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Nephi and Goliath: A Reappraisal of the Use of the Old Testament in First Nephi



Ben McGuire

I am going to speak today about some of the literary aspects of the writings of Nephi in the Book of Mormon. Some of what I will cover will be new, and some has already been discussed. However, I feel that my studies into the contents of Nephi's writings will be both fresh, and significant in advancing the literary studies of the Book of Mormon. The ideas I will be presenting have developed over the last several years, and have taken a number of surprising twists. I am certain that this paper will not remain my final position on this subject. Yet, if it stimulates a new way of looking at the sacred scriptures of the LDS faith, I will be more than pleased with its success.

A few years ago, S. Kent Brown published an article titled "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon." In it, he made the following remarks:

There is no clear statement indicating that the members of Lehi's immediate family understood that their departure from Jerusalem was a reenactment of Israel's flight to freedom. It is necessary, therefore, to sift through the evidence piece by piece.

Brown continues with this remark:

But it was not Nephi or Jacob, members of Lehi's immediate family, who made this connection explicitly; instead, it was others who came five hundred years later.

While Brown and others may be right, that the Lehite exodus from Jerusalem was not a conscious re-enactment, he is nonetheless incorrect in his other assumption. The first part of this paper will demonstrate that not only was Nephi aware of the similarities between his exodus and that of Israel

under Moses, but also that he intentionally patterned his writings on the Old Testament text. This is not to say that he makes an explicit reference to it, but rather, that he expected his audience to draw this explicit connection. There can be no doubt, however, that this connection is first and foremost in his mind, as he wrote.

Tate, in much the same way, makes the determination that Nephi is not fully aware of the Exodus pattern. Instead, he writes in his article “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon:”

But at this point he cannot have known how apt the allusion really is. This is Nephi before he has the text in hand as a means of glossing his experience, before he realizes in what detail his own family will replicate the Exodus. As his awareness grows, he alludes with increasing frequency to the Exodus...

Tate, like Brown, does not take it far enough. By focusing exclusively on the Exodus narratives in the Book of Mormon, he leaves behind a number of other indicators which demonstrate conclusively that there is no ‘growing awareness’. That, in fact, Nephi begins his record by pulling heavily from the Old Testament—as if he is assuming that his work and the Old Testament will be read side by side. Hence, a number of early parallels, which Tate does not find, do not deal with the Exodus at all, except in a peripheral fashion. Once seen for what they are, these passages show that Nephi was consistently reliant on the Brass Plates. In following Tate’s work, this has led to some incorrect comparisons between the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament. Because his work has been so influential, these errors persist in LDS scholarship.

I also need to mention the work of Szink. His article, “To a Land of Promise,” was one of the first to deal with the Book of Mormon based on its language content. The work is of immense value in furthering Book of Mormon studies. Szink makes a number of assumptions, which I have also followed, in dealing with the language issues of the Book of Mormon—more specifically, with the fact that we do not have an original language text. This paper is not large enough in scope to defend these assumptions, and I will be enumerating them, the way that I understand them below. Szink’s understanding is restricted by the importance he lends to 1 Nephi 6:3-4, when he writes:

The result does not represent a day-to-day or even a year-to-year account, but rather a highlighting of main events with special emphasis on “the things of God” and a desire to “persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved.”

In doing so, he fails to see that for Nephi, political and secular perspectives are inseparably tied to religious truth. As I will more fully explain later, a great deal of Nephi’s writing deals almost

exclusively with the issue of who had the right to rule the people. I am not saying that Nephi does not intend to have his work be the vehicle of the salvific message, but rather, that he includes many details that we do not recognize as being essentially tied to that message.

Finally, let me mention Noel B. Reynolds. Reynolds articles have been very influential to parts of my understanding of the text. Out of the sea of LDS publications written on First and Second Nephi, he is almost alone in his recognition of the political nature of Nephi's writing. In his article "Nephi's Political Testament" he writes:

The two messages of the book are tied together in such a way that whoever accepts the teachings of Christ accepts that Nephi was a legitimate ruler, and vice versa. ... Nephi carefully constructed what he wrote to convince his own and later generations that the Lord had selected him over his older brothers to be Lehi's successor. Thus, one interesting way to read the account is as a political tract produced to show that his rule was authoritative. ... What we tend to read as a story of flight from Jerusalem is really a carefully designed account explaining to his successors why their religious faith in Christ and their political tradition—the kingship of Nephi—were both true and legitimate.

This paper will validate these ideas.

To begin with, I wanted to explain one of the assumptions that I am making in presenting today. As I mentioned earlier, it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend this assumption, although, I feel that discussion on this topic will in the end be both necessary and valuable.

The language of the King James Bible is used throughout the Book of Mormon. I am going to assume that when the Book of Mormon uses similar terms and phrases to the Old Testament in the King James version, that these terms and phrases are based on similar or identical language in their respective original texts. I admit that this assumption is pivotal to my work.

By now, you may be wondering why I titled this Nephi and Goliath. What I intend to demonstrate is that Nephi, in writing the literary unit of his encounter with Laban, borrowed, or re-wrote the text of the Old Testament story of David and Goliath. I want to use as a primary source the story of the death of Laban at the hands of Nephi. Because I am interested more in the literary content of the story, I will not be commenting directly on its theology, nor will I be dealing with the vast body of literature dealing with the legalistic aspects of the death of Laban. Instead, I wish to focus on the form of the story, along with its language, to show a clear dependence between the Laban story in First Nephi and the story of David and Goliath. Once I have demonstrated this dependence, I will correlate the

evidence with literary criticism of the David and Goliath story in the Old Testament to show how the Book of Mormon confirms current scholarly opinions on the authorship of this story in the Old Testament.

Before I begin to take apart the stories, let me begin by discussing Nephi's own comments on the nature of his small plates from which the books of First and Second Nephi are taken.

It is clear, for starters, that Nephi has a slightly different understanding of the term 'history' than we use today. Nephi tells us that his perception of what this record should contain is based both on his experience with the Brass Plates and on revelation. The record of his people (or any people), when modeled on the Brass Plates, contains four distinct elements as outlined in 1 Nephi 5:11-14. I have bolded the significant parts of this passage:

11 And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, **which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents;**

12 **And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah,** king of Judah;

13 **And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning,** even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.

14 And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, **also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers;** wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine.

These four elements are **1)** a creation account, **2)** a record of the people (a history, and more particularly, a history dealing with the kings), **3)** a record of the prophecies (or as Nephi later calls it the ministries), and **4)** a genealogy. All four of these parts are not included in the Small Plates of Nephi. The primary function of these small plates is to provide the third item in this list, although Nephi also states that he will include some specially selected components of item number two as well.¹Understanding this, it becomes perhaps a little clearer that with the exception of the first item in the list (the creation account), the other three items are discussed a number of times, relative to the need to include or exclude them in the record.

The creation account is referred to a number of times, and we are told that this narrative was included on the brass plates. Nephi does not include it specifically, nor does any later Nephite leader. The second item, the history, Nephi tells us is recorded for the most part on his larger plates, with some parts of it included in the small plates, specifically items that deal with the reign of Nephi (1 Nephi 10:1), a topic that will be addressed a little later, as it has specific relevance to the passages I am presenting. The third item in the list, the ministry of the people, and the revelations of the prophets, takes special consideration for being the purpose these small plates were created. This was by direct commandment and revelation. And finally, the fourth item, the genealogy, Nephi tells us consistently that the genealogy is available in the records of his father, and that it is not necessary for him to recreate it in his own writings. Nephi makes these comments so that we see that he is intending this work to be 'like unto the engravings which are on the plates of brass' (1 Nephi 52:23). It becomes then a little clearer that the historical details within the text will support Nephi in his ministry, or in his reign.

It remains true, that Nephi sees his writings as being read alongside those writings which make up the Old Testament. Nephi receives specific revelations to this effect in 1 Nephi 13 and 14. Here, Nephi is told "And they must come according to the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb; and the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed, as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth." And again, of John the Revelator: "Behold, he shall see and write the remainder of these things; yea, and also many things which have been." This particular concept, that the Book of Mormon would not stand in a vacuum, almost certainly affected its contents.

Based on the above comments, the historical narratives within the books of First and Second Nephi will then contain elements that deal with the two themes he discusses. My objective here is to show that the narratives presented by Nephi are often rooted in the stories of the Brass Plates. We can identify specific parallels with Biblical texts, (since we do not have a copy of the Brass Plates) and we can then see that Nephi borrowed extensively (which would only be natural) from the texts in his possession.

The first passages I wish to deal with are the story of the killing of Laban in 1 Nephi 3:31-4:18 and parallels from 1 Samuel 17:4, where David kills Goliath. Let me begin by citing verbatim both of the relevant passages as they currently stand in the Book of Mormon and in the KJV Old Testament:

1 Nephi 3:31-4:18

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.

4 Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

5 And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

7 Nevertheless I went forth, and as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine.

8 And when I came to him I found that it was Laban.

9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

14 And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.

15 Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.

16 And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

18 Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

1 Samuel 17:1-54

1 Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which [belongeth] to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammin.

2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

3 And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and [there was] a valley between them.

4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height [was] six cubits and a span.

5 And [he had] an helmet of brass upon his head, and he [was] armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat [was] five thousand shekels of brass.

6 And [he had] greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

7 And the staff of his spear [was] like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head [weighed] six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set [your] battle in array? [am] not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

9 If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

10 And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

12 Now David [was] the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehemjudah, whose name [was] Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men [for] an old man in the days of Saul.

13 And the three eldest sons of Jesse went [and] followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle [were] Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.

14 And David [was] the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul.

15 But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

16 And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

17 And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched [corn], and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren;

18 And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of [their] thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge.

19 Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, [were] in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

20 And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle.

21 For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army.

22 And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren.

23 And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard [them].

24 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid.

25 And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, [that] the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

26 And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who [is] this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

27 And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him.

28 And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

29 And David said, What have I now done? [Is there] not a cause?

30 And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner.

31 And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed [them] before Saul: and he sent for him.

32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou [art but] a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered [it] out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught [him] by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

38 And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.

39 And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved [it]. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved [them]. And David put them off him.

40 And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling [was] in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

41 And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield [went] before him.

42 And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was [but] a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

43 And the Philistine said unto David, [Am] I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

44 And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

46 This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

47 And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle [is] the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.

48 And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

49 And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang [it], and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but [there was] no sword in the hand of David.

51 Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

52 And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron.

53 And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

54 And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

Looking at Parallels

Now I admit that this is a lot of material to work from. So, I will be listing in two columns the parallels I believe exist within the text.

1 Samuel 17:4-7, 11

4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height [was] six cubits and a span.

5 And [he had] an helmet of brass upon his head, and he [was] armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat [was] five thousand shekels of brass.

6 And [he had] greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

1 Nephi 3:31

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

7 And the staff of his spear [was] like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head [weighed] six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

For lack of a better term, I will use Nephi's. This is the introduction of 'the mighty man'. In the Old Testament story, it is Goliath. In 1 Nephi, it is Laban. The second set of cast members are faithless Israel on the one hand—'Saul and all Israel', and Laman and Lemuel on the other. This is a distinct parallel which Nephi is trying to make, and which he reinforces later on.

Next, we have the introduction of the hero—1 Samuel 17:32 and 1 Nephi 4:1

1 Samuel 17:32

32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

1 Nephi 4:1

1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

David is the Hero in the Old Testament text, while Nephi fills that role in his own account. In this first appearance, the Hero encourages faithless Israel in their task, stating that there is nothing to fear, and that they are willing to challenge the mighty man.

Both heroes then cite as the basis for their faith two miracles. David cites two instances from his own life, and Nephi cites one from the history of Israel, and one from his own life. Both miracles are significant from the hero's point of view. The hero then concludes by remarking that just as God performed those two miracles, God will deliver them from the hand of the mighty man.

1 Samuel 17:34-37

34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered [it] out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught [him] by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

1 Nephi 4:2-3

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt?

Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptian

David's two miracles were being saved from the two animals bent on killing him. Likewise, he claims, God will treat Goliath as one of these animals. The two miracles for Nephi are first, the destruction of the Egyptians when Moses parted the Red Sea. And second, the visitation of an angel. The angel, among other things, mentions that they will overcome Laban. We will return to the angel, as he plays a larger role in explaining why Nephi included this particular episode. The parting of the Sea is also significant, as it serves to show God destroying the enemies of Israel while they are leaving for their Promised Land. This runs parallel to Nephi's description of Lehi's journey into the wilderness as a second exodus, and functions as a brief comparison between Laban (and his tens of thousand) and the might and armies of Egypt, as an obstacle that stood between Israel and their promised land. The idea is quite clear—just as in the Exodus, God will fight their battles.

Next, we have remarks to the effect that the Hero comes according to the will of God, and that God will 'deliver into his [the heroes] hands' the mighty man.

1 Samuel 17:45-46

45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

46 This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

47 And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle [is] the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.

1 Nephi 4:6, 10-12, 17

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

I find this phraseology highly significant. While this terminology is used regularly in the Old Testament, it is the only place where it is used in the Book of Mormon. When dealing with passages that are concerned with delivery, it is always being delivered from evil, from the grave, from the hands

of your enemies. Here, in both stories, we have God delivering the mighty man into the hands of the hero. Of course, the passage in 1 Samuel is based somewhat on Exodus 21:13, and this intent carries over to the Book of Mormon account, so, this is clearly not conclusive evidence for textual reliance on the Old Testament at this point, however, just as the phraseology in other places in the Book of Mormon is highly suggestive of Old Testament narratives (specifically, the term murmur, as pointed out by Terence L. Szink), the use of this phraseology here adds to a growing argument of textual reliance. The passage in Exodus reads:

And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver [him] into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

Nephi is very careful here, to specify that the preliminary requirements have been adhered to. He does not 'lie in wait', but, was 'led by the Spirit' and when he 'came near unto the house of Laban' he 'beheld a man [Laban].' In other places, his careful adherence to Mosaic law, as found in the Old Testament, can be seen, just as here, and helps us to identify the proof texts he is using in writing his small plates.

Back to the parallels, additionally, in both scenarios, the mighty man has defied the will of God.

We end this literary unit with a final widely recognized parallel—the hero decapitates the mighty man, using his own sword.

1 Samuel 17:51

Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith.

1 Nephi 4:18

Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

The parallels here are obvious and need no additional explanation.

We now ask ourselves, why does Nephi include this particular narrative account. My proposition is that the text for this literary unit is based on the story of David and Goliath, and propose the following as the reason for its inclusion in first Nephi.

First, at the time Nephi wrote this, one of the most significant issues being dealt with by the Nephites and Lamanites was that of rulership.

Behold, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren. But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that they did seek to take away my life. Yea, they did murmur against me, saying: Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people. Now I do not write upon these plates all the words which they murmured against me. But it sufficeth me to say, that they did seek to take away my life.²

And it sufficeth me to say that forty years had passed away, and we had already had wars and contentions with our brethren.³

Second, earlier, Nephi had specified that these plates (the small plates) would contain an account of his reign:

And now I, Nephi, proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings, and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and also of my brethren.⁴

In this usage of the Old Testament, Nephi draws parallels between different groups—his brothers as faithless Israel, Laban as Goliath, and, most significantly within this context, himself as David, the then future king of all Israel. This recognition is in fact foreshadowed in 1 Nephi chapter 3, when the angel appears before Nephi and his brothers, and says this:

And it came to pass as they smote us with a rod, behold, an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them, saying: Why do ye smite your younger brother with a rod? Know ye not that the Lord hath chosen him to be a ruler over you, and this because of your iniquities? Behold ye shall go up to Jerusalem again, and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands.⁵

Nephi has already been selected as the ruler, just as the Old Testament records of David. These intentional parallels now can be seen as a part of combining the truth of the Gospel message as taught by Nephi, with the correctness of his political leadership. This supports Noel Reynolds work on the political Book of Mormon.

Third, in following the second aspect of its inclusion, we realize that this story, rather than dealing with the ministry of Nephi, instead deals with his reign, and the legitimacy of his rulership.

Now, if we can assume textual reliance, we can take and apply Old Testament literary criticism to the story of Nephi and Laban in 1 Nephi, and discover some fascinating details.

It has long been recognized that the story of David and Goliath contains contradictory elements. So much so, that today, a consensus has been reached within the scholarly community that the story of David and Goliath is a composite of two sources: an earlier source – consisting of 1 Samuel 16:14-23; 17:1-11; 17:32-40; 17:42-48a; 17:49 and 17:51-54, and a later source consisting of 1 Samuel 17:12-31; 17:41; 17:48b; 17:50 and 17:55-18:5. This identification is further strengthened in the fact that the LXX omits 17:12-31, 41, 48b, 50 and 55-18:5. If we return to my list of parallels above, you will notice that every single parallel that I found was drawn from the early source. To show how this changes the appearance of the two stories, I will now show the two stories again, only this time I will delete all of the later material from the 1 Samuel account of David and Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:1-54

1 Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which [belongeth] to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammim.

2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.

3 And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and [there was] a valley between them.

4 And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height [was] six cubits and a span.

5 And [he had] an helmet of brass upon his head, and he [was] armed with a coat of mail;

1 Nephi 3:31-4:18

31 And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

1 And it came to pass that I spake unto my brethren, saying: Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?

2 Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the

and the weight of the coat [was] five thousand shekels of brass.

6 And [he had] greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.

7 And the staff of his spear [was] like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head [weighed] six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him.

8 And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set [your] battle in array? [am] not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.

9 If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.

10 And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

11 When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

32 And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

33 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to

Red Sea.

3 Now behold ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt? Let us go up; the Lord is able to deliver us, even as our fathers, and to destroy Laban, even as the Egyptians.

4 Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem.

5 And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

6 And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

7 Nevertheless I went forth, and as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine.

8 And when I came to him I found that it was Laban.

9 And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel.

go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou [art but] a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

34 And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered [it] out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught [him] by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

37 David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

38 And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail.

39 And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved [it]. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved [them]. And David put them off him.

40 And he took his staff in his hand, and chose

10 And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And I shrunk and would that I might not slay him.

11 And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. Yea, and I also knew that he had sought to take away mine own life; yea, and he would not hearken unto the commandments of the Lord; and he also had taken away our property.

12 And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands;

13 Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.

14 And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.

15 Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.

him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling [was] in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

42 And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was [but] a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

43 And the Philistine said unto David, [Am] I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

44 And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

46 This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

47 And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle [is] the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.

16 And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass.

17 And again, I knew that the Lord had delivered Laban into my hands for this cause—that I might obtain the records according to his commandments.

18 Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword.

48a And it came to pass, when the Philistine
arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David,

49 And David put his hand in his bag, and took
thence a stone, and slang [it], and smote the
Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk
into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to
the earth.

51 Therefore David ran, and stood upon the
Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out
of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off
his head therewith. And when the Philistines
saw their champion was dead, they fled.

52 And the men of Israel and of Judah arose,
and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until
thou come to the valley, and to the gates of
Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell
down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath,
and unto Ekron.

53 And the children of Israel returned from
chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled
their tents.

54 And David took the head of the Philistine,
and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his
armour in his tent.

I have put these two accounts here into a column format not only to show you that in terms of length, the two accounts are now much more similar, but also to help you visually identify the fact that the parallels exist in the same chronological order in both accounts.

Clearly, if the assessment of literary dependency holds true, then we have tremendous new insight into the formation of the traditional text of the Bible, as well as the contents of the Brass Plates. Such an assumption would allow us to move forward with the idea that perhaps the earlier text of the David and Goliath stemmed from a northern source, which the Brass Plates represent. But, more significantly in the context of apologetics, we now can present a rational explanation for the phrase Nephi uses, which is so similar to that used of Caiaphas about Jesus Christ:

It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.⁶

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.⁷

Under the current assumptions, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the phrase has its roots (in both instances) in a David story in the Old Testament, where it would be a natural fit to apply it to David himself.

The possibilities here are endless.

I chose the David and Goliath story as the proof text for literary dependency for several reasons. First, we are all familiar with both stories—the parallels become more visible the closer we look at the two accounts. Second, this passage lies outside of the typical comments we have read on the parallels with the Exodus from Egypt found in the Book of Mormon. Third, this passage had some unique applications in the arena of Textual Criticism of the Old Testament, which I feel reflect back on the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as a historical text.

When S. Kent Brown wrote that the frequency in parallels with the Exodus literature increased as Nephi wrote, he was right. However, the frequency of parallels with the Old Testament, not just those dealing with the Exodus narratives do not. They are found just as frequently in the beginning of the text, and are written into the text of the Book of Mormon from the beginning by Nephi to justify his political and religious perspectives. In essence, when Nephi wrote in 2 Nephi 26 "... it must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God", he means that it is also necessary to demonstrate that Nephi and Lehi were prophets called of God, and that the reign of Nephi is legitimized by the Lord.

We begin with the introduction to Nephi's account, in which we find two separate and distinct literary passages, which I will refer to as the calling of Moses, and the road to Sinai, after their Old Testament counterparts.

Just as Nephi indirectly makes use of Exodus 2:13 in his retelling of the David and Goliath story, most of the first two chapters of 1 Nephi, which can be broken down into two distinct sections, deals indirectly with Numbers 12:6:

And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, [I] the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, [and] will speak unto him in a dream.

This in itself is significant, as Numbers 12 deals with a challenge to the authority of Moses as a prophet based on his actions (he married an Ethiopian woman). Additionally, there is implied that with the most faithful prophets, the Lord speaks 'mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold ...'. This particular chapter holds a unique impact for Nephi as will become presently clear.

Our narrative starts in verse 6:

And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

In this verse, the pillar of fire has often been linked to the pillar of fire in the Exodus narratives, that leads the Israelites from Egypt. This identification has been strongly supported in part because of the footnotes in the current LDS printing of the Book of Mormon which points to a connection, and because, in general both are valid representations of the presence of God. However, here, the intent of Nephi is to show a connection between the prophetic call of Moses and the prophetic call of Lehi. Exodus 3:2,6 records the following:

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush [was] not consumed.

6 Moreover he said, I [am] the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Continuing in 1 Nephi 1:7-8:

7 And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

8 And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was **carried away in a vision**, even that he saw the heavens open, **and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne**, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

At this point, we are referred back to Numbers 12. We have here a reference to a vision, whose singular moment is a vision of God. This recalls the phrase: "I ... will make myself known unto him in a vision".

Now we skip forward to 1 Nephi 2:1

1 For behold, it came to pass **that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream**, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life.

Here, we see the distinct fulfillment of this concept given by the Lord in Exodus 2:13. Nephi is trying to define his Father, and his role, by using the language of the Old Testament associated with the calling and legitimacy of Moses as a Prophet. At this point, I want to make a note that while there are many, many parallels which I could bring up, I am only going to bring up a few—time does not permit more. Yet, those that I discuss I feel are pertinent to developing a better understanding of the literary nature of the Book of Mormon as Nephi intended it to be read.

At the close of chapter one, Nephi strengthens this connection when he speaks of his father relative to the 'prophets of old'. (v. 20): "And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away."

Other persistent themes that might produce some fruit in this area include the ideas that in both the Exodus and in the Book of Mormon, God hears the cries of his chosen people, and promises to deliver them.

Shortly after his calling, in the mode of Moses, Lehi is spoken to in a dream by God. In this dream, he is commanded to leave Jerusalem. In opposition to the Exodus, he does not take his valuables, but rather, what he can carry with him. And then, notably, he makes a three day trip into the wilderness,

where he builds an altar and makes offerings to God. This is done in contradiction to the Old Testament regulations regarding sacrifices and the Temple. There has been much discussion on these few verses. They were clearly significant to Mormon, who, although the three day trip is only mentioned once in the Book of Mormon, thought it necessary to include it in his introduction to First Nephi. Modern LDS commentators have often discussed this in terms of the standard common pattern of threes, which clearly are present in the scriptures. To Nephi though, and perhaps to Mormon as well, this is not example of a general pattern, but, a retelling of events following a specific Old Testament pattern. This pattern has numerous additional parallels, not mentioned explicitly, but perhaps implied by Nephi's use of the Old Testament material. The Book of Mormon account records simply the following:

And it came to pass that when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water. And it came to pass that he built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God.⁸

Yet, even though this passage is the extent to which this trip is mentioned in his writings, Mormon (Nephi?) found it significant enough to include it in the heading to the first Book of Nephi when he writes:

He [Lehi] taketh three days' journey into the wilderness with his family.

LDS commentaries which deal with this particular three day journey are uniform in their approach. In Eugene England's essay, *Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?* Published in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Lights on Ancient Origins* (Noel B. Reynolds ed.), for example, we get a distinctly literal interpretation. England's writes of Lehi's route:

The route and times were quite specific, even somewhat mysteriously so: "He came down by the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea" and "when he had traveled three days in the wilderness, he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water ..."

This literal approach to the text is of course necessary to the essay, as England is trying to identify a relatively exact location for Lehi's camp. And, he also uses a determination for a three-day distance that is by no means universally accepted to do so. Additionally, he must assume that the 'three day' journey does not start in Jerusalem, but rather, begins when they depart from the well-known trade routes at Aqaba. This explanation, while informative and certainly interesting, cannot be equated with fact, as there are too many variables which cannot be conclusively demonstrated.

Likewise Ludlow, following the same logic wrote in his *Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (p. 91)

The exact distance of the Valley of Lemuel from Jerusalem is not made clear in the Book of Mormon. The superscription to 1 Nephi (wherein Nephi states that Lehi “taketh three days’ journey into the wilderness from the *land* of Jerusalem) seems to indicate a space between the two locations that can be covered in a three-day journey. However, some students of the Book of Mormon interpret 1 Nephi 2:4-6 to mean that Lehi and his group traveled an indefinite number of days until they arrived “in the wilderness in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea”; then they traveled through that wilderness for three days to the Valley of Lemuel.

These are two examples of many instances of this reading of the text. There has been very little attention paid to this detail, apart from trying to use it in a very literal fashion to uncover factual details of Nephi’s journey to his promised land. Yet, if we follow the premise that Nephi is fashioning his writings on the Old Testament, this particular phrase takes on a great importance, suggested by its inclusion in the superscript to 1 Nephi.

Following closely the parallels seen between the prophetic call of Moses, and the prophetic call of Lehi, this is a parallel with the initial departure of Israel from Egypt to Sinai. A three day trip into the wilderness is discussed extensively in the Book of Exodus.

And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.⁹

This is the first mentioning of this three-day time period. This first instance is followed by a number of repeated instances, each adding additional information, and each of which has applicability to the narrative presented by Nephi. An explicit statement regarding the completion of this trip is never made, yet its completion is pre-supposed in several of these passages. This three day journey was the trip between Egypt and Marah.

And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go. And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go,

we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.¹⁰

Pharaoh of course refuses to let them go. The request, as Sarna in the JPS commentary on Exodus, was not unusual in the corvee system under which the Israelites found themselves. And, in Exodus 8:25-28, Moses details the reasons the three-day journey was necessary.

25 And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.

26 And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?

27 We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us.

28 And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me.

According to Sarna, the text here indicates that the intended sacrifices of Moses and the Israelites would be anathema to the Egyptian cultic awareness, and the three-day journey would thus become necessary to take them "well beyond the circle of Egyptian cultic holiness." Three days after leaving Egypt, as indicated by their crossing the Red Sea, and outside of the direct power of the Egyptians, Moses and the Israelites arrive at Marah. Here, the name the vicinity after the water, which was undrinkable. Marah means of course bitterness. Here, the Lord performed another miracle for the people, and covenanted with them.

Back to the Nephi account, it became clear to me, that in Israel's journey from Egypt was the reason for the three-day journey in Nephi's account. Does he use the three-day trip as a literal space of time? Many LDS would like to believe so, yet we then share with England a sense that to have included that single space of time in the midst of a narrative filled with traveling, would indeed be mysterious. We could conclude perhaps that like the Old Testament in many places, a three-day journey could represent a significant segment of time, and thus was used intentionally in such a fashion. Perhaps Nephi intended to take the three-day traveling to show that like Abraham on his way to sacrifice Isaac, that this journey was to be considered a voluntary act of free-will, and not a spontaneous act of obedience. Either way, the parallels are obvious. After this three-day trip, both groups arrive at a

source of water. There are covenants made. The completion of the three-day journey and sacrifices associated with it is implied within the text of both Exodus 3:20 and Exodus 15:22-26.

20 And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.

22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.

23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

25 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them,

26 And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

Additionally, while the parallels are not exact, the naming of the place where the journey ends is a prominent feature in both stories. Likewise the departure with only what could be taken.

There are numerous other points of contact. And there are areas which could provide new insight to Nephi's understanding of the events in his life. Could the Brass Plates be the spoiling of Egypt? Were they of greater value than even the gold and silver of Israel? They were certainly worth more (in financial terms) than their accumulated wealth (1 Nephi 3:24), and they were of great worth to Lehi and company (1 Nephi 5:21).

This issue of religious and secular authority extended to nearly every aspect of Nephi's writing. It is only natural, given the number of times these issues are brought up within the text. The leadership and prophetic role of Nephi and Lehi are challenged at every turn.

9 And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day.

10 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

11 And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

12 And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

13 And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.

14 And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

15 And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice, and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him.

16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account.

17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

18 Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard.

19 And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world.

20 And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance.

This line of study is becoming increasingly important. Not only because the Book of Mormon as literature is beginning to mature as a study in its own right, but also because it provides an extremely important and legitimate evidence to the authenticity and reliability of the Book of Mormon as a historical literary text from the milieu which it claims for its origins.

The purpose of this paper is to show two things—First, that Nephi intentionally borrows from the Old Testament in creating his text—not just in direct citations, as in the Isaiah material, but also indirectly, as he borrows phraseology and story lines from familiar Old Testament stories. Second, that in identifying where this material is borrowed, we find that the Book of Mormon gives us insight into the state of the text of the Brass Plates, and how they differ from our traditional Old Testament text. This in turn provides an interesting new evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

The thesis of this paper is that the primary nature of the books First and Second Nephi in the Book of Mormon are literary in character, and that the history in them is a secondary feature. By this, I mean that Nephi, while working from a factual and historical perspective, presents to us in the text of First and Second Nephi, a cohesive argument that transcends the recording of mere details. His argument is that the recognition of proper secular and religious authority is inescapably linked to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This viewpoint takes a radically different direction from the traditional perspective that the Book of Mormon represents a primarily historical account, and that its history can be used to show its authenticity. I believe that while this perspective presents a fruitful approach, that it precludes us from understanding much of the message of Nephi.

There are a great many parallels between the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament (and New Testament), particularly in the arena of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt as compared to the Exodus of

Lehi and his family from Jerusalem. It is my belief that some of these parallels as previously presented are in fact erroneous. Not because the imagery in the Book of Mormon does not stem from the Old Testament, but rather because the imagery is not drawn from the Exodus story. This alleviates some of the forced interpretation provided in previous discussions on the subject, without changing the essential nature of the conclusions drawn from the text.

Notes

¹ See 1 Nephi 6:11, 9:2-10:1, 19:1-5 and 2 Nephi 5:33.

² 2 Nephi 5:1-4.

³ 2 Nephi 5:34.

⁴ 1 Nephi 10:1.

⁵ 1 Nephi 3:29.

⁶ 1 Nephi 4:13.

⁷ John 11:50.

⁸ 1 Nephi 2:6-7.

⁹ Exodus 3:18.

¹⁰ Exodus 5:1-3.