

General Comments on Jacob

Small and Large Plates Separated

With the death of Nephi, the large plates and small plates appear to have been separated. Jacob obtains the small plates and Nephi commands him to keep a spiritual record of them (cf. 1:1-4), but Jacob only makes mention of the large plates as "his [i.e., Nephi's] other plates", and we don't hear about them again until WofM 1:10 where we are informed they were handed down from king to king until King Benjamin inherited the small plates as well. Thus, it would appear with Nephi anointing a new king over the Nephites (cf. 1:9), the large plates went to him and the records were kept separately. Also, Jacob uses the plural "we" repeatedly in 4:1-3 when it comes to referring to plates being inscribed for posterity, so there are necessarily others involved.

This separation of the plates suggests what we would refer to today as a "separation of church and state" with this second "Nephi" being the king and Jacob being the high priest.

Jacob's Writing Style

As we saw in the speech 2 Ne. 6-10, Jacobs oratory and writing style is such that they include little or no background material to explain the context. Jacob complains of the difficulty of the task of inscribing on the plates (cf. 4:1), and so we might attribute it in part to that, but even still, he is willing to quote verbatim the allegory of Zeno's olive tree while omitting a lot of other details. Where Nephi gives us a lot of contextual material like how people feel, what people are thinking, why people do things, Jacob is just the opposite. He is lean on details and spare in style. Why? Maybe its just his personality, or maybe he is trying to avoid hurting individual's feelings and thus omits details for the sake of discretion. The result is we have to read between the lines a lot more with Jacob than we did with Nephi.

General Comments on Jacob 1-3

Early Nephite Apostasy

Shortly after Nephi dies, the Nephites begin their slide into apostasy. In these three chapters, Jacob specifically identifies three sins the people fall into: materialism (2:12-22), sexual immorality (2:23-35), and bigotry (3:1-11). The one sin which is most problematic is sexual immorality, so

Jacob emphasizes that over the other two (cf. 2:23, 3:12).

This address by Jacob is different from his previous address in 2 Ne. 6-10 as here he explicitly states they were out of the right way and identifies exactly what it is they are doing wrong. The previous sermon was exhortation to stay out of trouble, here the people are in trouble.

The matter of sexual immorality is one of adultery and fornication by prostitution, or "whoredoms" (cf. 2:23, 3:5, 3:12). The people committing these acts were attempting to justify them by comparing themselves with David and Solomon and saying it was no different from their multiple wives and concubines (cf. 2:23). Jacob attacks their false justification by showing that even David and Solomon's multiple wives and concubines were an abomination (cf. 2:24), so these Nephites have no footing to stand on at all in appealing to their example.

At this time the community is still relatively small (note Jacob in 3:13 is the first to state the population is starting to get "numerous"). If some kind of prostitution were occurring in such a small group, whether the activity was formal or informal, it seems unlikely it could be held for long from the general knowledge of the rest of the group. The results would be a social catastrophe for a small formerly cohesive group. Backstabbing, gossip, and innuendo are a natural reaction, and the text suggests it has already started happening here (cf. 2:35, 3:10). But, note Jacob sidesteps this issue and paints all of the women in the community as victims, both the wives who have been cheated on (cf. 2:35) and the women who have been compromised by prostitution (cf. 2:27-28, 2:32-33). This would obviously diffuse tension between the wives who had been cheated on and the women who had been prostituted. Jacob instead casts the blame entirely at the feet of the men involved (cf. 2:35, 3:8), and rightly so in any patriarchal society (the precedence for Jacob doing so would be Hosea 4:12-14, see the Jewish Publication Society translation of this passage for the most plain translation, as the KJV is obtuse), as there would be no supply if there were no demand. These men who are sexually exploiting the women ought to be compelled out of charity to assist them (the subject of 2:17-19) without requiring sex in return.

How pervasive was the problem? Like many other issues surrounding this case, Jacob gives us no details. But, from the surrounding text we can draw some conclusions. First, Jacob is addressing men, wives, and children in the plural, so it is not a single isolated incident. Second, the wives and children have found out about it and it has caused personal and family upheaval, so the practice was ongoing. However, in 2:5 Jacob states it is the Lord who has revealed to Jacob the true

spiritual condition of the people and has commanded him to get up the following day to chastize the people (cf. 2:11). This suggests the practice was covert and therefore not widespread, and certainly not condoned by the community in general.

While not explicitly stating this is the case, Jacob might be suggesting it was the second king over the Nephites who was responsible for or involved with the initiation of this practice given the apparent correlation between the present king and the ancient ones (cf. 1:15). If this is the case, it sounds similar to the later case with Wicked King Noah (cf. Mosiah 11:16). However, it seems unlikely Nephi would choose someone prone to such things to be his successor. But, good men do fall, as did the ancient David. Unfortunately, Jacob is sparse in the details surrounding what led up to the present situation, so we are left to speculate.

Timing of Jacob's Speech

There is considerable internal evidence pointing to Jacob's speech in these chapters occurring some time during the month of Tishri in the Hebrew calendar (September-October in the Western calendar). The first day of Tishri is Rosh Hashanah (cf. Lev. 23:24) wherein the shofar, the ceremonial ram's horn, is blown as a remembrance to the Israelites of their heritage. This is seen as the feast of the beginning, a celebration of the creation of Adam and a renewal to their spiritual lives. Jacob refers to such symbolism as the Creation and man being from the dust in 2:5, 2:15 and 2:21.

This is followed by Yom Kippur on the tenth day of Tishri. Yom Kippur (cf. Lev. 16:29-34, Lev. 23:26-32), or the Day of Atonement, is the peak of the Festival cycle and is to be the one most important day when a person focuses on their relationship with God. It is a day of fasting wherein one reflects on their offenses to God and man and asks both for forgiveness. It is also a day of tzedekah, or charity, wherein people make donations to the needy. Jacob references fasting by paraphrasing Isaiah's formula of the Fast (cf. Isa. 58:6-7) in 2:19 and he discusses tzedekah in 2:17. On Yom Kippur the high priest also performs the sacrifice of one scapegoat and release of another scapegoat, and then washes the blood off his clothes (cf. Lev. 23:15-24). Jacob makes reference to washing himself of the people's sins in 1:19 and 2:2.

The festivals of the month of Tishri end with the Feast of Sukkot (cf. Lev. 23:34-43), or Tabernacles or Booths, wherein the people are to gather into the Temple and dwell in makeshift huts that symbolize Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Hospitality is to be shown all visitors of the booth whether family or not. Thus, all in the community, both rich and poor, experience the

transient nature of material wealth as they abandon their homes for these huts and share their substance with all who visit. The participants are to gather to the Temple to give thanks for the many blessings received of the Lord in a fashion similar to what Americans would see Thanksgiving as. Jacob references the circumstances which result in the ancient wandering in the wilderness in 1:7. He acknowledges the great blessings of the Lord in 2:12-13. He exhorts selflessness in material things in 2:16-19.

And finally, the reference in 1:17 to being gathered inside the Temple clearly suggests a time of ingathering for all the people, which would naturally occur on one of the three major Feast days. And, 2:11 states that the Lord's command to speak to the people was given the night before so the people were already planning on gathering into the Temple the following day as it couldn't have been some special gathering called by Jacob.

All of these parallels suggest the speech occurs during the month of Tishri, probably at the beginning of the Feast of Sukkot.

Comments on Jacob 1

1 FOR behold, it came to pass that fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; wherefore, Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven. 2 And he gave me, Jacob, a commandment that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people which are called the people of Nephi. 3 For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. 4 And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people.

v1-4 Jacob starts off his portion of the small plates by keeping the calendar of events. He also indicates the small plates have been passed on from his older brother Nephi to himself (v. 1). He indicates Nephi told him to keep the record on these plates spiritual (v. 4), as opposed to historical, following the commands from 2 Ne. 5:29-33 (v. 2). The history of the people should be on the large plates, and these small plates should be handed down from Jacob to his children (v. 3).

v1 "fifty and five years", Nephi was probably an early teenager

when Lehi left Jerusalem. Taking an early assumption of 12 years old plus 55 would place Nephi as at the very least 67 years old. Jacob, being born at some point during Lehi's journey in the wilderness, is more than 10 years younger, so Nephi sees him as a good candidate to take over record keeping. We would have to assume Jacob's physical health was good as well.

v3 Why did the plates go to Jacob and his seed and not Nephi's children? We know from 1 Ne. 16:7 that Nephi married, and in 2 Ne. 5:6 he refers to "my family" and not just a wife, so we would presume he had children. But, there is never any mention made in the text of either sons or daughters.

Perhaps Nephi did have sons and he wanted to break any kind of hereditary claims to kingship or being high priest as a preemptive measure. This seems unlikely though as if it were his agenda why would he then tell Jacob the small plates were to go to him and his seed, a command that is lineage-based?

Did Nephi have all daughters? The king whom Nephi anoints in his place is called "a man" by Jacob (v. 9), not "my nephew" or "Nephi's son". If he had sons it seems likely some reference would be made to them either at present, or in retrospect. But, none is ever made. Thus, it seems most likely Nephi had all daughters.

5 For because of faith and great anxiety, it truly had been made manifest unto us concerning our people, what things should happen unto them. 6 And we also had many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy; wherefore, we knew of Christ and his kingdom, which should come. 7 Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness. 8 Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world; wherefore, I, Jacob, take it upon me to fulfil the commandment of my brother Nephi.

v5-8 Jacob explains the purpose of this religious record is to let their posterity know they believed in Christ. They know their posterity will fall into disbelief at times as it has been revealed to them (v. 5). So, they want their posterity to know their fathers had many revelations and considerable knowledge regarding Christ (v. 6). Thus, they labor diligently to teach the present people to come unto Christ so as to not invoke God's anger (v. 7), but they also want to labor diligently to persuade all people, obviously including their posterity, to come unto

Christ (v. 8).

v5 Jacob may be obliquely referring to some personal revelation of his own, as suggested in v. 6, but it seems more likely he is referring to Nephi's grand vision of 1 Ne. 12-15 as the reader would be familiar with that.

v7 "we labored diligently among our people", one would assume the contents of 2 Ne. 6-10 represent some of these labors.

v8 This verse uses similar wording as that appearing in 2 Ne. 9:18. By "bear the shame of the world", Jacob is referring to the scorn worldly people subject the religious to, as in 1 Ne. 8:27-28. He means "bear" as in to "withstand" or "endure".

9 Now Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings. 10 The people having loved Nephi exceedingly, he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare-- 11 Wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would. 12 And it came to pass that Nephi died. 13 Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. 14 But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.

v9-14 Nephi recognizes he is near death, so he appoints "a man" to be king in his place (v. 9). The people have loved Nephi and recognize he has done great things for them as their leader (v. 10), so they symbolically name all kings "Nephi" after him as a title to honor his tradition, regardless of the real name of the individual who becomes king (v. 11). Jacob informs us that Nephi dies, and this sets the stage for the full rulership of the new king, as referenced in v. 15 (v. 12). Jacob then carefully defines his terms of "Lamanites" (v. 13) and "Nephites" (v. 14) as behavior-based as opposed to strictly lineage-based.

v9 Nephi didn't want to be king himself, despite the people's desire to have him be one (cf. 2 Ne. 5:18). But, regardless of his denial, they considered him to be one anyway (cf. 2 Ne. 6:2). Hence the title "second king" in v. 19, as Nephi was the first

one, albeit informally. His acquiescence is similar to that of the Brother of Jared in Ether 6:24 and Samuel in 1 Sam. 8, and it bodes ill for the Nephites. He may have done it as a preventative measure so as to avoid any infighting for who would be king after he died.

v13 Note Jacob's divisions of the families attends the discussion of the political transition from Nephi the protector (cf. 2 Ne. 5:18) to a formal king in his honor. Jacob is identifying the form of local government. While there was a reign of kings, the king presided over some sort of patriarchal tribal system.

As Jacob's interests are spiritual and not political, he chooses to ignore the political divisions and instead makes the spiritual division in v. 14.

v14 Hostilities persist between the Lamanites and Nephites from 2 Ne. 5:34 through Jacob 3:7, Enos 1:20, Jarom 1:7, Omni 1:10, at least up until the time of King Benjamin in WofM 1:13-14. After that war, where the Lamanites were badly routed by King Benjamin, there appears to have been a passive detente until the sons of Mosiah went and preached to the Lamanites in Mosiah 28.

But, this general state of tension between the two groups doesn't necessarily preclude all communication. It is plain from ch. 2-3 that some knowledge of the Lamanites is among the Nephites, and in ch. 6 we have Sherem, who is probably a Lamanite, come among them.

Also, contrast Jacob's behavior-based definitions with the skin color-based definitions used in 3:5-9.

15 And now it came to pass that the people of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son. 16 Yea, and they also began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride.

17 Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord. 18 For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi. 19 And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day.

v15-19 Jacob gives background to establish the context of the

next two chapters. Under the reign of the second king, the people start sliding into immorality just like in old times (v. 15). And, they also started getting materialistic (v. 16). The result is Jacob has to address these behaviors at the Lord's command (v. 17) because he was a priest and teacher of the people (v. 18). As Jacob and Joseph took their calling seriously, realizing the people's sins would be visited upon them if they failed in their callings, they taught them what the Lord told them to (v. 19).

v15 "like unto David of old", while Jacob likens them to David he never actually accuses them of desiring many wives and concubines. What Jacob does accuse them of is "whoredoms", which in modern language is "prostitution". Hence his warning against "fornication and lasciviousness" in 3:12.

v17 "I taught them in the temple", this Temple was apparently built largely by Nephi fairly early on, cf. 2 Ne. 5:16. It couldn't have been all that large, and yet Jacob is teaching them inside of it. This indicates the group population is still rather small. And, it isn't a matter of Jacob addressing only the elder males of the community as it is plain from the subsequent address that women and children are present, cf. 2:7.

That the address occurred rather spontaneously (cf. 2:11) in the Temple suggests it occurred on one of the regular feast days or on the Sabbath when people would have gathered in to the Temple anyway.

v18 Compare 2 Ne. 5:6.

v19 "their blood might not come upon our garments", cp. 2 Ne. 9:44.

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