

## The Brass Plates of Laban and What They Contained

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### SOME PROBLEMS OF INTEREST RELATING TO THE BRASS PLATES

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The Book of Mormon relates that when Nephi and his brethren returned from Jerusalem with the brass plates, their father Lehi proceeded to give the records thorough examination. (I Nephi 5:10.) It is a well-established fact that writing on metal plates was not an uncommon practice in the ancient world.' In his search of the brass plates, Lehi discovered that they contained the "five books of Moses" as well as a record of the Jews from the beginning down to Zedekiah's reign; many of Jeremiah's prophecies were also found engraven on the sacred plates. Let us quote Nephi's exact words:

"And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning.

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 parents;

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

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.'

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." (I Nephi 5:10-14.)

I wish to call special attention to the words, "prophecies which have been spoken by *the mouth of Jeremiah*" (italics author's), which occur in the paragraph, "By the mouth of" is assuredly not common English usage.. We are not accustomed in our ordinary speech to say that we intend to consult prophecies spoken "by the mouth of" Isaiah, Jeremiah, or any other prophet. But the expression is perfectly good Hebrew idiom and seems to have been translated literally by Joseph Smith. The fact that it occurs in II Chronicles 36:21-22 and Ezra 1:1 does not necessarily mean that he copied it from our common English version.

Lehi also discovered the genealogy of his fathers upon the brass records; he therefore knew that he was a descendant of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, through his son Manasseh. (I Nephi 5:14; Alma 10:3.)

The statements of Nephi regarding the contents of the brass plates are extremely important to us because of present-day critical views respecting the Old Testament. Most contemporary Old Testament scholars severely question or deny completely that Moses wrote, or had written, the first five books of our Bible. But the Book of Mormon affirms the truth of the old Hebrew' tradition that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, or the Pentateuch, as we call it. (I Nephi 5:11; II Nephi 2:15-19; 3:4-10; Pearl of Great Price: 12:28-33. etc.) The Nephite record (together with the Book of Moses) shatter-for the Latter-day Saints, at least-current "critical" views regarding the date, authorship, and composition of the Pentateuch. Even the book of Deuteronomy, which many critics especially contend was written in the days of Josiah (c. 621 B.C.), is of Mosaic origin, according to the Book of Mormon. (See, e.g., I Nephi 22:20-21; II Nephi 20:23; cf Deuteronomy 18:15,18-19.

Many other interesting problems arise as a result of Nephi's words concerning the brass plates. One wonders how Jeremiah's prophecies found their place on the brass plates, since Laban, their former keeper, was a thoroughly unrighteous man. How did Jeremiah, or his scribe Baruch (Jeremiah 36:4), or some other representative of the prophet gain access to the plates in Laban's treasury, in view' of the difficulties which Nephi and his brothers had in getting at them? Were they aided and abetted by Zoram, the servant of Laban? We shall have to wait for more light, before these questions can be answered. Another problem arises because of the discovery of the Book of the Law which was found in the temple in the days of Josiah, the king of Judah. Here is the Biblical account of the discovery:

And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah (c. 621 B.C.) that the king sent Shaphan the son of the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord saying:

"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the money which is brought into the house of the Lord which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: and let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the workmen that are in the house of the Lord to repair the breaches of the house, unto the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons; and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house."

Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand; for they dealt faithfully. And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe: 'I have found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord' And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan, and he read it, And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought back word unto the king, and said: the servants have Poured out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen that have the oversight of the house of the Lord" And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying: "Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book", And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Law, that he rent his cloths And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahilcam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micajah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Auhiah the king's servant, saying:

"Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us  
(II Kings 22:3-13)

As a result of finding this book, King Josiah instituted a great reform. (See II Kings 22:14-23: 25.) Now the question arises, what was the nature of the Book of the Law, to which Josiah and his fathers had failed to heed? Many conservative scholars have held that it included the entire Pentateuch, while most of the critical scholars have held it to be the book of Deuteronomy. In view of the fact that King Josiah's reforms included in their scope a wider legislation than that found in Deuteronomy, it would seem probable that the book found in the temple included not only Deuteronomy but others, if not all, of the books of the Pentateuch. As students of the Book of Mormon we ask ourselves, how does it happen that the Jews in the days of Josiah—at least up to 621 B. C. were without the Book of the Law, inasmuch as the brass plates containing it were in the hands of Laban or one of his predecessors? Are we to suppose that the keepers of the brass plates deliberately withheld the Book of the Law from the Jews? They must have known they were without it. Such an action would seem strange because certain individuals were allowed access to the plates in order to write the prophecies of Jeremiah. Perhaps the Book of the Law was some other book than we have supposed, but that seems quite unlikely. At present, we are unable to answer, with any certainty, the questions I have asked. But they are interesting questions, and someday we shall probably obtain the answers to them.

Nephi makes another statement about the brass plates that arrests our attention. He says, "And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, *wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records.*" (I Nephi 5:16; italics author's.) These words seem to indicate that the recording of the Hebrew scriptures on the brass plates had begun many generations before Laban's time, how many we know not. Furthermore, it would be kept in the senior tribe of Israel, that is to say, in the tribe of Ephraim. (See Genesis 48:5, 13-20; I Chronicles 5:1-2.) Laban may well have been a descendant of Joseph through Ephraim. We may properly ask ourselves how it happened that Laban and Lehi's family, for that matter, inasmuch as they were descendants of Joseph through Manasseh—happened to be living in Jerusalem. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, as the reader is well aware, had been allied generations before with the northern kingdom of Israel, not with Judah in the south. A reasonable answer to our question would be this: The northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians when its capital of Samaria capitulated to Sargon II in 721 B.C. The forebears of Laban may well have fled to Jerusalem to prevent the sacred records from falling into alien hands. Lehi's grandfather or great-grandfather may have left his northern home for Jerusalem in order to prevent his children from intermarrying or making religious compromises with the foreigners brought into the land by the Assyrians. Such a course would not be unreasonable on the part of many devout families.

If the brass plates had been kept by Laban's ancestors in the tribe of Ephraim as early as the united kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, it would be of great interest to know their history and that of any other sacred records subsequent to the division which took place after Solomon's death; it will be remembered that the northern confederation of tribes followed Jeroboam and the southern kingdom of Judah remained under Rehoboam. (I Kings 11:29; 12:24.) What happened to the keeping of sacred records when the Israelites became sharply divided on political grounds so much so that the two nations were enemies? We remember the religious effects of the American Civil War upon the North and South when we ask the question. The prophets in both nations probably paid little attention to the political lines of division, but it is improbable that all of them had their words recorded in the scriptures of both nations. From the

time of the division until the fall of the northern kingdom in 721 B. C.. the brass plates may well have been the official scripture of the Ten Tribes. It is probable that some prophets wrote on these plates whose writings may not have been recorded on the records kept in Judah. Were Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:20) among them? They were all Hebrew prophets known to the Nephites. but their names do not appear in our current Old Testament. It is also possible that the writings of some prophets in Judah were not placed on the brass plates during the period under consideration, but of this we have no way of knowing. But after the fall of Samaria, in 721 B. C. it is very probable that most Jewish prophetic writings were engraved on the brass plates. assuming, of course, that Laban's immediate forebears came to Jerusalem as we have already conjectured. It is a fact of considerable importance in biblical studies that the Book of Mormon indicates the presence on the brass plates of more scripture than that contained in our Old and New Testaments put together. (1 Nephi 13:23-26.) Considering the fact that these plates recorded Hebrew scripture written only before the year 600 B. C.. we have ample testimony to the loss of much scripture between that date and the present time.

When Lehi had searched the brass plates, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy to the effect that the day would come when they should be made known unto all kindreds, tongues. and people who were of his seed. (1 Nephi 5:17-18.) Moreover, he prophesied that the brass plates should never perish or be dimmed by time. (1 Nephi 5:19.) We know, therefore. that many unknown or hitherto corrupted texts of Hebrew scripture will be restored to the world in correct form. To those of us who are interested in the study of the Bible, this is a comforting and even a thrilling prospect.

### **From John L. Sorensen**

#### *The Brass Plates*

Near the beginning of the Book of Mormon we read of Nephi and his brothers being sent back to Jerusalem to obtain a record particularly desired by their father Lehi. This record was in the possession of one Laban, whose ancestry Lehi shared and who possessed significant power and influence in Jerusalem shortly before the Babylonian captivity. The content of the plates had two aspects: (1) "The record of the Jews," including "the law of Moses," and (2) "also a genealogy of (Lehi's) forefathers." Upon the sons' obtaining the plates, a fuller description was entered in the Lehite record:

Lehi took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search search them from the beginning. And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which give an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents; and also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah; 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. 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. . . . And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers.

Amulek in the Book of Mormon (Mma 10:3) reports that Lehi descended from Manasseh. Joseph Smith also stated that according to the first portion of the Book of Mormon record-the transcript of which was lost by Martin Harris-Ishmael (who accompanied Lehi) was a descendant of Ephraim.

The description of the contents of the brass plates indicates that they contained a record essentially similar to the Old Testament as we are familiar with it, but with an expanded text (1 Nephi 3:3), including a genealogy going back through the tribe of Joseph rather than Judah. This points to an origin in the Northern Kingdom, rather than in the Judaic South. This impression is further supported by a number of citations from the brass plate record scattered through the Book of Mormon.

Book of Mormon writers mention five prophets whose words appear in the brass plates: Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, and Neum (the last might be Nahum). Of the first four only Isaiah is surely known from existing biblical texts. Internal evidence suggests a reason why: All four direct a great deal of attention to the Northern Kingdom. Since the Masoretic text, which lies behind our King James version, came out of the South, omission of three of the four (or four of the five, counting Neum) is explicable. Zenos is quoted as saying, "And as for those who are at Jerusalem. . . "In Nowhere else in the extensive quotes from Zenos does he mention Judah or Jerusalem. This in context strongly suggests that he was not located in the territory of Judah. (It is implied in 3 Nephi ii:i6 that Zenos and Zenock were of a Joseph tribe, although

nothing is said of location.) The reference to Jerusalem implies a date after David's capture of the city and quite probably after the division of the monarchy (about 922 B.C.). Careful reading of the allegory of the olive tree, from Zenos, as well as Alma 33:3-17 concerning both Zenos and Zenock, further confirms a context of a sinful Israel more reminiscent of the time of Amos (mid-8th century B.C.) than earlier or later. Moreover, Zenock was said to be a "prophet of old," a chronological term not used regarding Jeremiah or even Isaiah. The probability is high, therefore, that the prophets cited from the brass plates date between 900 B.C. and the end of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.

Lehi's connection with the Joseph of Egypt is emphasized in the blessing he pronounced on his own son, Joseph. When Lehi there asserts, "For behold . . . I am a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt," there can be no question that his information was derived from the brass plates, for it was his first inspection of them which revealed to him that he was a descendant of Joseph. He then continues on to communicate additional information about Joseph, finally quoting at some length a prophecy credited to that patriarch. This added information and the genealogical tie again point our attention to the Northern Kingdom, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh.

The emphasis on Egyptian tradition and language manifest in the Book of Mormon is also coordinate with the Joseph element in the brass plates. Nephi's statement that his record consisted of "the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyphans" could equally be said of the inscription on the back of one of the carved ivories from Samaria, where Egyptian glyphs were used in a cartouche apparently to spell out the sounds in a Hebrew name (A-L-Y-W-Sh-b or Eliashib). Hugh Nibley's *Lehi in the Desert* documents extensive Egyptian cultural ties among the Nephites which seem to support a far more fundamental connection than mere trade exposure in the time of Lehi. Lehi's purpose in obtaining the record was "that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers," not merely the language of Lehi's trade transactions. It is also to be noted that Lehi, according to Nibley's analysis, was trade-, international-, and desert- oriented. Such characteristics, we shall see below, are congruent with the Northern-centered E tradition.

Other significant data on Northern Kingdom Ephraimitic inclusions and orientations in the Book of Mormon deriving from the brass plates will be pointed out later. It is already evident, however, that the record obtained from Laban's treasury included a version of the Old Testament with special Northern Kingdom characteristics.

### *The E Source and the Northern Kingdom*

E source was fundamentally a Northern Kingdom expression. According to Albright, E gives strong indications of being an official rewriting of J intended for the Northern Kingdom and produced in the century following division of the Kingdom (about 922 B.C.). J itself could not date later than the division, and its formation under the United Monarchy (about 1000 B.C.) is highly probable. The preferences in deity names between J and E sources have been demonstrated to be consistent and significant, not mere literary quirks. They reflect different traditions transmitted through regionally-distinct "schools" of scribes which existed from the tenth century onward. After the Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. "faithful worshippers of Yahweh fled to Judah and there cultivated a number of their own traditions." There in the first half of the seventh century J and E "were woven together . . . into a single narrative (JE)." J was the main source used, with E materials occasionally used in parallel or, more often, in replacement.

Albright noted that differences between J and E already existed in the Pentateuchal poems dating between Exodus and the Monarchy, thus the later "schools" had a prior basis. Such distinction could have had both a regional and a cultural basis, for the El names which characterize the E materials tended to be more popular on the edge of the desert, as a heritage from nomadic times. Cassuto's observation also may be related. He noted that in Old Testament situations where God is represented as a universal or international deity, rather than as God of Israel, an El name occurs. For example in all the sections of Genesis pertaining to Egypt, including the entire story of Joseph, El names are used exclusively. The universalizing influence, the desert influence and the Joseph influence in northern Israel all reinforced the separateness of deity names and motifs of the sacred tradition found in E, as against the more nationalistic J source preferred by the Jews at Jerusalem.

### *Other Indications of E in the Book of Mormon*

Details not mentioned above further evidence possible E effects on the Book of Mormon, either through the brass plates or through the family tradition in which Lehi was reared.

1. The Book of Mormon virtually ignores the Davidic covenant, a element. David is mentioned but six times (two incidentally in quotations from Isaiah). Two instances involved strong condemnation of David..
2. Instead, considerable attention is paid to the Abrahamic covenant and to the patriarchs. All twenty-nine references to Abraham are laudatory. Jacob is also so named, a positive E characteristic, whereas J uses "Israel" as his personal name.
3. The Jews, particularly the inhabitants of Jerusalem, are branded as evil in the strongest terms.
4. Emphasis is placed on Joseph being sold into Egypt, his saving Jacob's house, and the Lord's special covenant with Joseph which is not attested in the Old Testament. The coat of Joseph is a topic specific to E on which the Book of Mormon adds data not found in the Jewish version (').
5. The name Jehovah, the preferred J title of deity, occurs only twice in the Book of Mormon (once in a quote from Isaiah 12-with one word changed-and once in the very last sentence in the volume). The name Lord is usually used for divinity in the Book of Mormon (almost **1400** times)
- 6.. Unmistakable El (E source) names do occur in the Book of Mormon, notably Most High God (Hebrew "El Elyon") and Almighty God (the Septuagint's term for "El Shaddai"), the former six times and the latter eleven.

In addition to these points, which are sufficiently specific that they strike me as probably based on the brass plates text, other characteristics of E of more generic nature are found in the Book of Mormon. We might suppose them to result from the early Book of Mormon writers' carrying on a record-keeping tradition or scribal "school" which had a strong E ingredient in it. The Book of Mormon, at least in its first portion (the small plates), could plausibly be considered a manifestation of that scribal tradition, on the basis of the evidence offered above.

E's focus on events, in contrast to J's remarkable characterizations of persons, fits the Book of Mormon, which is annalistic and for the most part limited in its treatment of characters. At least the text of the small plates, like E, is abstract, tending to be removed from mundane life. E's tendency to turn attention back to ancient times likewise fits. The Elohist (E) tendency to refer to dreams and angelic messengers rather than to direct appearances by God (a J feature) is similarly apt for the Nephite volume. Other E features include greater concern with moral issues, and a relatively spiritualized, distant and abstract conception of God (as against J's picture of a God treading the earth and concerning himself with specific human events).

Latter-day Saint scholars should especially consider whether the international or desert influences suggested in E could reflect the situation indicated in D&C 84:6-13, which asserts that a line of priesthood and sacred knowledge related to but distinct from that in Israel persisted in the desert from the time of Esaias, a contemporary and associate of Abraham, at least until Moses and Jethro. The last is an E name, in contrast to J's Hobab; of course Jethro's father was *Reu'El*. (It is doubtful that Esaias is the same as the "Ezias" mentioned in Helaman 8:20, given the differing spellings of the names both of which came to print through Joseph Smith. Textual usage affirms the difference.)

Some may suggest that the Elohist features noted above occur in the Book of Mormon as pure happenstance that Joseph Smith in authoring or translating the Book of Mormon phrased the Book in biblical language familiar to him, some of which would necessarily be similar to E elements preserved in the King James' version. Chance seems ruled out, however, by Robert F. Smith's finding that the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price lacks E and appears to show J and P characteristics but no E. Thus Joseph Smith's style is a doubtful explanation for E features in the Book of Mormon, there being no reason to think the language used by him would be any different from one volume to the next-except as the original sources differed.

### *A Plausible Synthesis*

The record engraved in Egyptian characters on the brass plates had its origin long before Lehi's day.~ Strong emphasis in this account on Abraham and Joseph hints that this usage could have begun as early as the visit of the former to Egypt and certainly no later than the time of Joseph, the Egyptian vi~er. The

record probably reached Palestine via the tribe of Ephraim, Joseph's son. The lineage maintaining this particular account probably continued living in Ephraimitic territory in northern Israel throughout the time of the Divided Monarchy, until the **721 B.C.** destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians. At that point the plates likely were brought south to Jerusalem by a relatively wealthy and influential descent group.

Maintaining the brass plates required becoming literate in the writing system, which was no mean task in itself, and then adding to it sacred materials, history and genealogy as this information developed through time. Although the lineage record was privately held and controlled, it was known and available to the leading Jews in Jerusalem. No doubt records kept by other groups were in turn known to the scribes keeping the plates of Laban. Comparing, editing and making new copies would have been among the scribal functions.

At least two branches of the kinship unit having custody of the brass plates had developed by the time of Lehi in the latter half of the seventh century B.C. His family had lost direct contact with the scribal branch but were aware of some connection. The scribal branch was both wealthy and powerful within the Jerusalem establishment. Lehi's branch was also in a substantial status though not prominent. Upon Lehi's determining to leave the kingdom of Judah in anticipation of coming disaster at the hands of the Babylonians, he had his sons seek the plates of brass from Laban, the record custodian for the related group. They did obtain them-with great difficulty-then departed into the desert, eventually reaching the New World.

Lehi had lived all his life at Jerusalem, yet he found himself antipathetic to the Jews there, and they to him. His personal characteristics in some ways stood against those common in the Jerusalem hierarchy in ways parallel to how the E source differed from J. Lehi was moralistic, a dreamer, archaistic, with a rather abstract view of God, and more concerned with historical events and sacred principles than with personalities or the concrete present. Judging by his son Nephi, he liked to contemplate the complex symbolism and distant prophecy of an Isaiah rather than the concreteness of Jeremiah's burdens against his contemporaries at Jerusalem. He preferred the clarity of Abraham's and Joseph's god El (Elohim, El Shaddai, El Elyon), over a Yahweh encumbered and obscured by pagan cult practices of the Jerusalem of his day.

The record-keeping tradition begun among the Nephites took its form out of the character and cultural background of Lehi and Nephi, the two pivotal persons in the transfer. While we expect some changes took place between the form and process of tradition-keeping manifest in Lehi's line in Palestine and that by which the Nephite scribes carried out their responsibilities, a great deal of continuity is also evident. Nephi, a culture hero, was followed by his brother, Jacob, who confirmed the religious and literary tradition which his elder brother had implemented. Both of them preferred prophets who dealt at length with the Northern Kingdom, Isaiah on the one hand and Zenos on the other. Then later keepers of the Nephite records followed implicitly the pattern set by these early leaders. In this manner an Old World scribal tradition was transplanted to the New World where traces of it might still be seen two millennia later.

In conclusion, there appears good evidence that the Book of Mormon contains elements which are congruent with what scholars of the Old Testament distinguish as the E or Elohist source. To biblical scholars this congruence should invite serious attention to the Book of Mormon for what it may reveal to them about Old Testament sources. To Latter-day Saints, the presence of E materials in the Book of Mormon should serve as a challenge and stimulus to examine more carefully the scriptures entrusted to them, and to participate actively and cooperatively in elucidating both the texts and their interpretations.

## **The Prophets of the Brass Plates**

Robert L. Millet

We continue our study of different prophets in the Book of Mormon and their messages. This hour we will do something a little different. We'll talk about the prophets of the brass plates. The Book of Mormon bears an important testimony of the critical nature of record keeping and particularly of the necessity for

scriptural records in the development and preservation of a civilization preservation from both illiteracy and unbelief. You notice that in 1 Nephi 4, you recall how critical it was that they get those brass plates. Let's go to 1 Nephi 4. Beginning at about verse 9, as Nephi encounters Laban, he sees his [Laban's] sword. Verse 10 reads: "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." Nephi has never killed anyone before, but he begins to realize, in verse 11, that essentially, Laban has violated the Lord's law. More importantly, the Spirit constrains him again, "Take his life." Now, verses 12-13:

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

*[And this key verse:] 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.*

And Nephi takes his [Laban's] life. You know, I have often thought that years later when Nephite leaders took that sword of Laban and: took it up, that it meant many things. It meant "the Lord is with us as he was with our fathers," and "as he protected them in battle, so will he protect us." But it occurred to me, too, that for some people, every time they saw the sword of Laban, they might have thought of this: The scriptures are always bought with a price. In this case, Nephi had to kill a man to get the scriptures. They were bought with a price.

The brass plates are an integral part of the Nephite story and of the message of the Book of Mormon. Let's ponder for a moment on what they contained. What do you remember? What's on the brass plates? Name one, two, or three things.

*[Student answer:]* The books of the Old Testament.

Okay, the Pentateuch, the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. What else?

*[Student answer:]* Genealogy, showing Lehi's lineage.

Good. A family history, or genealogical lineage, so that when they finally got them, what does Lehi discover or have confirmed? He is of Joseph. What else? Anything else on there? In fact, we have the first five books. Do we have anything more than that?

*[Student answer:]* I All the prophecies, including those of Jeremiah.

So it is pretty contemporary, implying that it is being kept up in the days of Jeremiah, who is a contemporary with Lehi. I'd like to suggest and show today in what we read and study that the

brass plates, though like our Bible, are very much unlike it. They have more. They are more extensive, more detailed.

In 1 Nephi when plain and precious truths are to be taken away-let's go to that. We finally get around to discussing the Bible that had been corrupted and excised. Read 1 Nephi 13:20:

*And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land; and I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them.*

*And the angel said unto me: Knowest thou the meaning of the book?*

*And I said unto him: I know not.*

*And he said: Behold it proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew [so we begin to talk about the Bible, as it were]. And I, Nephi, beheld it; and he said unto me: The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many.*

In other words, the plates of brass were more extensive than the Bible that we would eventually receive. Now, part of the reason was, as we would learn, this great and abominable church would take away and keep back many of the plain and precious truths and many covenants of the Lord that had been contained in that Bible.

Let me add one other detail about the brass plates, and I like the way Elder Bruce R. McConkie said this in 1984 in an address given at BYU:

*From various Book of Mormon references we gain a glimpse of what is on the brass plates.*

*They contain the record of the Jews down to the days of Zedekiah, including the genealogies of the people and the prophecies of the holy prophets, among which are the words of Isaiah and portions of Jeremiah.*

*They contain, in their perfect form, the law of Moses and the five books of Moses-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.*

*They contain the writings of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, than which few have been greater, and on them is found the mysteries of God and the commandments he has given to the children of men.*

*They contain books of holy scripture of which the world does not dream, including the writings of Zenock, Neum, and Zenos.*

*[But this is the part I want to stress:] But what interests us more than the books included on the brass plates is the tone and tenor and general approach to the gospel and to salvation that they set forth. They are gospel oriented and speak of Christ and the various Christian concepts which the world falsely assumes to have originated with Jesus and the early apostles. (Bruce R. McConkie, The Doctrinal Restoration)*

What we will notice, as we do our tour through the brass plates records today, is just how gospel centered they are and how much they read like the doctrines of the gospel we understand today. Before we

do that, I just want to make reference to some things. Remember, that one of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon was to establish the essential truthfulness of the Bible. For many years, you know, we have approached this in the wrong direction. We have gone out trying to prove the Book of Mormon from the Bible. The Lord never intended that. The Lord's purpose is that he knew there would come a time when the Bible itself would be in question. So he raises up a prophet, restores to him ancient records, gives him power to translate them, and they come forth and help establish essential truthfulness. That is why the Lord would say, in the 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, that the Book of Mormon is given for the purpose of proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true.

Let me give you an example. If you want an interesting experience, just go through the Book of Mormon looking for what you and I would call biblical people or events. For example, Lehi and Alma spoke of Adam, Eve, and the Garden of Eden (2 Nephi 2:18-25; Alma 12:22-27; 42:2-10); Aaron, son of Mosiah, read the scriptures concerning the Creation, Fall, and Atonement (Alma 22:12); Amulek spoke to the people of Ammonihah of Noah and the flood (Alma 10:22); Amaleki, the record keeper, spoke of the Tower of Babel (Omni 1:22); Jacob spoke of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and went so far as to tell us it was a similitude of Christ being sacrificed by the Father (Jacob 4:5); Alma spoke of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek and of Melchizedek's greatness (Alma 13:1-19); Nephi, son of Helaman, spoke of Abraham's messianic prophecies (Helaman 8:16-17); and Captain Moroni related many of the words of Jacob, or Israel, before Israel's death (Alma 46: 24-26). (That is a very interesting one. You may want to make a note that in the 46th chapter of Alma, there is quite a bit of detail there about the prophecies of the Jacob of old that we would know of from no other place other than the Book of Mormon.) Moses, one of the key figures (of the Book of Mormon), is mentioned over and over and over again; Abinadi read the ten commandments to the priests of Noah (Mosiah 13:11-24; 14:1-2); David and Solomon are mentioned (Jacob 1:15; 2:23-24), including the Temple of Solomon (2 Nephi 5:16).

Let me read to you something that Brother Sidney Sperry, one of the great minds of this church, once wrote about the brass plates. He said:

*The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians when its capital of Samaria capitulated to Sargon II in 722 B.C. The forebears of Laban may have fled to Jerusalem to prevent the sacred records from falling into alien hands. Lehi's grandfather or great-grandfather may have left his northern home for Jerusalem in order to prevent his children from intermarrying and making religious compromises with the foreigners brought into the land by the Assyrians.*

Brother Sperry then asked the following question: "What happened to the keeping of sacred

records when the Israelites became sharply divided on political grounds [that is, the northern tribes from the southern tribes]-so much so that the two nations were enemies?" What happened to the records? He then suggested this answer:

*The prophets in both nations probably paid little attention to the political lines of division, but it is improbable that all of them had their words recorded in the scriptures of both nations. From the time of the division until the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., the brass plates may well have been the official scripture of the ten tribes. It is probable that some prophets wrote on these plates whose writings may not have been recorded on the records kept in Judah [meaning in the south]. Were Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and Ezias (1 Nephi 19:10; Helaman 8:20) among them? They were all Hebrew prophets known to the Nephites, but their names do not appear in our current Old Testament. It is also possible that the writings of some prophets in Judah were not placed on the brass plates during the period under consideration, but of this we have no way of knowing. (Sidney B. Sperry, *Problems of the Book of Mormon*, pp 43-44)*

Let me just have you look at a couple of passages. Let's go to 3 Nephi. Wouldn't it be nice if all of the stuff on the brass plates-details, origins, content-were in one chapter? But it is not. Let's go to 3 Nephi 10. Again, our context here is that the Savior's voice is being heard by the people before He is coming to the Nephites. Let's read verses 15-16:

*Behold, I say unto you, Yea, many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ, and were slain because they testified of these things. [Let me just suggest that these things have to do with events associated with his coming-destructions, etc. related to his coming to the Americas. Notice this language very carefully:]*

*Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed. They testified of us, who are the remnant of their seed"*

That just sounds an awful lot like "I (i.e., we) wrote a lot about Zenos and Zenock because they are of the same tribe we are: Joseph." Do you see what I am getting at? These people are kind of heroes of the Nephites. What else do we know about them? Let's go back to Helaman 8. Can we tie down Zenos, Zenock, Neum, Ezias? The answer is, not well. Let's see what we can establish. Go to verse 19. Let me just have you look back at the previous page and note who we are citing. We are talking about Moses knowing of the Messiah, in verse 17. We are talking about Abraham knowing about the Messiah [in verse 18]. Now verse 19: "And now I would that ye should know, that even since the days of Abraham there have been many prophets that have testified these things; yea, behold, the prophet Zenos did testify boldly; for the which he was slain." What things? The coming of Christ. "And behold, also Zenock, and also Ezias, and also Isaiah, and Jeremiah," and so forth.

Now, what about their time? Well, I think the phrase "since the days of Abraham" doesn't help a

whole lot because it means somewhere after 1800 B.C. We notice, here, that for his testimony, Zenos is put to death. Look back in Alma 33:17, speaking now of Zenock, okay? It reads: "And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old [Zenock, in this case] has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death."

One of the very haunting messages of the Book of Mormon is that the testimony of Jesus is costly. Think about Lehi, early in our story. Lehi learns some important things and he begins to preach, and the people respond. What do they want to do? Take his life. Think about Abinadi. Why did they take his life? Not just because he called them to repent, but because he testified that Christ would come to earth, take a physical body, and become human. That was not a popular thing among the wicked. So Zenos and Zenock were put to death because of their testimonies.

Let's go now to some specific teachings from the brass plates. Let's back up to 2 Nephi 2. Who's our teacher in chapter 2? Who's our teacher and who's our student? Lehi is the teacher and Jacob is the student. Let's turn to verses 17-18:

*And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read [I assume he is talking about the brass plates, especially because of what's going to follow], must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is writen, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.*

*And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies, wherefore he said: Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.*

We could go on, but what is the first thing that Lehi teaches? Because of what I read, I know something about the fall of Lucifer in the premortal life. One of the important points I want to make is this: I am convinced, after years of study on one particular area, that the closest approximation you and I have to the brass plates, one of the best ways we can get close to understanding what was on the brass plates, is Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible.

If you want to know what was there beyond what is obviously in the Book of Mormon, look at the Joseph Smith Translation. Now, for example, the book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price is Joseph Smith's translation of the early chapters of Genesis. It is a fascinating thing to study 2 Nephi 2 and then read the book of Moses. You will find the language unmistakably similar. It is as if Lehi draws upon an ancient record we know as the brass plates. Joseph Smith is having revealed to him ancient things as well, through his inspired translation.

So, he says "*according to things which I have read.*" The fall of Lucifer—we would read that, for example, in Moses 4. Look at verses 22-26 of 2 Nephi 2:

*And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.*

*And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.*

*But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.*

*Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.*

*And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.*

So, there we have the Creation, Fall, and Atonement. He learned that where? According to what he's read. Now, I don't rule out the fact that Lehi could have learned these things, as other Book of Mormon prophets could have, by independent revelation. But they often drew upon the teachings of the ancients. You and I could learn about the Atonement in Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible, but we would have learned as much from Moses 2, 3, 4 in the Pearl of Great Price.

Let's back up to 1 Nephi 19:10, and notice what is going on. Nephi is talking about things that are sacred to him. Verse 7 says: "*For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet*"—in other words, *they count Him as unimportant*. Now read verse 10:

*And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel.*

Let's just stop there for a second. Look at the detail that came through. Let me just ask you what detail we know about the crucifixion, death, and rise of Christ from our present Old Testament? Not much detail. I suppose Isaiah 53 is as detailed as anything we have, and we certainly don't get this kind of detail. Notice what these men are preaching: Lifted up, according to Zenock; crucified, according to Neum; buried in a sepulchre, according to Zenos; and Zenos also spake concerning three days of darkness that would accompany. See, that is very specific. Go on to verse 11:

*For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.*

See the details, the particulars there? That just isn't in our Old Testament. I want you to notice, too, how many times he says "the prophet." May I suggest that he is talking about Zenos? Zenos was a very significant prophet. In fact, some years ago, when Elder McConkie talked about the brass plates, he said it this way: "I do not think I overstate the matter when I say that next to Isaiah himself—who is the prototype, pattern, and model for all the prophets—there was not a greater prophet in all Israel than Zenos. And our knowledge of his inspired writings is limited to the quotations and paraphrasing summaries found in the Book of Mormon." Notice now, as we move along, the number of times reference is made to "the prophet." Continue in verse 12:

*And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers.*

Now, look ahead in the verses that follow. Look at 13: "As for those who are at Jerusalem, saith the prophet"; verse 14: "saith the prophet"; verse 15: "saith the prophet"; verse 16: "the prophet Zenos." Notice they refer to him sort of like we refer to Joseph Smith. If I say, "I am reading *The Teachings of the Prophet*," no one here wonders what I am talking about. Zenos seemed to be like that. Isaiah and Zenos are big in the eyes of the Nephites. So, you notice the detail on the life and death of Christ.

Let's go to chapter 33 of Alma again. Remember now what Elder McConkie said about how interesting we find not only certain writings, but a tone and a tenor and a gospel flavor about those writings. In Alma 33, notice what we have. Let's look at our background, browse around a little. Where are we? We are in the middle of something. What are we in the middle of? Zoramites. Yes, this is Alma and his colleague preaching to the Zoramites. We have already given chapter 32, which is the most famous chapter on faith, but frankly, 32 is only a partial story without 33, because now who stands up? Amulek. Amulek stands up to give like testimony, supporting, confirming testimony, and notice what he wants to do. There is a pattern among the Nephites as to how they preach the gospel. The great teachers in the Book of Mormon always

do it a certain way. They stand up, introduce the subject, then they go back and cite the ancient prophets, and then they bear their own witness. Notice what Amulek does. What's the problem with the Zoramites? They have been kicked out of their synagogues, so they feel they cannot worship. And so notice the approach. This is still Alma, isn't it? It's not Amulek; he's chapter 34. Alma is going to preach a little more, then Amulek will confirm. Let's read Alma 33:2-7:

*And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. [Now notice what he is going to do. Who do we refer to?] Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?*

*For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.*

*Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me.*

*And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.*

*And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.*

Don't you find it interesting that when Amulek does get up in the next chapter and starts preaching, he talks to them about prayer and about what they ought to pray over? What does he talk about? Your flocks, your fields, and where? In your houses, your closets. What do they rely upon? They are relying on the testimony of Zenos. Do you see what I am saying? Verses 8-11:

*Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them. [The Savior is going to use a similar testimony in Matthew 6 when he talks about that.]*

*Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.*

*Yea, and thou hast also heard me when ~ have been cast out and ~ave been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cues, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.*

[The prayer continues:] *And thou did hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.*

What am I saying? This is the point. It is not only that he is drawing upon the teachings of Zenos to establish that you can pray anywhere-that is important-but notice what he does. We discover, in the brass

plates, a concept of godhead that is very much like the concept we have. What is the concept of godhead that we find in the Old Testament? Jehovah. You don't know anything about Father and Son in the Old Testament. Here we find a Father and a Son, and the Father turns away his judgment because of the atoning sacrifice of the Son. Let's go on to verses 12-17:

*And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?*

*Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.*

*Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God? [Remember, that was one of their problems too. They had been taught "thou art a spfrit and thou wilt be a spirit forever." Remember how they would stand on top of the Rameumptom and utter that? "How can you disbelieve on the Son of God?" You have to start at the foundation.]*

*For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things- For behold he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.*

*And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God. [Both of them were establishing not only the importance of prayer, but the redemption through the Son of God.]*

Let's try another message from the brass plates. Let's go back to 1 Nephi 22. What's going on here is that Nephi has just quoted from Isaiah. 48 and 49. Let's pick up at about verse 15: "*For behold, saith the prophet, the time cometh speedily that Satan shall have no more power over the hearts of the children of men; for the day soon cometh that all the proud and they who do wickedly shall be as stubble; and the day cometh that they must be burned.*" Does that language sound familiar? "*The day cometh that those who are wicked shall be as stubble*"? Let's don't answer yet. Look at verses 23-24 of the same chapter:

*For the time speedily shall come that all churches which are built up to get gain, and all those who are built up to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world, and to do all manner of iniquity; yea, in fine, all those who belong to the kingdom of the devil are they who need fear, and tremble, and quake; they are those who must be brought low in the dust; they are those who must be consumed as stubble; and this is according to the words of the prophet. [Notice the words the prophet, and the language, again, consumed as stubble.]*

*And the time cometh speedily that the righteous must be led up as calves of the stall, and the Holy One of Israel must reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory.*

One more, and then we'll draw some conclusions. Look back over with me to 2 Nephi 26:9: "*But the Son of righteousness shall appear unto them; and he shall heal them, and they shall have peace with him, until*

*three generations shall have passed away, and many of the fourth generation shall have passed away in righteousness."*

Having read those two or three passages I want to now read something from Malachi 4:1-2:

*For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble:*

and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

*But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

Notice the similarity of language? We have a little bit of a problem here. Give me a enough date for Nephi. Six hundred B.C. or 550 B.C., somewhere in there. Now give me a date for Malachi. Four hundred to five hundred B.C. So we have Nephi quoting Malachi one hundred years before Malachi said it. Could I suggest an alternative? That Nephi and Malachi are both drawing upon Zenos?

Again, we turn to Elder McConkie. This is a great statement; I really like this. He says: "*Our understanding of the prophetic word will be greatly expanded if we know how one prophet quotes another, usually without acknowledging his source.*" That is refreshing, isn't it? He goes on:

*Either Isaiah or Micah copied the prophetic words of the other relative to the mountain of the Lord's house....*

*Some unnamed Old Testament prophet, who obviously was Zenos, as the Book of Mormon testifies, spoke of the day when the wicked would be destroyed as stubble; when the righteous would be 'led up as calves of the stall'; when Christ should 'rise from the dead, with healing in his wings'; and when the Holy One of Israel would then reign on earth."*

*Malachi, who lived more than two hundred years after Nephi, uses these very expressions in his prophetic writings. Can we do other than conclude that both Nephi and Malachi had before them the writings of Zenos? [Let me go on; this gets interesting:]*

*Both Paul and Mormon expounded with great inspiration about faith, hope, and charity, in many verses using the same words and phrases. If there is any difference between them, it is that Mormon expounds the doctrines more perfectly and persuasively than does Paul.*

*It does not take much insight to know that Mormon and Paul both had before them the writings of some Old Testament prophet on the same subjects.*

*It is perfectly clear that John the Beloved is copying, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, words written by John the Baptist, a practice with which we have no fault to find.*

*Once the Lord has revealed his doctrine in precise language to a chosen prophet, there is no reason why he should inspire another prophet to choose the same words and presenting the same doctrine on a subsequent occasion. It is*

*much easier and simpler to quote that which is already been given in perfection. We are all commanded-including the prophets among us-to search the scriptures and thereby learn what other prophets have presented.* (Bruce R. McConkie, The Doctrinal Restoration 17-18)

Isn't it interesting that as we are reading along from 1 and 2 Nephi, we find Nephi drawing on an ancient source just as Malachi drew upon an ancient source? Let's just turn to 2 Nephi 3. Here's another great message, and we won't go into this in detail, but who is our teacher here and who is our student? Lehi and Joseph, [respectively]. Now, here's another example. If you and I were to approximate the brass plates and the message of the brass plates, we would look to the Joseph Smith Translation. Second Nephi 3, is Lehi's prophetic statement to his son Joseph, drawing upon the prophecies of Joseph of old concerning the last days, the call of Joseph Smith, the restoration of the gospel, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Let me suggest that this is but an excerpt. A much longer recitation of this is contained in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50. And so we have these prophecies of Joseph of old.

Look over in 2 Nephi 4:1. After we have completed the prophecies, Nephi says:

*And now, I, Nephi, speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken, concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt.*

*For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us, and our future generations; and they are written upon the plates of brass.*

So, also upon the plates of brass are the prophecies of Joseph. We don't even have the time or the inclination to talk about all the things of Isaiah that we could learn that are on the plates of brass. Let me have us go to Alma 13. Again, we are in the middle of a lengthy sermon, or a series of sermons, that Alma and Amulek are giving to a pretty wicked people. Pick up at about verse 14. Now, sometimes when you begin reading and rereading passages and chapters and books, you see relationships and themes that weave themselves through those books. For example, read chapters 12 and 13 of Alma, ~ just for the phrase *rest of the Lord*. It is all through here (e.g., "entering into the rest of the Lord"). Drawing on those ancient prophets again, Alma is saying, those ancient people, the children of Israel, couldn't pull it off because of their stubborn attitude and rebellion. Let's don't be like them. Let's open ourselves to the revelations of the Holy Ghost so we can enter into the rest of the Lord.

So he says to be in tune with the atoning powers of Christ, get your sins forgiven, and when he moves into chapter 13, he begins talking about priesthood and priesthood powers. He talks about those who

hold the Melchizedek Priesthood in this life having been foreordained to that before they came here. He talks about, in verse 11.

*Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.*

*Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.*

And then he chooses one illustration. His illustration is Melchizedek. He says, 'Let's do it the way Melchizedek did it.' Let's start in verse 14, keeping in mind, How would Alma know about Melchizedek? Well, obviously the Lord could reveal, by vision or whatever, about Melchizedek, or he [Alma] could study the brass plates.

*Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.*

*And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.*

*Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they; might enter into the rest of the Lord.*

*Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;*

*But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father. (Alma 13:14-18)*

I want to pause there. Where's the other place I would learn about the detail of Melchizedek? There are not many other places to go. The other place is the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14. Now, notice what is said in the next verse, verse 19: "Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention." Now, who has more particularly made mention of him? Melchizedek was really an enigmatic figure in Christian and Jewish history. No one knows about him, and weird legends have grown up about Melchizedek. It is interesting to me that among the people Joseph Smith talks about a great deal, things that he has revealed to him, they are about Melchizedek. It seems to me that Alma is drawing upon those brass plates to learn what

he learned about Melchizedek. The praise in verse 19 is unparalleled. There were no people who did it better than Melchizedek did, of him they had more particularly made mention. Who are "they"? Well, they who kept the records Alma had read, not the ones we have read.

Let's try Helaman again. Go to Helaman 8. We referred to a portion of this chapter a moment ago, but I want us to pick up at about verse 14. Remember the setting? This is Nephi testifying of Christ. How do you testify? You draw upon the old prophets, have them testify, and then you bear witness.

*Yea, did he not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come.*

*For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?*

There really is the central message of the allegory. Again, what is it? It is coming from a brass plates prophet.

Let's begin to draw some conclusions from this discussion. Let's go back to 1 Nephi 22:30, the very end of Nephi's first book: "*Wherefore, my brethren, I would that ye should consider that the things which have been written upon the plates of brass are true; and they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God.*" Kind of a nice summary, isn't it? What's there is right and true, and they [the brass plates] tell you that you should do the right stuff. Let's try another. Mosiah 1, Benjamin's tribute to the brass plates. In verses 1 and 2, he is talking to his sons, Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman, and we need someone to read 3 and 4:

*And he also taught them concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, saying: My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates, which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God.*

*For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time.*

Besides the little detail that is fairly interesting that they were written in Egyptian, notice what they do.

They provide a corporate memory, an institutional memory, if you will. Let me just read to you, without us turning to it, from Alma's testimony to his son: "And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these

things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls" (Alma 37:8).

Let's close with a final thought about the destiny of the brass plates. When Lehi gets this record, he searches it. He rejoices and he prophesies. In 1 Nephi 5, Lehi prophesies that these brass plates will go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people who are of his seed. But in Alma 37, Alma is a little more expansive. He just says they will go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. How's that going to be? Obviously through what we have, through the Book of Mormon. That is one way. There is another. Finally, Elder McConkie said:

*Someday the Lord will raise up a prophet, who will also be a seer and a translator, to whom he will give the brass plates that they may be translated for the benefit and blessing of those in all nations.*

*Would God that the work might commence at least in our day, though in fact we have no such hope.. Why should the Lord give us what is on the brass plates or in the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon when we do not even treasure up and live by what he has already given us?( Ibid)*

So, yes, it will go forth through this means, the Book of Mormon, but surely one day we will get the whole record. Can you see what is going on here? What an interesting thing the brass plates prove to be. They are a story within a story. Here we are telling the Nephite story. We wonder sometimes why they made so much effort to go back and get those plates. But it wasn't just a matter of having scriptures to read. You and I benefit dramatically from the truths that come from these brass plates. What a powerful message. When that sword of Laban was held up, it didn't just mean "God will lead us in battle," but it meant the price to be paid for the scriptures.

I testify, like the prophets of the Book of Mormon did, that the truths that are contained on the plates of brass are true and right and good. They will bless us. This is a way-that is, through the Book of Mormon-the Lord is blessing the world. He is blessing the world by getting the message of the plates of brass-perhaps something far more extensive than we have ever appreciated-into the world's hands. I am grateful for those prophets, Zenos, Zenock, Neum, Ezias, who, in essence, gave their lives that the testimony of Jesus and the message of the gospel might go to future generations, people they didn't even know. That is a courage and commitment I think we could imitate. That we will do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## **Alma Prophecies Concerning the Brass Plates**

Alma 37:

3 And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning--

4 Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.

6 Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

7 And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

8 And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.

9 Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

Alma 37:Verse 10

10 And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer?

Alma 37:Verse 11

11 Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear.

Alma 37:Verse 12

12 And it may suffice if I only say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto

God; for he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works, and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.