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Matthew L. Bowen

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# NEPHI'S GOOD INCLUSIO

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Matthew L. Bowen

*Abstract: As John Gee noted two decades ago, Nephi is best explained as a form of the Egyptian word nfr, which by Lehi's time was pronounced neh-fee, nay-fee, or nou-fee. Since this word means "good," "goodly," "fine," or "fair," I subsequently posited several possible examples of wordplay on the name Nephi in the Book of Mormon, including Nephi's own autobiographical introduction (1 Nephi 1:1: "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents ... having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God"). It should be further pointed out, however, that Nephi also concludes his personal writings on the small plates using the terms "good" and "goodness of God." This terminological bracketing constitutes a literary device, used anciently, called inclusio or an envelope figure. Nephi's literary emphasis on "good" and "goodness" not only befits his personal name, but fulfills the Lord's commandment, "thou shalt engraven many things ... which are good in my sight" (2 Nephi 5:30), a command which also plays on the name Nephi. Nephi's autobiographical introduction and conclusion proved enormously influential on subsequent writers who modeled autobiographical and narrative biographical introductions on 1 Nephi 1:1-2 and based sermons — especially concluding sermons — on Nephi's "good" conclusion in 2 Nephi 33. An emphasis in all these sermons is that all "good"/"goodness" ultimately has its source in God and Christ.*

According to Nephi's own account, the Lord's commandment to make the small plates came as follows: "Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven **many things upon them which are good** in my sight, for the **profit** of thy people" (2 Nephi 5:30). As John Gee first proposed, the name Nephi is best explained as a form of the Egyptian word *nfr*, which was later pronounced *neh-fee*, *nay-fee*, or *nou-fee*,<sup>1</sup> especially during and

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1. John Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189-91; idem, "Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009), 1-5.

after Lehi's time. The word *nfr* denotes "good," "goodly," "fine," "fair."<sup>2</sup> Since Nephi's scribal training was in "the language of [his] father" which included or "consisted of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2), Nephi conceivably heard the echo of his own name in the Lord's injunction to him regarding the making of the small plates (in 2 Nephi 5:30), which he called — along with his large plates — "the plates of Nephi" (1 Nephi 9:2). Royal Skousen has pointed out that the "books" of 1 and 2 Nephi were both called "the Book of Nephi."<sup>3</sup> The literary framing of Nephi's personal writings suggests that both books of *Nephi* can be seen as a single "good" book; or, put another way, they constitute a single, unified testimony of "the goodness of God" (1 Nephi 1:1; 2 Nephi 33:14).

The Lord's use of "good" in 2 Nephi 5:30 thus seems to have suggested an overarching theme for Nephi's small-plates account, as Nephi begins and ends his writings on those plates with the threefold repetition of forms of the term "good." This repetition at the opening and closing of his account constitutes a framing device sometimes called *inclusio* or an envelope figure.<sup>4</sup> In the short study that follows, I propose that this clustering of "good" terminology not only reflects Nephi's autobiographical wordplay on his own name, but also highlights two of Nephi's main themes: the importance of having a knowledge of and partaking of the "goodness of God" and doing "good." I will also briefly sketch the influence and impact that Nephi's thematic focus on "good" and "goodness" had on later Book of Mormon writers, particularly Amaleki, Mormon, and Moroni.

### Opening Frame: "Goodness" Taught and Learned

The first threefold repetition of "good" terms occurs in the very first verse of the Book of Mormon, and in the beginning of Nephi's autobiography:

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2. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131-32. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 2:252-63.

3. Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 28. In Helaman 2:14, Mormon refers to the entirety of the large plates as "the Book of Nephi." Like 1 and 2 Nephi, 3 and 4 Nephi were also titled "the Book of Nephi." See idem, *Earliest Text*, 564, 642.

4. For some biblical examples of this literary device, see *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 323-25.

I, **NEPHI**, having been born of **goodly** parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of **the goodness** and the mysteries of **God**, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (1 Nephi 1:1)

The first of these “good” terms is Nephi’s own name. As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> this suggests deliberate autobiographical wordplay on — or play on the meaning of — Nephi’s name. The wordplay suggests that Nephi’s name (*nfr* > *nfi* = “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” “fair”) is appropriate because of the “goodly” quality<sup>6</sup> of the parenting that he received: he “was taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father.” While

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5. Matthew L. Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 2.

6. Old English *gōdlic*, whence “goodly” derives, denoted “excellent” (i.e., of “excellent” or “good” quality), but also “comely, fair” (see J.R. Clark, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. [Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984], 158). In other words, its semantic range overlaps considerably with Egyptian *nfr* (“good,” “goodly,” “fine” [quality], “fair”). Imitating Nephi’s language, Enos (Enos 1:1) explains that he knew his father was “a just man — for [i.e., because] he taught me in his language and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Enos’s education was proof of his father being “just” or righteous (see further below). Perhaps the best endorsement of the idea that “goodly” in 1 Nephi 1:1 means “good” as in “of good quality” is Joseph Smith’s adaptation of Nephi’s biography:

“I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the <State> of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instruct<ing>me in <the> christian religion[.]”

(See Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844* [Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian’s Press, 2012], 11; emphasis in the original, underlining mine; hereafter cited as JSPJSH). When the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible uses the term “goodly” it usually does so in the sense of “good” quality — i.e., fine or excellent quality (see, e.g., Genesis 27:15; 49:21; 39:28; Leviticus 23:40; Numbers 31:10; Deuteronomy 3:25; 6:10; Deuteronomy 8:12; Joshua 7:21; 2 Chronicles 36:10; Psalms 80:10; Jeremiah 11:16; Ezekiel 17:8; Ezekiel 17:23; Joel 3:5). In some instances, “goodly” refers to appearance, i.e., “good” to look at or “fair” (see, e.g., Genesis 39:6; Exodus 2:2; 1 Samuel 16:12; 2 Samuel 23:21). However, in not one instance does “goodly” connote or denote “wealthy.” It should be noted that both of the aforementioned senses of “goodly” fit well within the range of meaning of Egyptian *nfr*; whence Nephi most plausibly derives (see further Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights* 23/6 [2003]: 2-3. In light of this evidence

that education included at least something of the “knowledge of the **goodness** and mysteries of God” — Lehi himself had a testimony of God’s “goodness”<sup>7</sup> — we read that Nephi also had, in contrast to his brothers, a desire to gain this testimony (via confirmatory revelation) for himself (see 1 Nephi 2:15).<sup>8</sup>

### Closing Frame: Persuading and Teaching to Do Good and to Partake of God’s Goodness

In 2 Nephi 33, Nephi returns to the kind of autobiography with which he began his record (1 Nephi 1:1ff.). Nephi apprehends that in order to live up to the “good” or “goodliness” that was so evident in his father’s life (whose heir he was)<sup>9</sup> and to live up to his own name, he must be willing to persuade to others — especially his people, the Nephites (“good[ly] ones,” “fair ones”),<sup>10</sup> to do good, which he does ceaselessly throughout his life: “And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it **persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known** unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and **persuadeth** them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal” (2 Nephi 33:4).

Notably Nephi refers to “the words which [he has] written” collectively as “it” and uses a singular form of a verb rendered “persuadeth” — “it persuadeth them to do good” — a grammatical phenomenon sometimes called “deflected agreement.”<sup>11</sup> The change of pronoun + verb to a singular construction emphasizes Nephi’s “words” as a single unit.

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— especially the testimonies of Enos and Joseph Smith — the idea that “goodly parents” means “wealthy parents” cannot be sustained, in my view.

7. See, e.g., 1 Nephi 1:14; 5:4.

8. 1 Nephi 2:16: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also **having great desires to know of the mysteries of God**, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.”

9. See 2 Nephi 1:28-29 and 5:1-13.

10. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2-3; see also Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: The 40th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: RSC and Deseret Book, 2011), 240-63.

11. For more on the phenomenon of deflected agreement, especially as found in the Book of Mormon, see Andrew Smith, “Deflected Agreement in the

Nephi's writings — his “words” — are subdivided into two “books,” though they can be viewed as a literary whole. The deflected agreement emphasizes that they are, in a sense, really one “book” — Nephi's “good” book.

A few verses later, Nephi invokes “good”-terminology again:

And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they **teach all men** that they should **do good**. (2 Nephi 33:10)

Nephi characterizes his writings as “the words of Christ [that] he hath given ... unto me,” as if to leave no doubt as to their provenance. Moreover, he widens his scope from “persuading” his people to “do good” to “teaching” his “beloved brethren” the Lamanites, to the Jews (and their descendants), and “all ye ends of the earth” (which would include the Gentiles). His words “teach all men” — i.e., all three of these groups — “that they should do good.” We may further note here that the word “believe” is repeated five times in 2 Nephi 33:10 alone. Nephi wishes his people, the Nephites, to do “good” and thus remain “good” and that they will not “dwindle in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22-13; 26:15-19; or “dwindle and perish in unbelief,” 1 Nephi 4:13)<sup>12</sup> as the Lamanites already dwindled.

What “good” did Nephi want them to “do”? Nephi further declares that “it [the body of his writings] speaketh of Jesus and persuadeth them to believe in him and endure to the end, which is life eternal.” Nephi *meristically*<sup>13</sup> alludes to the “doctrine of Christ”<sup>14</sup> — i.e., having faith in Jesus Christ, repenting, being baptized, receiving the Holy Ghost,

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Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21/2 (2012): 40-57.

12. The Spirit's words to Nephi in 1 Nephi 4:13 already hint ominously at the Lamanites as a “nation” that dwindled and perished spiritually in unbelief. They lost access to the Brass Plates at Nephi's departure from them (2 Nephi 5:12; cf., e.g., Mosiah 10:16; Alma 20:13).

13. *Merismus* is a rhetorical device in which a whole is referred to a whole by one or several of its parts.

14. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31-50; idem, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 26-56; “; see also idem, “How to Come unto Christ,” *Ensign* 22 (September 1992): 7-13; and most recently,

and enduring to the end which evokes the promise of the Father “Ye shall have eternal life.”<sup>15</sup> Nephi has just expounded the “doctrine of Christ” at length in 2 Nephi 31–32. Thus, the “good” that Nephi’s “good” book “persuadeth” his people to “do” is identified here specifically as obedience to the “doctrine of Christ” — or, put another way, “hearken unto these words and believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 33:10).

Finally, Nephi closes his personal writings with an invocation of the phrase “the goodness of God” that matches his use of the phrase “the goodness and mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1). He declares:

And you that will not partake of the **goodness of God**, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:14)

Nephi’s expression “you that will not partake” means “you that are not willing to partake” or “you who do not want to partake,” recalling Lehi’s statement regarding his sons, Laman and Lemuel, “they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:18).<sup>16</sup> As Jennifer C. Lane has observed, “We must be careful in how we read the modal verb ‘would’ in this sentence [in 1 Nephi 8:18]. In modern-day English we use ‘would’ or ‘will’ to express future tense, but *will* also means ‘what we want’; its root is the German verb *willen*. Laman and Lemuel did not come because they did not want to come.”<sup>17</sup> These same observations can and should be applied to 2 Nephi 33:14: those who “will not partake of the goodness of God” are those who do not *want* to partake of the goodness of God — i.e., they are unwilling. If we do not partake of God’s goodness, it is because we do not want to partake.

Moreover, Nephi equates “partak[ing] of the goodness of God” with “respect[ing] the words of the Jews,” respecting his [Nephi’s] words, and respecting “the words which shall proceed forth out of

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idem. “The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31,” *Religious Educator* 16/2 (2015): 51-75.

15. 2 Nephi 31:2; cf. 2 Nephi 31:15.

16. On Laman and Lemuel’s unbelief and their refusal to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, see Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit,” 240-63.

17. Jennifer C. Lane, “The Presence of the Lord,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision* (2011 *Sperry Symposium*), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 130.



the mouth of the Lamb.” This constitutes Nephi’s final invocation of the “law of witnesses”<sup>18</sup> — the Israelite law governing capital cases (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Nephi explicitly describes Judgment Day (“the last day”) as the legal setting, when the world — including the members of the latter-day Church of Jesus Christ<sup>19</sup> — will be on trial. Nephi invokes three scriptural witnesses that will be present at that trial: the words of the Jews (the Old and New Testaments), Nephi’s words (including those spoken and recorded by his descendants in the Book of Mormon), and “the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God” which would presumably include latter-day scripture (e.g., the Doctrine and Covenants) and the words of all true prophets, ancient and modern. Thus, the “goodness of God” of which we are commanded to partake includes the “words of the Jews” (the Bible), the Book of Mormon, and “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Moroni 7:45; D&C 84:44; 98:11).<sup>20</sup>

### Imitating and Adapting Nephi’s “Good” Words

The influence of Nephi’s writings on subsequent Book of Mormon writers can scarcely be overstated. Enos imitates Nephi’s biographical introduction including the latter’s use of wordplay<sup>21</sup>:

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18. On Nephi’s use of the “law of witnesses” in 2nd Nephi, see Bruce A. Van Orden, “The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 307–21; idem, “‘We Prophesy of Christ’: The Law of Witnesses in 2nd Nephi,” *Ensign* 20 (February 1990): 22–25.

19. Ezra Taft Benson (“A New Witness for Christ,” *Ensign*, November 1984, 8) stated to the entire Church at the October 1984 conference: “We do not have to prove the Book of Mormon is true. The book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! **The Book of Mormon is not on trial — the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ.** I testify that the Book of Mormon is the word of God; and therefore Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith is a prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, with its authorized servants to perform the ordinances of salvation today, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

20. D&C 98:11: “And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God.”

21. See Matthew L. Bowen “Wordplay on the Name Enos,” *Insights* 26/3 (2006): 2; idem, “‘And There Wrestled a Man with Him’ (Genesis 32:24): Enos’s Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151–160.

1 Nephi 1:1	Enos 1:1
I, <b>Nephi</b> [Egyptian <i>nfr (nfi)</i> = good(ly)] having been born of <b>goodly</b> parents therefore I was <i>taught</i> somewhat in all the <i>learning of my father</i>	I, <b>Enos</b> [Heb. 'ēnôš = “man”] knowing my <i>father</i> that he was a <i>just man</i> for he <i>taught</i> me in <i>his language</i>

Although Enos shifts the wordplay to his own name, the textual dependency of Enos’s biography on Nephi’s is as clear an example of textual dependency as one could wish to find in the Book of Mormon. Enos’s personal name is appropriate for the same reason that Nephi’s is: on account of “goodly” or “just” parentage — Enos’s father Jacob was a “just” man, as Lehi and Sariah were “goodly” parents. Proof of the parental righteousness — the quality of being “just” — and the parental “goodness” of Lehi, Sariah, and Jacob consisted in their education of their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Enos 1:1). Moreover, Nephi and Enos could point to their own names as constituting such evidence: Nephi was “good” and Enos became a “man” whose “soul hungered” after righteousness (Enos 1:4).<sup>22</sup>

Zeniff, who like Enos, evidences a Nephite (royal?) scribal education in his autobiographical prologue,<sup>23</sup> also imitated Nephi’s self-introduction including his “good[ly]” autobiographical wordplay:

1 Nephi 1:1	Mosiah 9:1
I, <b>Nephi</b> , [Egyptian <i>nfr (nfi)</i> = good(ly)] having been born of <b>goodly</b> parents therefore I was <i>taught</i> somewhat in all the learning of <b>my father</b> ... yea, <i>having had a great knowledge</i> of the <b>goodness</b> and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.	I, <b>Zeniff</b> [cf. “Zenephi,” Moroni 9:16] having been taught in all the language of the <b>Nephites</b> and <i>having a knowledge</i> of the land of <b>Nephi</b> or the land of <b>our fathers</b> ’ first inheritance and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them — But when I saw <i>that which was good</i> among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed

Zeniff’s royal autobiographical introduction exhibits a similar wordplay on “Nephi” and “good” in explaining why he had resisted a

22. Cf. 3 Nephi 20:8; cf. Matthew 5:6; 3 Nephi 12:6.

23. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit,” 246-248.

pre-emptive genocidal war against the Lamanites. If the name Zeniff is a form of, or related to, the name Zenephi (attested in Moroni 9:16, “he of/ the one of Nephi,” or “son/descendant of Nephi,” the an even richer wordplay emerges.<sup>24</sup> When compared with his ancestor Nephi’s autobiography upon which his own autobiography is stylistically and literarily modeled, Zeniff’s statement that he found “that which was good” among the Lamanites has important implications for their having been descended from “goodly” ancestors or “born of goodly parents” (the Hebrew term *’āb* means both “father”/“parent” and “ancestor”). Zeniff recognized there was still much that was “Lehite” or “Nephite” in their culture. In other words, not every heritage of their “goodly” ancestors (1 Nephi 1:1) had been abandoned (cf. Jacob 3:5-7).

King Benjamin also gave his sons a scribal education just as his forefathers had given their sons:

1 Nephi 1:1 and Enos 1:1	Mosiah 1:2
<p><i>I, Nephi</i> [Egyptian <i>nfr</i> (<i>nfi</i>) = <i>good(ly)</i>] having been born of <i>goodly parents</i> therefore I was <i>taught</i> somewhat in all the learning of <i>my father</i></p> <p><i>I, Enos</i> [Heb. <i>’ēnōš</i> = “man”] knowing <i>my father</i> that he was a <i>just man</i> for he <i>taught</i> me <i>in his language</i></p>	<p>And it came to pass that [<b>Benjamin</b>, v. 1] had three <b>sons</b> [Heb. <i>bānīm</i>] And he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum and Helaman And he <i>caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers</i> that they might become <b>men</b> [<i>’anšê</i> &lt; <i>’ānāšīm</i>] of <b>understanding</b> [<i>binā</i>] that they might <i>know</i> concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their <i>fathers</i>...<sup>25</sup></p> <p>Benjamin (<i>bēn/bin</i> + <i>yāmin</i>) = “son of the right hand” — note: King Benjamin’s wordplay on his own name in terms of “sons and daughters” of the “right hand” in Mosiah 5:6-12 (cf. 5:5-15).<sup>26</sup></p>

Mormon’s description of King Benjamin’s education of his sons probably draws on a first person account written by Benjamin himself, apparently modeled on Nephi’s and Enos’s autobiographies. And, as John Tvedtnes has noted, there is additional language evidencing the textual

24. See the Book of Mormon Onomasticon entry <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/ZENEPHI>.

25. Matthew L. Bowen, “Becoming Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand: King Benjamin’s Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21/2 (2012), 2-13.

26. *Ibid.*

dependence of Mosiah 1:2-6 on 1 Nephi 1:1-2.<sup>27</sup> A similar phenomenon may be detectable in the narrative biographical introductions of Alma<sup>28</sup> and Abish,<sup>29</sup> respectively:

1 Nephi 1:1 and 1 Nephi 2:16	Mosiah 17:2 and Alma 19:6
<p><i>I, Nephi,</i> having been born of <i>goodly</i> parents, therefore I <i>was taught</i> somewhat in all the <i>learning of my father</i> [Hebrew <i>’ābî</i>]. (1 Nephi 1:1)</p>	<p>But there was one . . . whose name was <b>Alma</b>, he also being a <i>descendant of Nephi</i>. And he was a <b>young man</b> (Heb. <i>’elem</i>) <i>and he believed the words which Abinadi</i> [perhaps “My-Father-is-generous”]<sup>30</sup> <i>had</i> <i>spoken.</i> (Mosiah 17:2)</p>
<p><i>I, Nephi,</i> being exceedingly <i>young</i> (i.e., an <i>’elem</i>), nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires <i>to know</i> the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord, and . . . he did . . . soften my heart that <i>I did believe</i> <i>all the words which had been spoken by my</i> <i>father</i> [<i>’ābî</i>]. (1 Nephi 2:16)</p>	<p>. . . save it were one of the Lamanitish <b>women</b>, whose name was <b>Abish</b> [“Father is a man”] she having been converted unto the Lord for many years, <i>on account of a remarkable vision of her father</i> (Alma 19:6)</p>

Although the emphasis of the wordplay in the latter two passages, as in the case of Enos 1:1, changes to fit the name, all of these biographical and autobiographical descriptions ultimately owe a literary debt to Nephi’s “goodly” autobiography (1 Nephi 1:1-2). Acknowledging that literary debt makes these passages appreciably more beautiful and meaningful in terms of the impact that parents and ancestors have upon faith and conversion.

Perhaps as impactful as Nephi’s autobiographical introduction, however, was his conclusion with its emphasis on doing “good” and on the “goodness of God.” Amaleki commences his conclusion of the Book

27. John A. Tvedtnes, “A Note on Benjamin and Lehi,” *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 3.

28. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘And He Was a Young Man’: The Literary Preservation of Alma’s Autobiographical Wordplay,” *Insights* 30 (2010): 2-3.

29. Matthew L. Bowen, “Father is a Man: The Remarkable Mention of the name Abish in Alma 19:16 and Its Narrative Context,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 14 (2015): 77-93.

30. The first onomastic element in Abinadi is absolutely clear: -*’ābî* (“my father”). The second element is less clear. Cf. Arabic *nad<sup>w</sup>* (“generous, willing”). Other possibilities are noted here: <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/ABINADI>.

of Omni and the small plates with language that is almost entirely taken from the latter part of 2 Nephi (30-33):

And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord,<sup>31</sup> wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in **all things which are good**; for **there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil**. And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and **partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption**. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved. (Omni 1:25-26)

Amaleki's emphasis on "good" here has its source in 2 Nephi 33 and Nephi's persuading and teaching all to do "good" and the "goodness of God" and the implicit notion that God is the source of all good. Moreover, the phrase "partake of his salvation and the power of his redemption" constitutes Amaleki's formulation of Nephi's "partak[ing] of the goodness of God."<sup>32</sup> Amaleki's use of the phrase "endure to the end" helps us recognize that everything that precedes it — i.e., coming unto Christ, offering the whole soul like a burnt offering, and continuing in fasting and prayer — pertains to what Nephi called the "doctrine of Christ" (faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity, until the final pronouncement of salvation).

Likewise, Mormon's sermon on faith, hope, and charity (preserved for us in Moroni 7) owes much to 2 Nephi 31–33 (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 31:20) and Omni 1:26-27. Mormon prefaces his discussion of faith, hope, and charity with a discussion of how to discern good from evil. In Moroni

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31. Cf. Enos 1:1-2.

32. Cf. Jacob's formulation of Nephi's idea of "partak[ing] of the goodness of God": "Wherefore we labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God..." (Jacob 1:7). Jacob's language is borrowed from the end of 2 Nephi (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:23; 33:14).

7:5-28 alone, Mormon uses “good” twenty-six times.<sup>33</sup> Mormon develops at length the ideas of “good” first emphasized by Nephi in his *inclusio* (and elsewhere in his work, e.g., 2 Nephi 26) and mentioned by Amaleki (“all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil,” Omni 1:25).

Moroni’s final exhortation, wherewith he concludes the entire Book of Mormon, evidences dependence on the texts of Nephi, Amaleki, and his father Mormon — the latter two themselves, of course, dependent upon Nephi. In this final exhortation, Moroni invokes the word “good” seven times. Like Nephi, Moroni is writing to a future “Lamanite” audience and his first use of “good” in his exhortation establishes a terminological link with his ancestor Nephi and his work: “Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me **good**; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites; and I would that they should know that more than four hundred and twenty years have passed away since the sign was given of the coming of Christ (Moroni 10:10). In a way, Moroni’s exhortation is an extension of 2 Nephi 33, updating the latter in terms of what has happened to the Lamanites and Nephites since that time as a paranesis for their Latter-day audience, including descendants of the Lamanites and Nephites.

Moroni’s second and third uses of “good”-terminology, like Nephi’s use of “good”-terminology in 2 Nephi 33, identify that which is “good” with the Savior Jesus Christ, who is the author of all good: “And **whatsoever thing is good is just and true**; wherefore, **nothing that is good denieth the Christ**, but acknowledgeth that he is” (Moroni 10:6). Moroni’s fourth use of “good” does the same: “And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that **every good gift cometh of Christ**” (Moroni 10:18).

Moroni’s fifth invocation of “good” is negative and looks forward to the Great Apostasy, while the sixth looks forward to the Restoration:

And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth — that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief. And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be **none that doeth good among you, no not one**. For if there be one among you that doeth **good**, he shall work by the power and gifts of God. (Moroni 10:24-25)

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33. Moroni 7:5-6 (3 x); 10-17 (12 x); 19-22 (5 x); 24-26 (5 x); and 27 (once).

The phrase “none that doeth good” is a quote or paraphrase of Psalms 14:3 (Psalms 53:3): “They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (“Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”). This ancient temple text describes apostasy. According to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s 1832 account, the Lord described the Great Apostasy with this very text.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Mormon’s statement, “if there be one among you that doeth good” may be interpreted as an allusion to or prophecy of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who did “work by the power and gifts of God.”

Finally, Moroni concludes his exhortation and the entire Book of Mormon with a seventh instance of “good” that perhaps looks forward to the Restoration: “And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and **lay hold upon every good gift**, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30). The phrase “laying hold upon” recalls the language of Lehi’s and Nephi’s vision of the Tree of Life, especially the “rod of iron” and Nephi’s equation of “the rod of iron” with the “word of God”<sup>35</sup> and his later adaptation of it as the “word of Christ.”<sup>36</sup> Zion will be established in its fullness when Lamanite, Jew, and Gentile forsake evil and “lay hold upon every good gift.”

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34. “Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not<my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them acording to thir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which<hath> been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[o]stles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is] written of me in the cloud<clothed> in the glory of my Father and my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the hevnlly vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart about that time my mother and but after many days [p. 3]” (Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, pp. 1–6, Ms., handwriting of Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams, LDS Church Archives). See JSPJSH 1:13.

35. 1 Nephi 11:25; 15:24–25; cf. 1 Nephi 17:26, 29; Helaman 3:29. See Matthew L. Bowen, “What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?” *Insights* 25/ 2 (2005): 2–3.

36. Jared T. Parker, “The Doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31–32 as an Approach to the Vision of the Tree of Life,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision (2011 Sperry Symposium)*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 161–78.

## Conclusion

Nephi's framing or bracketing of the body of his writings with clusters of the term "good"/"goodness" (1 Nephi 1:1; 2 Nephi 33:4, :10, 14) constitutes a literary device known as *inclusio*. Nephi's use of this device establishes "good" — including doing "good" and "the goodness of God" — as arguably the key theme of his small plates record, which is particularly appropriate given that Nephi's own name is best explained as a form of the Egyptian word *nfr*, forms of which denote "good," "goodly" and "goodness." Nephi thus fulfilled the Lord's commandment regarding the making of the small plates with exactness: "Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are **good** in my sight" (2 Nephi 5:30).

It is clear that Nephi's successors imitated both his "goodly" autobiographical introduction as well as his "good" conclusion, but perhaps the overriding point is that the writings of Nephi taught and influenced his successors and descendants to teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all good. They exhort us to partake of his goodness. Furthermore, their writings help us to use the spirit to discern between good and evil as well as any writings in existence. The Book of Mormon, like all scripture, is the "good gift" and the "word"/"rod" on which we are to "lay hold."<sup>37</sup>

Finally, no better endorsement of Nephi's "good[ly]" writings can be offered than that of the prophet Joseph Smith himself, who used Nephi's autobiography as the model for his 1832 autobiography: "I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the <State> of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instruct<ing>me in <the> christian religion[.]"<sup>38</sup> Many prophets like Nephi and Joseph Smith have been the beneficiaries of "goodly parents," who educated them and prepared them for their life's callings. Other prophets, like Abraham, became "goodly parents" through faith and faithfulness in spite of what their own fathers/parents had not been.

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37. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?" 2–3.

38. See again JSPJSH 1:11.



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**Matthew L. Bowen** was raised in Orem, Utah and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC and is currently an Assistant Professor in Religious Education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.





