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## Jacob and His Descendants as Authors

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## Chapter 6

# JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

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John S. Tanner

As a church, we tend to emphasize the universal, timeless doctrines of the scriptures and forget how our favorite verses relate to the speaker and to the circumstances in which he spoke. This is especially true of Jacob and his descendants. We don't sufficiently appreciate how distinctive Jacob is as an author or how unusual the books of Enos through Omni are as a history of Jacob's family. Just recently, for example, a colleague of mine made reference to *Nephi's* teaching that "to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29). This quote is Jacob's, of course; it comes from a magnificent two-day sermon recorded in 2 Nephi. My colleague had remembered the doctrine but forgotten both the speaker (Jacob) and the context (a sermon).

### **The Writings of Jacob and His Descendants in Context**

The writings of Jacob and his descendants form part of the small plates, a section of the Book of Mormon that Mormon included intact, presumably without editing. Only on the small plates may Joseph Smith have found someone's "handwriting" other than that of Mormon or Moroni. Speaking in the first person, Jacob and his descendants seem more individual, even in translation, than other writers whose words were more obviously edited by Mormon and Moroni. From Jacob through Omni, the record displays the complex variety one expects of a text written by many hands. The stylistic diversity of Jacob and his descendants is a powerful witness that we are dealing with

## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

material written by several ancient authors rather than by one person in early nineteenth-century New York.

Consider, for example, the transition between Omni and the Words of Mormon. It has the rough edges we would expect to find in a bridge between an unedited text and an edited abridgment. At this point in the book, Mormon explains for his readers a number of puzzling pieces that would make up his record. He discusses two different civilizations (the Nephites and Mulekites), two separate time frames (Mosiah's and Mormon's), and three groups of records (the small plates, the large plates, and his abridgment of the large plates). Mormon also mentions a fourth set of records (the brass plates) as he introduces the Book of Mosiah (see 1:3).

To make matters more confusing, just before Mormon's bridge, Amaleki in the Book of Omni records two dramatic episodes of cultural contact involving several major Book of Mormon civilizations. Amaleki first tells of an encounter between Nephites from the land of Nephi and Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla. This is our first introduction to a group that left Jerusalem at roughly the same time as did the Lehite group, about 586 B.C. (see Omni 1:13–19). Amaleki then recounts the Mulekites' prior contact with Coriantumr, the last survivor of yet another, even more ancient civilization about whom we've also heard nothing till this reference, but whose history will be given later (see Ether).

Thus in a few pages, the text refers to events happening across 2500 years of history and relating to every major Book of Mormon group. It does so, moreover, in a way that requires specific knowledge of how each civilization began and how it would end. No wonder that, despite Mormon's best efforts to smooth the transition, readers often find it difficult to understand how the parts fit together. In order to make full sense of these few pages from Omni to Mosiah, the reader (and writer) has to know Book of Mormon history from the coming of the Jaredites to the demise of the Nephites (not to mention the story of the lost 116 pages).

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

Yet Mormon makes the transition flawlessly—at least with respect to historical details. The transition is rougher with respect to style. The style of the small plates (Omni and before) is different from the style of Mormon's bridge (Words of Mormon) and of his abridgment of the large plates (Mosiah and after). These rough edges provide strong evidence that this part of the Book of Mormon is precisely what it claims to be: namely, a first-person document that is being spliced into a larger history by someone who knows the full story to come.

As a literary critic, I am naturally drawn to first-person documents. I listen for echoes of a human voice in every sort of writing or speech, however impersonal it is supposed to be—even in prophetic speeches. For example, I occasionally have my wife read conference talks aloud while I try to guess, from their style alone, who gave them. I am usually right. So, too, with the scriptures. I try to glimpse the man behind the message—not out of desire to discredit divine inspiration, but from professional habit and out of love for the spokesmen through whom God speaks. I will indulge in this sort of speculation here.

Of course, my guesses about the human characteristics of Jacob and his descendants may be wrong, just as I have sometimes guessed wrong about the author of a conference address. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that we can better appreciate scripture by asking questions about its human authors and by trying to put ourselves in their places. As Brigham Young told the saints: "Do you read the Scriptures, my brothers and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so" (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:333).

Before looking at Jacob, let me share one example of how understanding context can enrich our appreciation of content. The example is drawn from Nephi's psalm (see 2 Nephi 4:15–35), in which he sorrows over his weaknesses and afflictions, rejoices in his blessings from God, and pleads for divine help and mercy. Although Nephi's lament never mentions Lehi, it

## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

occurs just after Nephi records the death of his father. Is this merely coincidence? I think not. Consider what the death of Lehi meant to Nephi. Father Lehi had held the family together, with great difficulty. He and Nephi had shared the same vision, literally (of the Tree of Life) and figuratively (of commitment to God). When Lehi died, Nephi lost a friend as well as a father and prophet; he lost his confidant, advisor, and shield against the hatred of his brothers. Thus Nephi had ample reason to reflect on his distress, as he does in his psalm.

Before Lehi's death, Nephi had foreseen in revelation the tragic division between Lamanites and Nephites (see 1 Nephi 12:22–23). When Lehi died, Nephi must have known that the long-dreaded crisis was now both inevitable and near. With no father to turn to but his Heavenly Father, Nephi cries for strength: so lonely is his new burden of leadership, so dangerous his enemies, and so strong the temptation to be angry "because of [his] enemies" (2 Nephi 4:29) – meaning, I suppose, his brothers. I like to read his psalm, then, by remembering its human context, recorded in a verse that immediately precedes it: "And it came to pass that he [Lehi] died, and was buried" (2 Nephi 4:12).

### **The Plates as Jacob's Family History**

Now let us turn to Jacob and his descendants. After passing into Jacob's hands, the small plates became increasingly focused on the history of Jacob's family rather than on the history of the whole Nephite group. Understanding this is critical. Many distinctive features of the text can be explained by the fact that the record became primarily genealogical. From Jacob on, the plates were no longer kept by the rulers (see Jacob 1:9). Jacob and his descendants were not kings. From all we can tell, they did not play a leading role in political or military matters. This has major consequences for the record they left. After Nephi, never again do the authors of the small plates occupy a central position in the government. Of course, the small plates were always set aside for spiritual things rather than secular matters (see 1 Nephi

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

19:1–6; Jacob 1:2), but, from Jacob on, the small plates were written increasingly from a perspective outside the community's official life (see, for example, Enos 1:24).

Jacob's family eventually passed out of the prophetic line as well. Only Jacob himself clearly held a position of religious authority equivalent to that of high priest (see Jacob 1:17–19). His son Enos and grandson Jarom described themselves as only one among many prophets (see Enos 1:19, 22; Jarom 1:4). Jarom may not have done any public teaching or preaching at all. Although he referred to "my prophesying" and "my revelations," he spoke 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" (Jarom 1:11) – as if he were not one of them. Also he wrote, "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), sounding like a bystander outside the loop of government power and official church responsibility.

On the other hand, Jarom referred to Nephite warfare and trade in the first person: "We withstood the Lamanites. . . . And we . . . became exceedingly 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" (Jarom 1:7–8). Jarom sounds as if he was a soldier and artisan. Likewise, Jarom's son Omni fought for the Nephites, but there is no evidence that he did so as a military leader or that he had any religious calling. Far from it, he confessed he was a "wicked man" (Omni 1:2). The same is true of Jacob's other descendants who contributed to the Book of Omni. Abinadom admitted that he knew "of no revelation save that which has been written" (Omni 1:11). Amaleki said that the people "were led by many preachings and prophesyings" (Omni 1:13). The impersonal, passive phrasing implies that he did not himself act as one of the prophets or preachers.

This lack of either government or religious authority among Jacob's descendants does not mean that the Nephites had fallen



## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

into a complete dark age. Although they were not prophets themselves, these writers tell us prophets still lived among them. Enos even spoke of “exceedingly many” unnamed prophets (Enos 1:22). Jarom told of men “who [had] many revelations, . . . mighty men in faith of the Lord” (Jarom 1:4, 7). Amaron spoke of the Lord’s sparing the righteous portion of the Nephites during his day, proving there was a righteous remnant (see Omni 1:7). And Amaleki wrote of “many preachings and prophesyings” (Omni 1:13).

If we remember that this is a family record, we’ll be less likely to overgeneralize about the apostasy of the whole Nephite civilization. Perhaps there were great prophets mentioned in Mormon’s lost abridgment. We do not know, since the record comes from Jacob’s descendants who fell from prominence and perhaps from grace. Precisely because the plates are a family chronicle, their spiritual quality varies sharply with that of the family. This is the only place I know where a self-professed “wicked man” (Omni) wrote scripture. Later descendants of Jacob were merely ordinary men who happened to belong to an extraordinary lineage. They became scriptural authors only because the plates became mainly a family record—and none of us can choose our relatives, not even Jacob.

Beginning with Jarom, Jacob’s descendants kept the record so “that our genealogy may be kept” (Jarom 1:1; compare Omni 1:1). This purpose had not been mentioned by Nephi or Jacob. For many of Jacob’s later descendants, a genealogical entry is about all they would write. Yet even this is something. However pale their own lives must have seemed compared to those of the heroic first generation, however embarrassing it must have been, each man obediently fulfilled his charge, adding his own name to the end of the sacred record. We can learn something about duty from this.

Further, many of Jacob’s descendants (especially Omni and Abinadom) were refreshingly frank about their weaknesses. Perhaps we could learn from their humility and unblinking self-honesty as well. Moreover, all Jacob’s descendants—even

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

“wicked” Omni—treated the sacred record with respect. They appear to have felt the plates’ power. The very inadequacy they expressed implies that they had read the record and been moved, even intimidated, by its majesty. So it’s not entirely fair to dismiss these men as apostate. Perhaps we shouldn’t even assume that the self-confessed are completely reprobate. All Jacob’s posterity manifested humility, honesty, reverence for the sacred, and a common commitment to duty. This suggests that Jacob’s legacy of righteousness was not utterly lost in his posterity. His righteous blood still flowed in their veins, his sensitivity still circulated in their souls.

### **Jacob’s Literary Style**

This brings me to Jacob himself. Jacob’s style is unique among Book of Mormon authors. He simply sounds different. He used a more personal vocabulary than most and took a more intimate approach to his audience. Consider the contrast with his brother Nephi. Nephi “delights,” even “glories” in plainness (2 Nephi 31:3; 33:6). He frankly rebuked and frankly forgave his brothers (see 1 Nephi 7:21). He plunged into difficult tasks—getting the brass plates, facing down starvation, building a ship. Jacob, by contrast, seemed more anxious and withdrawn. He was openly pained that he had to use “much boldness of speech” to his brethren, especially in the presence of their women and children, “whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God” (Jacob 2:7).

He prefaced his temple discourse by admitting that he felt “weighed down with much . . . anxiety for the welfare of [their] souls”: “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).



## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

This is vintage Jacob: intimate, vivid, vulnerable. He used words about feelings – like *anxiety*, *grieve*, and *tender* – more frequently than any other Book of Mormon writer. For example, half the book’s references to *anxiety* occur in Jacob, and over two-thirds of the references to *grieve* and *tender* (or their derivatives), as well as *shame*, are Jacob’s. He is the only person to have used *delicate*, *contempt*, and *lonesome*. Likewise, he is the only Book of Mormon author to have employed *wound* in reference to emotions; and he never used it, as everyone else did, to describe a physical injury. Similarly, Jacob used *pierce* or its variants frequently (four of the ten instances in the Book of Mormon), and he used it exclusively in a spiritual sense. Such evidence suggests an author who lived close to his emotions and who knew how to express those emotions.

Like many sensitive people, Jacob did not preach harsh messages easily. Many times he openly shared his anxiety with his audience, as in the preface to his temple discourse discussed above. The structure of that sermon may also reflect his reluctance to speak harshly. He first addressed the relatively easy issue (pride) and then, reluctantly, moved to the “grosser crime,” whoredoms (see Jacob 2:22–23).

When Jacob did speak, however, he spoke vividly and even eloquently. Notice the concrete words 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” (Jacob 2:9; italics added). Or consider, “The *sobbings* of their hearts ascend up to God. . . . Many hearts *died*, *pierced* with *deep wounds*” (2:35; italics added). Here are strong words welded to strong feelings.

Jacob’s ability to find concrete words for abstract spiritual experience is the hallmark of his style. Perhaps he learned it by feasting upon the “tender” words of his “trembling” father (see 1 Nephi 8:37; 2 Nephi 1:14), and then passed his style on to his son Enos. At any rate, when Enos recounted the spiritual *wrestle* and *hunger* that led to his guilt being *swept* away, it appears that Jacob’s words had *sunk deep* into the boy’s style as well as his

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

soul (see Enos 1:2–6). Like Jacob, Enos also described the intangible through language drawn from the tangible.

Jacob's style is evident wherever his words appear. Even his sermon recorded in 2 Nephi, separated from the Book of Jacob by many chapters and many years, bears clear resemblance to his later temple discourse. Both sermons contain vivid, emotion-laden language. Both call upon the people to "awake" lest they become "angels of the devil" – a phrase unique to Jacob (2 Nephi 9:9, 47; Jacob 3:11). Both mention Jacob's desire to rid his garments of the people's blood and his consciousness of the Lord's "all-searching eye" (2 Nephi 9:44; Jacob 1:19; 2:2, 10). Likewise, Jacob prefaced two long scriptural quotations (one from Isaiah, the other from Zenos) by expressing his "anxiety" and his "over anxiety" for his audience (2 Nephi 6:3; Jacob 4:18). It is inconceivable to me that Joseph Smith could have invented such a subtle difference of style for Jacob and then remembered to use it so many chapters later as he rapidly dictated the translation.

### **Jacob's Themes**

Jacob's writing is also consistently focused on several favorite themes. One of his favorites, probably because of his own experience living in exile, was scattered Israel's preservation. He seemed to take special comfort in the promises made to scattered Israel, identifying the Lehite colony with Israel on the isles of the sea: "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).

Note Jacob's typically poetic phrasing that translates the idea of sadness into something concrete ("hang down our heads") and that describes the sea voyage as "made the sea our path." Beyond the style, note the message of comfort and hope – the same message Jacob quoted from Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 7:1–2; 8:3–12). Few descriptions of God's love in all scripture rival Isaiah's in chapters 40–66. To these chapters was Jacob drawn, for he

## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

delighted in scriptural assurances that God would not abandon exiled Israel.

This, I believe, ought to provide us with a clue as to how Jacob read Zenos, an ancient prophet on the brass plates. We often pay so much attention to what Zenos has told us about the history of Israel that we miss the powerful message that likely drew Jacob to the allegory: namely, that God loves and looks after the house of Israel, no matter where its people are scattered. The allegory is more than a complex puzzle whose solution unlocks world history, as some of us read it. The allegory also dramatizes God's steadfast love and active concern. Zenos's allegory ought to take its place beside the parable of the prodigal son. Both stories make the Lord's mercy so movingly memorable.

A key phrase in the allegory is "it grieveth me that I should lose this tree," repeated eight times. By means of such repetition, the allegory celebrates the Lord's long-suffering love. The frequent repetition of the line describes the quality of that divine love—it is unfailing, persistent, tenacious. This message of the Lord's love matters as much as, if not more than, the historical details of his plan to redeem Israel. Yes, the allegory tells how the Lord of the vineyard will work out his grand design in history. But more than this, it shows that he weeps over the loss of his trees: "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 also Moses 7:28–41). The Lord of the universe grieves that he should lose *any* tree of the vineyard. What a remarkable witness! I find this allegory one of the most eloquent scriptural testimonies of God's love anywhere. Surely Jacob did too.

But just so we don't miss the point, Jacob told us what matters most in the allegory: It is *not* figuring out history. Rather, it is feeling "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." This feeling should lead us to repent: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you" (Jacob 6:4–5). This is the neglected message of Zenos's allegory. By better understanding Jacob and the circumstances under which he taught and wrote, we understand better why he used Zenos's allegory. Seeing it through his eyes, we find in it the meaning he intended.

### **Jacob's Biography**

When Jacob quoted scriptures by Zenos or Isaiah, we can easily sense a close link between the man and his message. He must have felt strongly about these prophets' promises to scattered Israel, for he himself was a displaced person. This close link between Jacob's life and his message also shows up elsewhere. Let me list five facts about Jacob's life and suggest how each might be connected to 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 and probably orphaned at a young age. Some people are hardened by hardship, but not Jacob. Lehi promised Jacob that God would "consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain" (2 Nephi 2:2), and Jacob's sensitive style provides evidence that this promise was fulfilled. Long afflictions seem to have softened Jacob's spirit, verifying the famous Book of Mormon teaching about the value of "opposition in all things." Significantly, that teaching occurs as part of Jacob's patriarchal blessing (2 Nephi 2:11). We should remember Jacob when we teach the principle that adversity can have sweet uses. The evidence shows that the boy took Lehi's lesson to heart.

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

## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

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 used the word *brethren* often in his discourses to the Nephites too. It seems to have been his favorite way of addressing his people: he used it some fifty times, while he almost never addressed his audience directly as “my people,” the term Nephi preferred. Jacob’s choice of what to call his audience suggests an intimate family relationship with them and also shows his humility. At the same time, it reminds us that Jacob’s audience – including those he criticized so severely for whoredoms – were his kinsmen. No wonder Jacob felt anxious and pained. The erring Lamanites and Nephites were his relatives.

(3) Jacob was the younger brother of a prophet-colonizer. Nephi must have cast a large shadow, and Jacob’s writing suggests he was very aware of this shadow. The people decided to adopt Nephi’s name as a royal title (see Jacob 1:11), but Jacob himself chose to group all righteous family lines (including his own) under the title Nephites (Jacob 1:13–14). This may reveal his respect for his older brother (and perhaps his detachment from governmental matters) and serve to symbolize his humble deference to Nephi. Jacob presented himself as less prominent than his brother, the founder.

In addition, neither Jacob nor his descendants appear to have added new plates to the ones Nephi made. This may simply mean that they lacked the proper materials or skill to fashion plates, though both Jacob and Jarom mention an abundance of gold in the promised land (see Jacob 2:12; Jarom 1:8). More likely, it reveals something about the meaning of the plates in Jacob’s and his family’s minds: namely, that they saw the plates as primarily Nephi’s record, a sacred legacy from an incomparable man and cultural hero, to be added to only sparingly by those who followed. Even Jacob, whose contribution to the small plates is sublime and considerable, still confessed that his “writing has been small” (Jacob 7:27). Evidently, he was comparing his au-



## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

thorship to the extensive writing of his illustrious older brother. All the later authors in Jacob's family seem to have suffered from similar feelings of inferiority.

Jacob also seems to have lived in Nephi's shadow for another reason. His writing is more limited in historical scope than that of his older brother. Of course in touching but lightly on history, he was following Nephi's instruction and example. After the death of Lehi, Nephi too said little more about history. He resolved, rather, to write on the small plates only the things of his soul and charged his brother Jacob to do the same (see 2 Nephi 4:15; Jacob 1:2–4). Jacob obediently confined himself almost wholly to the ministry, recording sermons, discussions of scripture, and one story about a conflict with Sherem. He said nothing about the move to the land of Nephi and little of the colonization. The result is that Jacob comes across more as a priest and less as a colonizer than Nephi.

(4) Jacob was visited by Christ. In this respect, he was not a bit inferior to his brother. Nephi's tribute to Jacob seems to acknowledge this: "Jacob also has seen him [the Christ] as I have seen him" (2 Nephi 11:3; compare 2 Nephi 2:4). Jacob knew the Master; his writing is full of the testimony of Christ. Indeed, he is the first Nephite prophet to whom Christ's name was revealed (see 2 Nephi 10:3). He wrote his record so that his posterity might know "that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming" (Jacob 4:4).

(5) Finally, to end where I began, Jacob was a pilgrim, a wilderness writer. He was twice an outcast—first wandering with his family across the desert and great sea; then fleeing from the first settlements in America even deeper into the wilderness (see 2 Nephi 5:5–6). Like nomadic Abraham, the only security these New World exiles knew lay in their God and his law. Eternity was their covering, rock, and salvation (compare Abraham 2:16). Their experience in the wilderness may help explain why both Nephi and Jacob quoted from the brass plates more than any other Book of Mormon prophet. The brass plates were



## JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS AS AUTHORS

tangible links to the world they had left behind, as well as a key to the civilization they hoped to build.

How hard forging a new civilization must have seemed to Jacob! He had never even known the old one personally. Nephite survival must have often seemed perilous and precarious to this early pioneer. Despairing would have been easy, especially for a sensitive man like Jacob. He surely realized that time, geographic isolation, and sin could easily destroy the sacred traditions he was trying to teach. Or, if these failed, the Lamanites might succeed, for they were determined, as Jacob wrote, to “destroy our records and us, and also all the traditions of our fathers” (Enos 1:14). No wonder Jacob’s writing refers so often to anxiety.

### **Jacob’s Farewell**

The cost the wilderness exacted on Jacob is most evident in his final farewell. His parting words express the accumulated sorrows of a life of struggle: “I conclude this record . . . by saying that the time passed away with us, 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 how in substance and style this leave-taking could only be written by Jacob, of all Book of Mormon authors. It fits the facts of his life as a man, and it captures his sensitivity, vulnerability, and eloquence as a writer.

Jacob’s tone here is very different from that of his brother’s powerful farewell. Where Jacob ended quietly and on a minor key of distress, Nephi concluded with timpani rolls and cymbal clashes: “I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus.” Nephi was all confidence: “I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat”; his words challenge us to be righteous, as he had his older brothers: “You and I shall stand face to face before his bar.” His last statement restated his lifelong

## REDISCOVERING THE BOOK OF MORMON

commitment to absolute obedience; it could serve as an 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, felt assured of personal salvation. He looked forward to meeting the reader at the "pleasing" judgment bar of God (Jacob 6:13). But his farewell seems much less optimistic 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*. No one else uses *lonesome*, nor can I imagine any other Book of Mormon author writing "our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream," or "we did mourn out our days." None is so open about anxiety, none so poetic. No wonder Neal Maxwell called Jacob a prophet-poet. Jacob is a poet whose voice I've learned to love and whom someday I hope to meet.