

The Structure of the Book of Mormon: A Theory of Evolutionary Development

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WHEN JOSEPH SMITH BEGAN TO DICTATE the Book of Mormon, he did not understand the structure the book would ultimately take. He did not know that the first part of the manuscript would be lost, resulting in a major structural change in the first quarter of the book. Even with his revelation explaining the solution to the lost manuscript problem (D&C 10), he apparently still did not completely understand the book's final structure nor the system of plates that served as its source records. As did most of his theological ideas and innovations, Joseph Smith's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure evolved incrementally over a period of time.

This essay discusses the development in Joseph Smith's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure and explores the evolutionary nature of that development. The focus is how Joseph's understanding of the structure was influenced by the lost manuscript crisis, particularly the issue of compatibility between the lost manuscript and its replacement. A theory of incremental development is proposed based on a series of four distinct configurations or plans for the book's structure, as Joseph understood it. The four-plan sequence is derived from textual analysis of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants (D&C). The initial configuration (before the lost manuscript) was simple: Joseph Smith thought the Book of Mormon was to be primarily a translation of Mormon's plates, without any direct translation from Mormon's primary source, the plates of Nephi. In the next configuration (after the lost manuscript), the

lost portion was to be replaced by a direct translation from the plates of Nephi; these plates were still viewed as the source of Mormon's information (that which appeared on the lost manuscript). In the third configuration the plates of Lehi (separate and distinct from Nephi's plates) were understood to be an additional source for some of the material contained in the lost manuscript (such as Lehi's genealogy). And in the fourth and final configuration Nephi's plates were understood to consist of separate large and small versions, with the small plates taking the role of the replacement forepart and the large plates subsuming Lehi's plates and taking over the role of source record for all the lost manuscript material. Thus Joseph's understanding of the book's structure increased in complexity over the course of the book's dictation. The pivotal occurrence that precipitated this series of changes in structure and understanding and, some say, launched Joseph Smith on his prophetic career was the translation crisis associated with the unexpected loss of the original Book of Mormon manuscript.

TRANSLATION CRISIS AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

In June 1828 Joseph Smith allowed his scribe Martin Harris to take the only copy of the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript to show his wife and a few other close people. Harris's wife, who by then was hostile to Martin's involvement in Joseph's work, apparently succeeded in stealing the manuscript pages and they were never recovered. She must have believed that this would put an end to Joseph's book-writing activities and convince her husband of Joseph's imposture. To her, the book was a fabrication and Joseph wouldn't dare try to recreate it. Whether she destroyed the manuscript (as later rumored) is not known. What mattered more at the time was the possibility that if Joseph did produce a new translation, the original manuscript might reappear and inconsistencies between the two would raise questions about Joseph's claim that the book was a translation of an ancient record.

Joseph was distraught over this loss. Lucy Mack Smith¹ recalled his reaction upon first hearing from Martin that the pages had been lost.

"Oh, my God!" said Joseph, clinching his hands. "All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God. I

1. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 121-22.

should have been satisfied with the first answer which I received from the Lord; for he told me that it was not safe to let the writing go out of my possession." He wept and groaned, and walked the floor continually.

At length he told Martin to go back and search again.

"No," said Martin, "it is all in vain; for I have ripped open beds and pillows; and I know it is not there."

"Then must I," said Joseph, "return to my wife with such a tale as this? I dare not do it, lest I should kill her at once.² And how shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?"

I besought him not to mourn so, for perhaps the Lord would forgive him, after a short season of humiliation and repentance. But what could I say to comfort him, when he saw all the family in the same situation of mind as himself; for sobs and groans, and the most bitter lamentations filled the house. However, Joseph was more distressed than the rest, as he better understood the consequences of disobedience. And he continued, pacing back and forth, meantime weeping and grieving, until about sunset, when, by persuasion, he took a little nourishment.

The next morning we set out for home. We parted with heavy hearts, for it now appeared that all which we had so fondly anticipated, and which had been the source of so much secret gratification, had in a moment fled, and fled for ever.

For unknown reasons the obvious expedient (tedious though it may have been) of repeating the original translation did not offer much comfort on this occasion.³ The loss became a crisis with which Joseph struggled for

2. Joseph had left Emma, as Lucy Smith writes, "in so low a state of health, that he feared he should not find her alive when he returned" (*ibid.*).

3. It bears considering what exactly Joseph's culpability was and why he felt so personally responsible for Martin's mistake that even the possibility of a retranslation offered no consolation. The revelation (D&C 10) explaining that wicked men had stolen the pages for the purpose of altering the text and discrediting Joseph, thus ruling out the option of retranslating, had not yet been received. Neither had his being informed by an angel (according to Lucy Smith) that he had indeed sinned and must forfeit the Urim and Thummim occurred yet. Lucy wrote that when she and Joseph Sr. visited their son two months after he had returned to Harmony, he "gave us the following relation of what had transpired since our separation:—'On leaving you,' said Joseph, 'I returned immediately home. Soon after my arrival, I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord, and, as I was pouring out my soul in supplication to God, that if possible, I might obtain mercy at his hands, and be forgiven of all that I had done contrary to his will, an angel stood before me, and answered me, saying, that I had sinned in delivering the manuscript into the hands of a wicked man, and, as I had ventured to become responsible for his faithfulness, I would of necessity have to suffer the consequences of his indiscretion, and I must now give up the Urim and Thummim into his (the angel's) hands.'" This account places the responsibility with Joseph for his giving the manuscript to Martin, as D&C 3 and 10 also seem to do. However, Joseph's 1832 diary account (in Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates,

some time. For at least two months no translation was accomplished. Eventually a solution evolved.

The ultimate solution to the translation crisis was the small plates of Nephi. This smaller record happened to cover the same period in history as the lost manuscript (Lehi to Benjamin). Furthermore, instead of secular historical details it contained prophecies and other religious writings that, according to a revelation to Joseph (D&C 10), actually made the small record preferable to the lost translation of Mormon's abridgment of Nephi's large plates. The whole episode, in fact, was part of a "wise purpose" known only to God and foreshadowed in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 9:5). The purpose was to provide a way for important religious writings to be included in the book as well as a training experience for Joseph. Thus the first quarter of the Book of Mormon, from Lehi to Benjamin, was taken directly from the small plates of Nephi with no abridgment by Mormon, and the bulk of the remainder was taken from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. This solution provided a plausible explanation for Martin Harris's being allowed to lose the first manuscript and for the structure of the Book of Mormon that eventually emerged. Joseph Smith, however, apparently did not understand the finer points of this solution or the final Book of Mormon structure, even after receiving the D&C 10 revelation. That this is so can be seen from D&C 10.

D&C 10: INITIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TRANSLATION CRISIS AND SOLUTION

The initial description of the solution to the lost manuscript problem was given in the revelation (Book of Commandments [BoC] IX) that became D&C 10. This revelation, however, is not compatible with the Book of Mormon structure that eventually became known. Comparison of D&C 10 and the statements of the Book of Mormon reveals an inconsistency related to Mormon's knowledge of the small plates of Nephi. In explaining God's purpose for allowing the manuscript pages to be lost and how that problem was to be solved, Joseph recorded (possibly as early as the summer

1989], 8), which predates the D&C accounts (1833 BoC), has Joseph receiving permission to give Martin the manuscript: "I inquired again and also a third time and the Lord said unto me, 'Let him go with them . . .'" Thus, according to his own diary, Joseph had only done as he was commanded in giving the manuscript to Martin and his only culpability was in asking a third time. Nevertheless he apparently felt responsible for Martin's actions. The question of what exactly Joseph's mistake or sin was—asking the third time or giving the manuscript—seems unresolved and perhaps unresolvable. The related question also remains open—why was the simple solution of repeating the translation not seen as a viable option, particularly right after the loss. Perhaps early on Joseph anticipated that which was later to be revealed to him, that unfriendly individuals might try to steal the manuscript for the purpose of discrediting him, thus rendering inadvisable any retranslation attempt.

of 1828⁴) the following revelation (D&C 10:38-42):

38 An account of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands [lost pages], is engraven upon the plates of Nephi; 39 Yea and you remember it was said in those writings that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi. 40 And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi is more particular concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account— 41 Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained; 42 And behold, you shall publish it as the record of Nephi; . . .

Since there were two distinct sets of plates of Nephi, large and small, one may wonder which set was being indicated by the ambiguous phrase “plates of Nephi” used uniformly throughout this passage. In verses 40 and 41 “plates of Nephi” must mean small plates only since the first chapters of the Book of Mormon (the replacement chapters, 1 Ne.-Omni) were derived from the small plates. This interpretation, however, places the revelation at odds with the Book of Mormon itself. Verse 39 would imply that Mormon, in abridging the large plates, was referring to the small plates when he spoke of a “more particular account.” Yet the Book of Mormon stipulates that Mormon did not know about the small plates until after he had finished the abridgment of that portion of the large plates (Words of Mormon 1:3).⁵ Thus verse 39 of D&C 10 contradicts verses 40 and 41.

Are there reasonable explanations for this apparent discrepancy? Does it solve the problem to assume that, as the Book of Mormon account requires, Mormon was referring to what he understood to be the only (what were actually the large) plates of Nephi when he spoke of a “more particular account”? This explanation forces an illogical reading of verses

4. Joseph Smith et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 1:23, indicates D&C 10 was written in the summer of 1828, a short time after D&C 3, which was written in July 1828. This dating (summer 1828) could be an error attributable to James Mulholland’s insertion of it on separate sheets between pp. 10 and 11 of the original manuscript (private communication, Dan Vogel, 7 July 1995). Both the 1833 BoC and 1835 D&C dated D&C 10 later in May 1829.

5. “And now I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the [large] plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin . . . I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi” (Words of Mormon 1:3).

38-41, with a sliding definition of “plates of Nephi.”⁶

Does it solve the problem to assume that Mormon was referring to the inclusive set, large and small plates? This explanation again doesn't fit with the logic and wording of D&C 10:39-41. If the phrase “plates of Nephi” in verses 39-40 had been intended to mean the inclusive set, then verse 41 would not have used the same ambiguous phrase, but would have made clear that only part of that set (the small record) was to be translated as a replacement.

Is it possible that Mormon knew about the small plates earlier? It might be suggested that Mormon could have read about the small plates on the large plates during his abridgment of the forepart and even referred to them himself in his own abridgment without bothering to search among the records for the small plates until after finishing the forepart, Lehi-Benjamin. This is out of character with Mormon's role as abridger (although the Words of Mormon 1:3 version is itself out of character—that he would not have read the entire set of records before beginning an abridgment). More importantly the wording of Words of Mormon 1:3 (supported somewhat by Mormon 1:4) is fairly clear; the writer of the Book of Mormon intended to convey to the reader that Mormon did not know about the small plates until he reached Benjamin in his abridgment.

Apparently there is no reasonable way to reconcile this discrepancy in Mormon's knowledge of the small plates of Nephi with the assumption that Joseph Smith had a correct understanding of the final structure of the Book of Mormon at the time he recorded this portion of D&C 10. Joseph's understanding at this time must have been incomplete.

FOUR PLANS

In the remainder of this essay a theory is explored that more adequately accounts for the discrepancy noted above as well as others that follow. The theory postulates a series of four configurations or plans for the Book of Mormon structure. Each plan represents Joseph Smith's understanding of what the book's structure was at different points in time.

6. In order to be consistent with the Book of Mormon, D&C 10:38-41 must be read in the following manner: “An account of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, is engraven upon the plates of Nephi [large and/or small]; Yea and you remember it was said in those writings that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi [which Mormon thought at the time were the only, but were actually the *large*, plates]. And now, because the account which is engraven upon the [*small*] plates of Nephi is more particular concerning the things which, in my wisdom, I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the [*small*] plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained.”

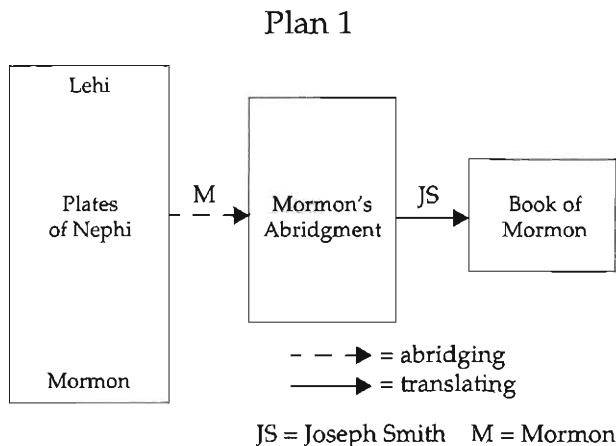
The plans are constructed on the basis of what the Book of Mormon would have revealed about its own structure to Joseph as he translated it (conversely this can be viewed as Joseph revealing what he envisioned for the book's structure by what he dictated regarding it). This method of construction results in what might be termed a minimum complexity description. That is, since Joseph could have learned about the Book of Mormon structure from sources other than the book itself, these plans represent the minimum level of configurational complexity. However, given the implication of D&C 10—that Joseph's understanding was still incomplete even after recording this revelation—the approach of assuming the minimum level of complexity compatible with what the Book of Mormon reveals about itself seems reasonable.

Plan 1

As Joseph Smith began dictating from the plates of Mormon in late 1827 or early 1828, the text made frequent references to a source record known as "the plates of Nephi." These references to "the plates of Nephi," where more details could be found,⁷ were probably much like those that appear in surviving chapters, such as 3 Nephi 26:6-8, "and now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people; but behold *the plates of Nephi* do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people. And these things have I [Mormon] written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people" (see also Mos. 1:6; Alma 37:2; 3 Ne. 5:10; 3 Ne. 5:8-11; Mormon 2:18). That such references also appeared in the early (lost) part of Mormon's abridgment is corroborated by D&C 10:39, "Yea and you remember it was said in those writings that a more particular account was given of these things upon *the plates of Nephi*." In abridging the Nephite history prior to Benjamin, Mormon would not have used language that distinguished Nephi's large and small plates because he did not know about the small plates until he had completed the abridgment down to the time of Benjamin. Therefore as Joseph dictated the early manuscript, "the plates of Nephi" were probably understood to have been a single set of plates from which Mormon took most, if not all, of his abridgment. The structure of the Book of Mormon Joseph would have inferred is that shown in the accompanying schematic diagram, Plan 1. His understanding would have been that the book was to consist

7. This technique is also used in the forepart replacement chapters by Nephi (and others) who defers historical details to his "other plates," such as in 2 Nephi 4:14, "for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; for a more history part are written upon mine other plates." (See also 1 Ne. 19:4; 2 Ne. 5:33; Jacob 1:3, 7:26; Jarom 1:14; Words of Mormon 1:10.)

(excluding Ether, Moroni, etc.) primarily of a translation of Mormon's record, which was an abridgment of a set of plates called "the plates of Nephi." This was probably Joseph Smith's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure initially.



With an understanding of the Book of Mormon structure represented by Plan 1, Joseph dictated the Nephite history at least to the story of Benjamin, and possibly somewhat beyond. In the process, frequent references were made to "the plates of Nephi" (where greater detail was recorded). Then came the birth of Joseph and Emma's first child in June 1828. The translation stopped and Martin Harris succeeded in persuading Joseph to let him take the manuscript. The first 116 manuscript pages were lost.⁸

After the loss of the manuscript, the translation was at a standstill. Joseph apparently lost his gift, and, in any case, the idea of retranslating the same material was not a viable option. The lost manuscript had contained detailed historical accounts and long name-by-name genealogies.

8. If Joseph retained any of the manuscript, it was probably only a few pages. These retained pages could have been what was being referred to in D&C 10:41 (see also 1830 preface), "Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, *which you have retained*." This interpretation would be consistent with the assumption that these verses, outlining a solution to the translation crisis, were first recorded by Joseph within a few months of his losing the manuscript, before any further translation had been accomplished (probably in the summer of 1828). A later (May 1829) dating is also possible; according to the late dating, the phrase "which you have retained" would refer to material translated after the lost pages episode. See also Max Parkin, "A Preliminary Analysis of the Dating of Section 10," *7th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1979), 70-81.

If it existed, it was in the hands of unfriendly persons who would not hesitate to bring it forth (altered, according to Joseph) for comparison with any retranslation that might be produced—this, for the purpose of, as Joseph later put it, “stir[ring] up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work.” For the work to continue, a solution was called for that did not require retranslation of the same material.

Plan 2

The solution to the lost manuscript problem was given in D&C 10 which Joseph recorded sometime between the summer of 1828 and May 1829.

1 Now, behold I say unto you, that because you delivered up *so many*⁹ writings, which you had power to translate, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them, 2 and you also lost your gift at the same time, 3 nevertheless it *has been* restored unto you again: therefore, see that you are faithful and *go* on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work as you have begun.

This first portion of the revelation confirmed that the reason Joseph had been unable to resume translating was because his gift had been lost. The third verse seems to be notifying him that his gift had been restored and that he was to resume translating. The instruction to “go on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work as you have begun” could be interpreted as instructing him to resume translation of the plates of Mormon where he had left off.¹⁰ Whether Joseph actually recorded these verses before or after resuming translation is uncertain, but in either case most investigators of Mormon history agree that he did finish the dictation of Mormon’s plates (Mosiiah-4 Nephi and possibly through Mormon 7) before returning to the forepart of the book. Thus the first part of the revela-

9. The 1833 Book of Commandments version is given for the first three verses. They were changed in the 1835 D&C to read: “Now, behold I say unto you, that because you delivered up *those* writings, which you had power to translate, *by the means of the Urim and Thummim*, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them; and you also lost your gift at the same time, *and your mind became darkened*; nevertheless it is *now* restored unto you again, therefore see that you are faithful and *continue* on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of *translation* as you have begun.”

10. This assumes the revelation was recorded in the summer of 1828, before he resumed dictation. Assuming the revelation was recorded in May 1829, after he had resumed dictating, this verse would simply be recounting what had already happened. The instruction to “go on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work” could then be viewed as a general one to finish the work he’d begun. However, the phrase “the remainder of this work” was subsequently used in a context, verse 46, that clearly implied the post-Benjamin portion of Mormon’s abridgment, thus supporting the former interpretation, i.e., the earlier, summer 1828 recording of this portion of D&C 10.

tion confirmed that, for the remainder of the Book of Mormon at least, the plan was unchanged.

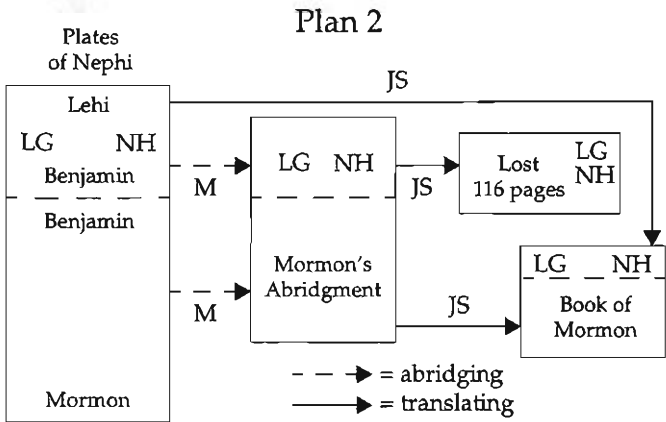
The latter part of the revelation dealt with an explanation for the loss of the Book of Mormon forepart (including involvement of the devil) and a solution for its replacement.

38 And now, verily I say unto you, that an account of those things that you have written, which have gone out of your hands, is engraven upon the plates of Nephi; 39 Yea, and you remember, it was said in those writings, that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi. 40 And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi, is more particular concerning the things, which in my wisdom I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account—41 Therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, which you have retained; 42 And behold, you shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. 43 I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will show unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the devil. 44 Behold they have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi. 45 Behold there are many things engraven on the plates of Nephi, which do throw greater views upon my gospel; therefore, it is wisdom in me that you should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work. 46 And behold, all the remainder of this work does contain all those parts of my gospel which my holy prophets, yea, and also my disciples desired in their prayers, should come forth unto this people.

As outlined in these verses, the solution was simple: bypass Mormon's abridgment. Instead of Mormon's plates, the plates of Nephi were to be translated for the pre-Benjamin portion of the Book of Mormon. In this context Joseph would have understood "plates of Nephi" to mean the original source from which Mormon took his abridgment. Since the plates of Nephi had been the original source, nothing would be lost. Not only would Joseph's enemies be foiled, there would be opportunity for additional "things" that would "throw greater views" upon the gospel to be included in the Book of Mormon.

Aside from the replacement of the first part of Mormon's abridgment with Nephi's record, this revelation apparently taught Joseph nothing new about the ultimate structure of the Book of Mormon and its source records. In particular, there was no indication of separate and distinct large and small plates of Nephi. As noted previously, the revelation (v. 39) was even slightly inconsistent with the final structure of the Book of Mormon that eventually became known. However, it was completely consistent with what Joseph's understanding of the structure would probably have been at the time, which was that Mormon made his

abridgment primarily from a single set of "plates of Nephi." Even linguistic nuances suggest that the "plates of Nephi" of D&C 10 were not the small plates, which ended at the time of Benjamin, but rather a set of plates that continued beyond Benjamin. There is the wording of verse 45, that Joseph "should translate this *first part* of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work." There is also the wording of verse 41 implying that Joseph could have translated even more from the plates of Nephi (beyond Benjamin) but that he was to stop at Benjamin. Since translating Nephi's plates was better for the first part of the book, Joseph (or later others) might have wondered why translating Nephi's plates wasn't also better for the remainder. If so, this question was answered with the assurance of verse 46 that the "remainder of this work," meaning the post-Benjamin part of Mormon's abridgment, contained all the parts of the gospel that were supposed to come forth. Although this statement provides a reason for not continuing the direct translation of Nephi's plates beyond king Benjamin, it is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the nature and role of the small plates that eventually emerged (1 Ne. 19:3) and further suggests that Joseph probably wasn't aware of the idea of the separate small plates of Nephi or the many "plain and precious parts" they would contain at the time of recording D&C 10. Thus it is likely that after the lost manuscript episode Joseph resumed dictation of the book of Mosiah with an understanding of the Book of Mormon structure similar to that shown in the diagram as Plan 2.



JS = Joseph Smith M = Mormon
 LG = Lehi's Genealogy and Prophecies
 NH = Nephite History (general, pre-Benjamin)

With the lost manuscript episode behind him, Joseph probably resumed translation of Mormon's abridgment in September 1828 with

Emma, Martin, and possibly others acting as scribes.¹¹ This effort would have probably continued through at least March 1829, when Martin was either sent or went away. During this dictation of the remainder of Mormon's abridgment was there anything new revealed about the Book of Mormon structure by its own text? Apparently not. The Book of Mormon text contains nothing from Mosiah through Mormon 7 that elucidates the structure of the book or its plates with any greater complexity than that of Plan 2 (see later discussion of computer search results under "Transcription Sequence"). Specifically, there is no mention by Mormon of the separate small plates of Nephi. Thus it is likely that Joseph's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure was still that of a single record (or plates) of Nephi and Mormon's abridgment of that record.

11. After the lost pages incident, between September 1828 and March 1829, how much of the Book of Mormon was transcribed and by whom are uncertain. Joseph recorded in his 1832 diary that Emma and his brother Samuel had written "some" for him during this time. However, Isaac Hale, Joseph's father-in-law, gave the following affidavit in 1834 that suggests Martin Harris also transcribed during this period.

About this time Martin Harris made his appearance upon the stage, and Smith began to interpret the characters or hieroglyphics, which he said were engraven upon the plates, while Harris wrote down the interpretations. It was said that Harris wrote down one hundred sixteen pages, and lost them. Soon after this happened, Martin Harris informed me that he must have a greater witness, and said that he had talked with Joseph about it; Joseph informed him that he could not or durst not show him the plates, but that he (Joseph) would go into the woods where the book of plates was, and that after he came back, Harris should *follow his track in the snow*, and find the book, and examine it for himself. Harris informed me afterward that he followed Smith's directions, and could not find the plates, and was still dissatisfied. The next day after this happened, I went to the house where Joseph Smith, Jr., lived, and *where he and Harris were engaged in their translation of the book*. Each of them had a written piece of paper which they were comparing, and some of the words were: My servant seeketh a greater witness, but no greater witness can be given to him. There was also something said about Three that were to see the thing—meaning, I suppose, the book of plates; and that if the three did not go exactly according to orders, the thing would be taken from them. I inquired whose words they were, and was informed by Joseph or Emma (I rather think it was the former) that they were the words of Jesus Christ. I told them then that I considered the whole of it a delusion, and advised them to abandon it.

The manner in which he pretended to read and interpret, was the same as when he looked for the money-diggers, with the stone in his hat and his hat over his face, while the book of plates was at the same time hid in the woods! After this *Martin Harris went away, and Oliver Cowdery came and wrote* for Smith, while he interpreted, as above described (John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* [Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon; New York: Robert Carter, 1842], 244-45).

This statement indicates that Martin was with Joseph in Harmony at least part of the time during the winter of 1828-29 acting as scribe for the Book of Mormon. The revelation referred to by Hale must have been the "witness" revelation, Book of Commandments IV (D&C 5), which had the effect of dismissing Harris as scribe.

Eventually Joseph completed Mormon's abridgment and returned to the forepart of the book. He had to do so without the benefit of the lost manuscript; despite his "utmost exertions to recover it," the manuscript had remained lost (see "1830 Preface"). His attention thus turned to what was to become the new forepart of the book, the plates of Nephi. This part of the work must have caused mixed feelings in Joseph. On one hand, a solution to the lost manuscript problem had been outlined in the revelation he had by now recorded (D&C 10)—a solution which involved translating directly from "the plates of Nephi." On the other hand, someone eager to discredit him (perhaps Mrs. Harris) might have the manuscript and be waiting for the retranslation or replacement to appear. If the manuscript had simply been misplaced, it would have been a different matter. But the revelation made clear that the manuscript had been stolen by persons with sinister motives. To know that such forces were at work must have been unsettling to Joseph. Until the replacement for the lost manuscript was published and had withstood any comparative challenges, he probably could not feel completely comfortable. As evidence that these concerns were real to Joseph at the time, there is the preface he included in the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon (see subsequent section, "1830 Preface") which explained the loss of the manuscript and the solution to translate different plates so that the devil's designs to thwart the work would be negated. (This preface was removed in the 1837 edition, apparently because such a threat no longer existed.)

Probably of more immediate concern to Joseph than the general public's acceptance of his work was that of Martin Harris. No one was in a better position to discredit Joseph with respect to the lost manuscript than Martin Harris. Martin had transcribed much of the manuscript. Martin's memory may not have been perfect but he might have recognized gross inconsistencies and conspicuous absences. Furthermore, if anyone had the manuscript, his wife was the most likely person. He was an easy target for her efforts to discredit Joseph, or so Joseph might have worried. Although he had exhibited a tendency to want to believe in Joseph, Martin also had a practical side to which appeal could be made, particularly in financial matters. His interest in the plates apparently had a pecuniary aspect as well as a religious one. A book that gave the history of the American Indians' ancestors, linked the Indians to the ancient Hebrews, and explained the mysterious burial mounds and fortresses that dotted the countryside would have appealed to the popular interest of the day. Such a book that also claimed to be true history had the potential of selling better than had Ethan Smith's recent, successful treatise, *View of*

the Hebrews.¹² Thus Martin was captivated not just by the religious implications of Joseph's book but also (perhaps more so at first) by financial profit. That Joseph was mindful of Martin's dual interests seems hardly questionable. Martin had the potential of becoming a benefactor, even the financier of the book's publication. But he was erratic and sometimes unpredictable. Until the plates of Nephi had been translated, published, and successfully defended against any attacks of a comparative nature, Joseph must have worried about the issue of compatibility between the replacement translation from the plates of Nephi and information in the lost manuscript.

With such concerns in the back of his mind, Joseph began translating the plates of Nephi. He would have expected that these plates were the original source of Mormon's abridgment. What he probably didn't know at the time was that the plates he was translating would turn out to be the small plates of Nephi, which had not been the source of Mormon's abridgment.¹³ He therefore must have been concerned when he began to translate the plates of Nephi and realized that the text he was dictating was not going to be consistent with the "plates of Nephi" that had been described in the lost manuscript. The lost manuscript contained implicit (at least, and probably explicit) evidence that the source of Mormon's abridgment had included detailed accounts of certain specific information such as Lehi's prophecies and Lehi's genealogy (designated LG in Plan 2 diagram). Since this information had been contained in the lost manuscript, it must have been in the original source (see flow of information designated LG in Plan 2 diagram). Whether he read ahead in the plates or came to the realization as he dictated the words, sooner or later Joseph would have comprehended that the record he was dictating was not going to supply this information. He would not have had to go any farther than 1 Nephi 6:1 to find out that Lehi's genealogy was not to be given anywhere in the present record of Nephi. Even as early in the text

12. B. H. Roberts's private *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, published in 1985 by University of Illinois Press and in 1992 by Signature Books, gives a lengthy discussion of similarities between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*, which was published in 1823 and 1825 in Vermont, several years before the Book of Mormon. It also contains a comprehensive argument based on a thesis uncharacteristic of Roberts's public discourse: that the Book of Mormon could have been a product of the fertile imagination of Joseph Smith, based on *View of the Hebrews* and similar "common knowledge" of the time.

13. The assumption made here for the sake of discussion is that Joseph started his translation of the replacement forepart directly with the small plates of Nephi. However, the preceding discussion of D&C 10 and word pattern studies (see "Transcription Sequence") suggest the possibility that he attempted an early translation from the large—at that time in his mind, the *only*—plates of Nephi, perhaps with Emma as scribe (see also n24). Unfortunately it is difficult to determine which plates he thought or claimed he was translating; Joseph apparently left no clear record of when he conceived of the existence of the small plates.

as 1 Nephi 1:16-17 Nephi was hinting that Lehi's prophecies weren't going to be given in any great detail. Joseph must have realized the ammunition this could become for his enemies if they desired to thwart the work. He must have become concerned. Why were the plates he had been told to translate, the plates of Nephi, not forthcoming with specific information that had been in Mormon's abridgment? Perhaps, Joseph might have speculated, the plates of Nephi were not the source of Mormon's information about Lehi's prophecies and genealogy. Perhaps the system of plates was more complex than he had initially imagined.

Plan 3

With the realization that the record of Nephi he was translating would not include certain specific information relating to Lehi that had appeared in the lost manuscript, Joseph also apparently realized the reason why. In the same verses that notify the reader of the absence of this information (1 Ne. 1:16-17; 6:1), Nephi also explains that his father Lehi had kept a record which did contain this information.

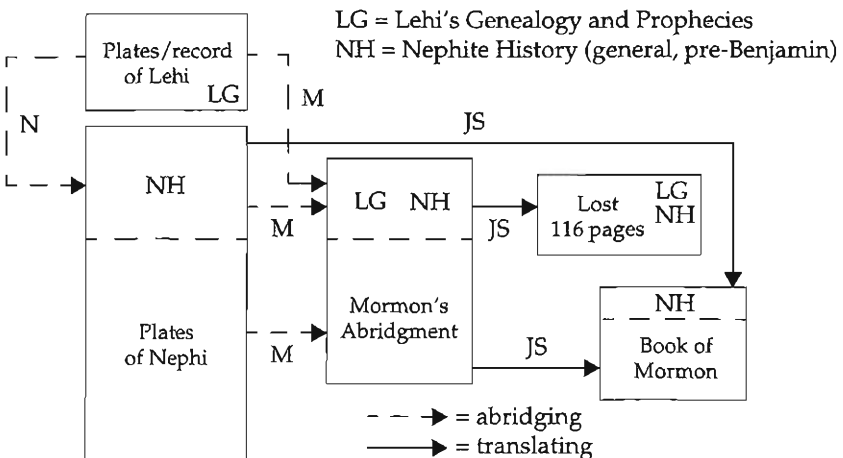
1:16 And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account. 17 But I shall make an account of my proceedings in my days. Behold I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life.

6:1 And now I, Nephi, do not give the genealogy of my fathers in this part of my record; neither at any time shall I give it after upon these plates which I am writing; for it is given in the record which has been kept by my father; wherefore, I do not write it in this work.

This record of Lehi, therefore, could have been the source from which Mormon got Lehi's genealogy and prophecies, Joseph might have reasoned. As for the plates of Nephi (the ones Joseph was now translating), they only contained an abridgment or part of the information in Lehi's record but not Lehi's genealogy. Still, what about the solution revelation (D&C 10); it hadn't mentioned any record of Lehi as a source for Mormon's (lost) abridgment. Didn't this new information about Lehi's record contradict the revelation? Hadn't the revelation said that the plates of Nephi had been the source of the lost manuscript information? Apparently not. D&C 10 only intimates that the plates of Nephi had been the source of this information. It hadn't said (or at least does not now say) so explicitly. What it says is that an account of that which "had gone out of [Joseph's] hands" was contained on the plates of Nephi. This wording left open the possibility that Mormon could have gotten some of his informa-

tion about Lehi elsewhere. Where? The plates of Nephi which Joseph was now translating seemed to suggest the record of Lehi. Of course, this explanation would require that Lehi's "record," as referred to in 1 Nephi 1:17, 6:1, be interpreted as a non-perishable one (i.e., plates) in order that it might be preserved from Lehi's to Mormon's time. But this interpretation would have been reasonable to Joseph, since previously transcribed text had used the words "record" and "plates" interchangeably (e.g., in 1 Nephi 6:1 Nephi's "record" clearly means Nephi's "plates"). Thus Joseph's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure would have expanded to that shown in the diagram as Plan 3 with the record or plates of Lehi serving as the source of Lehi's genealogy and prophecies. At worst, Joseph had slightly misunderstood the D&C 10 revelation if he inferred that the original source of *all* the information lost by Martin Harris had been the plates of Nephi. There was also still the minor problem of Mormon's having recorded (and Joseph's having already dictated) that he (Mormon) was specifically instructed to take (i.e., use) only the plates of Nephi (Mormon 1:4, 2:17, 6:6), which might be taken to exclude anything but Nephi's plates as a source for Mormon's abridgment. But that language was perhaps not to be taken so literally as to exclude Lehi's record. Thus Joseph could have been at least partially satisfied with an understanding of the Book of Mormon structure patterned after Plan 3 during the early stage of his attempt to translate the plates of Nephi. The important feature of Plan 3 compared to Plan 2 was that Lehi's genealogy and prophecies (LG) would no longer have been expected to appear in the Book of Mormon replacement forepart.

Plan 3



JS = Joseph Smith M = Mormon N = Nephi

With an expanded understanding of the Book of Mormon structure, which now included a knowledge of Lehi's record, Joseph would have again attempted the translation of Nephi's plates in order to fulfill the solution outlined by D&C 10. As he worked through the translation of Nephi's plates, however, sooner or later it would have become evident that there was still a problem: the plates of Nephi he was translating were *still* not the same plates to which reference had been made in the lost manuscript. Those plates of Nephi must have contained a *more* detailed description of general, pre-Benjamin Nephite history (NH) than the lost manuscript. These plates of Nephi apparently contained an even *less* detailed description of that history. As early in the text as 1 Nephi 6:3-6 Nephi gives indications that his record will not be the kind of detailed historical account which one might have expected as the source of Mormon's abridgment. In fact, Nephi's account was starting to sound more like a religious record than a historical one.

6:3 And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God. 4 For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved. 5 Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world. 6 Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed,¹⁴ that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men.

Knowing what he did about the lost manuscript, Joseph must have been not only puzzled but concerned. Surely the early Nephite history—which in the lost manuscript version included the names of generations of kings and descendants after Nephi—could not, like Lehi's genealogy and prophecies, be attributed to Lehi's record. The lost manuscript narrative had proceeded far beyond the time of Lehi's death. Even Martin Harris could have probably remembered that much. Why would the plates of Nephi not be forthcoming with even a general outline of the early Nephite history—at least as much as had been in the lost manuscript? Perhaps, Joseph might have speculated, these plates of Nephi were not the same plates of Nephi from which Mormon had taken his abridgment

14. Perhaps at this point Nephi anticipated that he would pass the small plates to his posterity. As it turned out, Nephi passed them to his brother Jacob for keeping (Jacob 1:1) and his own posterity remained nameless in the small plates.

(same name notwithstanding). Perhaps the Book of Mormon system of plates was yet more complex.

Plan 4

If Joseph puzzled over the scarcity of early Nephite history (NH) on the plates of Nephi, the answer was eventually forthcoming.¹⁵ In 1 Nephi 9 Nephi finally makes clear that the record he is writing is actually the second of two records, both of which are called “the plates of Nephi.”

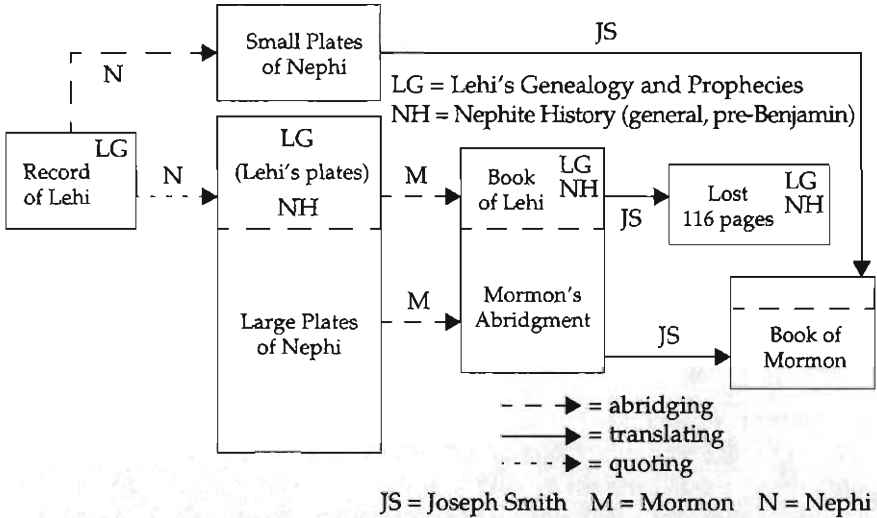
9:2 And now, as I have spoken concerning these plates, behold they are not the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people; for the plates upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore, they are called the plates of Nephi, after mine own name; and these plates also are called the plates of Nephi. 3 Nevertheless, I have received a commandment of the Lord that I should make these plates, for the special purpose that there should be an account engraven of the ministry of my people. 4 Upon the other plates should be engraven an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people, wherefore these plates are for the more part of the ministry; and the other plates are for the more part of the reign of the kings and the wars and contentions of my people. 5 Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not. 6 But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words. And thus it is. Amen.

For the first time Nephi’s small plates are identified. For the first time Joseph might have understood that there was no reason to expect much Nephite history on the plates he was translating, because the plates he was translating were the small plates, the ones specifically designated for religious writings. Apparently the “plates of Nephi” from which Mormon had taken his abridgment were the large plates. Joseph’s under-

15. It is possible that Joseph realized the lack of both specific information (e.g., Lehi’s genealogy) and general Nephite history in the small plates at the same time. Similarly it is possible that he discovered both the plates of Lehi and the small plates of Nephi at about the same time, since they are described within a few chapters of each other. Thus it is possible that his understanding went directly from Plan 2 to Plan 4, skipping Plan 3. If so, however, the preface he included in the 1830 Book of Mormon is puzzling. If he had never considered the configuration of Plan 3 as a means for explaining missing or different information in the replacement forepart, it seems more likely that the 1830 preface would have explained the lost manuscript episode in terms more evocative of Plan 4 (“large plates of Nephi” versus “small plates of Nephi”) than Plan 3 (“record/plates of Lehi” versus “plates of Nephi”). See also “1830 Preface.”

standing of the system of plates expanded to that shown in the diagram as Plan 4.

Plan 4



Plan 4 represents the basic structure of the Book of Mormon that eventually came to be understood by Joseph. An unabridged version of Lehi’s record, including his genealogy and prophecies (LG), was engraved on Nephi’s large plates (1 Ne. 19:1-2). An abridged version (not including LG) was engraved on Nephi’s small plates (1 Ne. 1:16-17, 6:1). Thus a structure was defined in which Lehi’s genealogy and prophecies (LG) were transmitted to Mormon’s abridgment (lost forepart) but not to Nephi’s abridgment (replacement forepart). The same structure provided that early Nephite history (NH) would also appear in the lost manuscript but not the replacement. Since the small plates were kept separately from the large plates by prophets instead of kings (1 Ne. 19:4, Jarom 1:14), there was no reason to expect much correlation between the two records except for Nephi’s part. When the brief narrative reached the time of Benjamin, the record ended because Amaleki had no more seed (Omni 1:25) and the plates were full (Omni 1:30).¹⁶ The reader is not entirely unpre-

16. It is notable that neither of these reasons was sufficient for ending the record on other occasions. When Nephi passed on the small record, he did so to his brother Jacob instead of his son. When more plates were needed to continue the record, they were simply made. Ore was plentiful (1 Ne. 18:25; 2 Ne. 5:15) and the practice appears to have been that if more plates were desired, more were made. Only Moroni was unable to make more plates because he was alone (Mormon 8:5).

pared for the small record to end, though. Jarom twice warns (Jarom 1:2, 14) that the plates are small and then offers this reason for not writing more, “wherefore it must needs be that I write a little; but I shall not write the things of my prophesying, nor of my revelations. For what could I write more than my fathers have written? For have they not revealed the plan of salvation? I say unto you, Yea; and this sufficeth me.” This part of the story is somewhat incongruent; it seems to relegate Jarom’s prophecy and revelation to a lesser importance relative to the burden of making a few additional plates which goes against a main theme of the Book of Mormon and the small plates in particular. Nevertheless, the reader’s mind is prepared for the small record to end, which it does at the right time with all the connecting history quickly explained in the last book, *Omni*, so that a coherent transition back to Mormon’s abridgment is possible.

Thus Joseph Smith’s understanding reached the final stage of complexity with regard to the structure of the Book of Mormon. He had progressed from a Plan 2 description to a Plan 4 description, possibly by way of an intermediate Plan 3 description. He had learned that there were actually two sets of plates of Nephi which, although referred to by the same name, were very different in nature and served different purposes. This insight alone might seem worthy of special mention by Joseph, given that the ambiguous name “plates of Nephi” must have been either the cause or effect of his own misinterpretation of the D&C 10 revelation. Having gained this new insight about the dual plates of Nephi, what kind of final description did he give relative to the lost manuscript, the replacement solution, and the Book of Mormon structure, and to what degree did his final description clarify points left undefined, ambiguous, and even contradictory in the initial one (D&C 10)? Interestingly, Joseph’s final description of these matters was still incomplete as far as what could have been said to clarify explicitly the structure of the Book of Mormon and its system of source plates.

1830 PREFACE: FINAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TRANSLATION CRISIS AND SOLUTION

The final description Joseph gave of the translation crisis and its solution is the preface of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

To the reader—As many false reports have been circulated respecting the following work, and also many unlawful measures taken by evil designing persons to destroy me, and also the work, I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which

said account some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing. I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken, were found in the township of Manchester, Ontario county, New York. The Author.

This final description of the manuscript problem is based largely on the initial description, D&C 10, and uses much of the same wording in its central portion. New material added at the beginning clarifies some of what had not been explicitly stated in D&C 10, that the plates of Lehi had been the source of the first part of Mormon's abridgment. However, like D&C 10, there is still no mention of separate and distinct large and small plates of Nephi in the 1830 preface. Thus this preface superficially sounds more like a description of Plan 3 than of Plan 4. Nevertheless, the wording is actually incompatible with Plan 3 in a subtle way such that it must be viewed as a Plan 4 description, albeit an incomplete one.

The wording Joseph used in the 1830 preface suggests a "sole source" status for the plates of Lehi with respect to the lost manuscript. Joseph wrote, "I translated . . . one hundred and sixteen pages . . . from the Book of Lehi, *which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi . . .*" (emphasis added). This description is incompatible with Plan 3, under which Lehi's "record"¹⁷ was viewed as a source for Mormon but not *the* only source. Specifically, under Plan 3 Lehi's record could be viewed as the source for Lehi's genealogy and prophecies (and some limited history), while Ne-

17. Whether Lehi's original "record" (1 Ne. 1:16-17, 6:1) is viewed as a metallic plate record or a perishable one is irrelevant under Plan 4. If Lehi's record was not metallic, Joseph's reference to "plates of Lehi" (1830 preface) could still point to the part of Nephi's plates that contained Lehi's record. On the other hand, under Plan 3, Lehi's "record" must be considered a non-perishable metallic "plate" record (although it is not specifically designated so in 1 Nephi) in order for it to be preserved to Mormon's time for abridgment.

phi's (still separate) record had provided the general post-Lehi, pre-Benjamin Nephite history. (See flow of information designated by Lehi's genealogy [LG] and Nephite history [NH] in Plan 3 diagram.) Therefore, under Plan 3 Lehi's record cannot be viewed as the sole source of Mormon's early abridgment (lost manuscript). However, under Plan 4 the plates of Lehi can be viewed as *the* source which provided both Lehi's genealogy and whatever Nephite history was in the lost manuscript because Joseph's reference to "the plates of Lehi" in the 1830 preface could point to the part of Nephi's plates that contained both.¹⁸ Thus the 1830 preface is only compatible with the final structure of the Book of Mormon, Plan 4 (not Plan 3); however, it is notably incomplete in not delineating the separate large and small plates of Nephi. Instead Joseph chose to leave the 1830 preface in the same ambiguous terms as D&C 10: "the plates of Nephi."

Who was the intended audience of the 1830 preface? Since Joseph had the preface removed in the 1837 edition, it would seem that the intended audience in 1830 had been his enemies (who still might have held the lost manuscript), those who had heard of the lost manuscript episode, and those who might have been swayed by comparative attacks using the lost manuscript. The preface was apparently no longer deemed necessary or important in 1837 when the possibility of such a challenge had become remote and the many "false reports" had long since ceased circulating. To a reader already familiar in detail with the contents of the book and its structure, the wording of the 1830 preface might seem slightly odd—odd in the sense that Joseph chose to contrast between "plates of Lehi" and "plates of Nephi" to explain the missing and replacement information for the book's forepart, instead of contrasting between "large plates of Nephi" and "small plates of Nephi" as suggested by 1 Nephi 9, Jacob 1:1, and Words of Mormon 1:3.¹⁹ But the 1830 preface certainly would not have seemed odd in that sense to a new reader in 1830, even to one who had seen or heard of the lost manuscript. The preface offered a logical explanation for any discrepancies between the lost manuscript material and the published replacement. A potential enemy of the work who was contemplating trying to discredit Joseph by pointing out such discrepancies (whether they be genuine or the result of alterations) could read this preface and easily see that the basis for such an attack had been weakened.

18. Jacob 3:13-14 indicates that a portion of a set of plates could be referred to by a name other than that by which the larger set was known, such as plates of Jacob or plates of Lehi within the plates of Nephi.

19. In fact, the record Joseph designated as the "plates of Lehi" in the preface is usually referred to as the "plates of Nephi" in the book itself.

THE PLATES OF NEPHI:

“AND I KNEW NOT AT THE TIME WHEN I MADE THEM . . .”

A significant feature of Joseph Smith's progressive understanding of the Book of Mormon records is the delay between his knowledge of the (large) “plates of Nephi” (by late 1827 or early 1828) and his knowledge of the small plates (sometime after D&C 10). A similarly significant feature of the Book of Mormon system of plates as defined under Plan 4 is the delay between Nephi's knowledge of the large and small plates. According to Nephi, both sets of plates were begun by him, as commanded by God, at different times; the large plates were begun just after Lehi's group arrived in the New World (ten years after they left Jerusalem), and the small plates between twenty and thirty years later. Thus the more important (for our day) ministry-prophecy record was begun at least thirty years after the departure from Jerusalem. This delay apparently affected the nature of the material recorded in the large plates. Nephi explains that in the beginning, before he knew he would be commanded to keep the small plates, he recorded major religious matters (his own and his father's prophecies) on the large plates (1 Ne. 19:1-3).

1 And it came to pass that the Lord commanded me, wherefore I did make plates of ore [large plates of Nephi] that I might engraven upon them the record of my people. And upon the plates which I made I did engraven the record of my father, and also our journeyings in the wilderness, and the prophecies of my father; and also many of mine own prophecies have I engraven upon them. 2 And I knew not at the time when I made them [large plates] that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these [small] plates; wherefore, the record of my father, and the genealogy of his fathers, and the more part of all our proceedings in the wilderness are engraven upon those first [large] plates of which I have spoken; wherefore, the things which transpired before I made these [small] plates are, of a truth, more particularly made mention upon the first [large] plates. 3 And after I had made these [small] plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.

Thus, according to the latter part of verse 1, the appearance of some amount of prophecy and religious writing in the first part of Mormon's abridgment (lost manuscript) would not have been inconsistent with the structure of Plan 4. To the degree he was sensitive to Martin Harris's vulnerability on the issue of compatibility of lost manuscript material, Joseph must have been gratified to see Nephi give such a clear explanation

for the appearance of religious writings in the first (lost) portion of Mormon's abridgment.

In addition to accounting for the possible presence of certain information in the lost manuscript (a certain amount of prophecy), the twenty-year delay between Nephi's plates also accounts for the possible absence of certain information. Given the frequency with which the first (large) plates are mentioned in Nephi's second (small) record (1 Ne. 1:17; 9:2; 10:15; 19:1-4; 2 Ne. 4:14; 5:29-33), it might be expected that Nephi would have also mentioned the existence of the small plates in the large record, at least after the point in time had been reached where he had been commanded to make them. If no mention of the second record was to be found in the lost manuscript, that could be accounted for by the fact that the commandment to make them had come to Nephi much later, perhaps after he had finished most of his first record. Thus it is logical that an extended record of history could have been written by Nephi that made no mention of the second set of plates he was commanded to make. And it is also therefore logical that Mormon could abridge at least a significant portion of Nephi's large plates and not become aware of the small plates (as apparently was the case; see Words of Mormon 1:3). But what about the approximately thirty years from the time Nephi was commanded to make the second record (570 B.C.) until his death (about 540 B.C.)? Didn't Nephi write about the small plates at all on the large plates? Or did Mormon not notice it as he was abridging? Given the frequency with which Nephi mentioned his "other" (large) plates in the small record, it seems inconsistent that the theologically more important small record would not have been mentioned prominently in the large plates by Nephi. Yet this is the logical inference we are led to by analysis of the contents of the Book of Mormon and the likely contents of the various plates according to the structure of Plan 4.

THE QUESTION OF CAUSALITY

Several questions related to the Book of Mormon structure and contents have arisen in the preceding discussion. For example, why did Mormon never mention the small plates of Nephi in his post-Benjamin abridgment, when he had by then acquired knowledge of them? Why would Nephi not mention his more important small plates in his large plates,²⁰ when he consistently did the reverse? Why were Nephi's, Mormon's, and Joseph Smith's knowledge of the small plates all significantly delayed relative to their knowledge of the large plates—in Joseph's case,

20. Here and in subsequent sections this inference is made for the sake of discussion. As explained at the end of the previous section, this is only an inference which seems logical but cannot be proved without examining the lost manuscript.

in spite of a revelation explaining the role of the plates of Nephi? Coincidence may be the answer in each case, or there may be specific reasons. One explanation that accounts for each of these "coincidences" is that the direction of causality between Joseph's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure and the information about that structure that appeared in the book could have been the reverse of that considered in the first part of this essay. That is, rather than thinking in terms of Joseph's understanding of the Book of Mormon being limited by and progressing according to what he learned from Mormon's and later Nephi's writings, it may be more correct to think in terms of Mormon's and Nephi's descriptions of the Book of Mormon records being limited by and progressing according to what Joseph understood or imagined. Perhaps the mind of Nephi, the mind of Mormon, and the mind of Joseph Smith were to some degree one and the same. As Joseph's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure progressed from Plan 2, to 3, and 4, so did Nephi's and Mormon's. If Nephi didn't refer to the small plates in his large plates, it could be because at the time Joseph dictated the lost manuscript in early 1828 he was thinking in terms of Plan 1. Perhaps the reason Mormon never mentioned the small plates in Mosiah through Mormon 7 is because at the time Joseph dictated this material in late 1828 and early 1829 he was still thinking in terms of a single set of plates of Nephi, i.e., Plan 2. Both Nephi's and Mormon's awareness of the small plates could have been delayed because Joseph's was. This interpretation need not be seen as attributing devious motives to Joseph. The state of his mind is unknown. But it does mean attributing to him more the role of author than of translator.

TRANSCRIPTION SEQUENCE

It has already been suggested that the four-plan series postulated herein fits with current understanding of the sequence in which the Book of Mormon transcription took place. Textual analysis of the Book of Mormon and Joseph's revelations has led most investigators of Mormon history to conclude that after the lost manuscript, transcription resumed with the book of Mosiah, and that the replacement chapters (1 Ne.-Omni) were probably the last to be transcribed. By using information criteria suggested by the four-plan theory to analyze the text of the Book of Mormon, it is possible to test the Book of Mormon for compatibility (in terms of transcription sequence) with the four-plan theory.

A computer search of the Book of Mormon text was conducted for passages related to the book's structure. A proximity search used the words "plates, book(s), record(s), account(s), Nephi, Lehi, and father" to

locate any references to plates, books, or records of Nephi or Lehi. These passages were then categorized according to the highest plan (2=lowest, 3=middle, 4=highest) that was explicitly identified by the text. The criteria for labeling passages according to a particular plan were:

- Plan 2: mention of a single record of Nephi or plates or a book of Nephi but no mention of plates or a record of Lehi and no mention of two records of Nephi.
- Plan 3: mention of a single record of Nephi or plates or a book of Nephi and mention of plates or a record of Lehi but no mention of two records of Nephi.
- Plan 4: mention of two records of Nephi.

The primary scriptures located by this search are:

- Plan 2: Mos. 1:6, 16; 28:11; Alma 37:2; 44:24; Hel. 2:13-14²¹; 3 Ne. 5:8-11, 14-18²²; 26:6-8, 11-12; 4 Ne. 1:19, 21; Mormon 1:3-4; 2:17-18; 6:6; 1 Ne. 1:1-3.²³
- Plan 3: 1 Ne. 1:16-17; 6:1-6.
- Plan 4: 1 Ne. 9:2-6; 10:15; 19:1-6; 2 Ne. 4:14; 5:29-33; Jacob 1:1-2; 3:13-14; 7:26; Jarom 1:14; Words of Mormon 1:3-9.

Visually scanning these passages shows the sequential progression of complexity of the descriptions used, from Plan 2 to 3 and from 3 to 4. A summary of the results of this search follows:

1. From Mosiah through Mormon, only Plan 2 passages are found, no Plan 3 or 4 passages.
2. Only one Plan 2 passage is in the forepart (1 Ne.-Omni), and this is 1 Nephi 1:1-3.

21. Mormon says that *all* his abridgment was taken from "the book of Nephi"; none of it is recognized as coming from the plates of Lehi from which the 1830 preface said Mormon abridged the lost book of Lehi.

22. This passage is easy to misinterpret as a Plan 4 passage because the phrase "and a shorter but true account was given by Nephi" (v. 9) taken in isolation might sound like a reference to the small plates of Nephi. The context in which this phrase appears, however, suggests that the "Nephi" referred to is the contemporary Nephi (son of Nephi) not the original Nephi (son of Lehi). The intended meaning was that there were many accounts written by many individuals; Mormon's abridgment came from only one of these, Nephi's, which was shorter than most. Either way, at this point in time (after king Benjamin), according to Plan 4, Mormon knew about both sets of Nephi's plates and yet is still not differentiating two distinct sets.

23. These first words of the Book of Mormon were, according to Plan 4, written by Nephi on his small plates many years after he had already written most of his large record and after being specifically commanded to make another record for a special purpose. However, the opening words of Nephi's second record make none of this background clear.

3. There are only two Plan 3 passages and these are near the beginning, 1 Nephi 1:16-17 and 1 Nephi 6:1.
4. The use of the word "therefore" is found to be generally predominant in Plan 2 passages and surrounding text, whereas the equivalent "wherefore" is predominant in Plan 3 and 4 passages and their surrounding text.²⁴

These findings are consistent with the conclusions that (a) after the lost manuscript crisis Joseph continued the translation from Mosiah through Mormon with an understanding of the book's structure represented by Plan 2; (b) Plan 3 was not realized until after Mosiah through Mormon had been transcribed; (c) only a little dictation in 1 Nephi was done while Joseph's understanding was that of Plan 3 or at least little survived; (d) the bulk of the replacement chapters (1 Ne. 9-Words of Mormon) was dictated last, after Joseph had a full understanding of Plan 4. In short, the four-plan theory is compatible with current understanding of the transcription sequence of the Book of Mormon. This analysis of course does not prove that Mosiah through Mormon was written under Plan 2, that 1 Nephi was attempted under Plan 3, and that 1 Nephi-Omni was finished under Plan 4. It merely shows the consistency of this interpretation with the Book of Mormon text. Clearly there are passages where the absence of, say, Plan 3 information in a Plan 2 passage would not be unusual. In many of the Plan 2 passages referring to the plates of Nephi, it would not necessarily be expected that the plates of Lehi would be mentioned, particularly if the plates of Lehi were viewed as a subset of the large plates of Nephi (which is possible under Plan 4).

However, there are several passages where additional information might be expected in order to make the passage conform better to the

24. This is significant because it has been shown from the Book of Commandments revelations (Brent L. Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993], 409-14) that Joseph preferred the word "therefore" during his early dictation which shifted later to "wherefore." The transition from "therefore" to "wherefore" in the Book of Commandments is distinct, occurring between May and June 1829. In the Book of Mormon Mosiah-Mormon are dominated by the use of "therefore." This is consistent with Joseph's having dictated this material prior to June. Ether exhibits a mixture of "therefore" and "wherefore," as do 1 and 2 Nephi. Jacob-Words of Mormon and Moroni is dominated by "wherefore." It is possible that the final versions of Ether, 1 Nephi, and 2 Nephi were dictated at the time Joseph was shifting from "therefore" to "wherefore" between May and June 1829. It is also possible that they were written after the transition to "wherefore" was complete and that the mixture in these books is a result of initial versions having been transcribed by Emma, Samuel Smith, or Martin Harris using "therefore" with later modifications having been made in the dictation to Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, or others using "wherefore." Jacob-Words of Mormon was probably written after the transition to "wherefore" was complete and did not incorporate much if any material that had been previously transcribed using "therefore."

“correct” final Plan 4 description. For example, it is notable that no mention of two separate sets of plates of Nephi (Plan 4) is made in 1 Nephi 1-8, even though doing so would have improved the clarity of meaning in these writings. In particular, 1 Nephi 1:16-17 and 6:1-3 contain no mention by Nephi that he is making two records even though, according to Plan 4, he must have been (recall that the large plates were started around 590 B.C. and the small plates around 570 to 560 B.C.). Instead Nephi refers here to his record consistently in the singular.

There is also a related noticeable absence as far as mentioning where Lehi’s genealogy could be found. In 1 Nephi 1:16-17 and 6:1-3 Nephi writes that his father’s record contains many details that his record does not, particularly his father’s genealogy. However, when he makes a point of stating where that genealogy can be found (1 Ne. 6:1), he only mentions the record “kept by [his] father,” not his own large plates, even though 1 Nephi 19:1-2 says that he had engraved his father’s record, including Lehi’s genealogy, on his large plates and this must have already been done prior to the time Nephi engraved 1 Nephi 6:1 on the small plates. Why didn’t Nephi mention in 1 Nephi 6:1 that Lehi’s genealogy could also be found in his large plates (and thus simultaneously clarify his separate large and small plates)? It is impossible to say for sure, but the fact that he did not is at least consistent with the interpretation that at the time of dictating 1 Nephi 1:16-17 and 6:1-3 Joseph was not yet aware of the separate large and small plates of Nephi; he was still thinking in terms of Plan 3.

A final example of clarifying information being absent where it might have been expected has already been noted in that Mormon did not refer to the separate religious and historical records of Nephi anywhere in his post-Benjamin abridgment,²⁵ even though by then he had found the small plates, read them, and would have probably noticed the way Nephi drew attention to his separate historical and religious records. Mormon also made no reference to the record of Lehi in his post-Benjamin abridgment, even though by then he had completed the abridgment of Lehi’s record which (according to the 1830 preface) he had taken from the plates (or record) of Lehi. In one place Mormon even makes the statement that “*all* the account which [he has] written” has been taken from the “book” (i.e., record or plates) of Nephi, thus making no reference to a record of Lehi or any other source record (see Hel. 2:13-14). Since under Plan 4 Lehi’s plates can be viewed as a subset of Nephi’s large plates, the latter (record of Lehi) omission by Mormon may be viewed as minor relative to the former (small plates). Nevertheless, why

25. This excludes Words of Mormon which probably wasn’t dictated by Joseph until after the small plates.

didn't Mormon delineate the separate large and small plates of Nephi (or the record of Lehi) in his post-Benjamin abridgment? Again, it is impossible to say for sure, but the fact that he did not is at least consistent with the idea that at the time of dictating Mosiah-Mormon 7 Joseph was not yet aware of either the small plates of Nephi or the record of Lehi; he was still thinking in terms of Plan 2.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The loss of the first 116 pages of the manuscript had a major impact on the transcription of the Book of Mormon and its ultimate structure. With the loss Joseph found it impossible to continue dictating. Yet his family, wife, and associates believed he was being guided miraculously by God in the endeavor. It was unthinkable that God's work could be obstructed by mortal men (or women) through such a simple scheme as stealing some pages. Joseph's best hope was to recover the manuscript, which he tried strenuously to do (see 1830 Book of Mormon preface), and in the meantime receive reassurance from God that the work was not being thwarted. Thus Joseph received his first revelation. Book of Commandments II (D&C 3) explained the reason Joseph had lost his gift to translate "for a season" and gave reassurance that God's work would continue (though no specific plan for solving the crisis at hand was given). The original version (BoC II) also promised that if Joseph repented God would "only cause [him] to be afflicted for a season" and he would "again be called to the work."²⁶ In effect this revelation provided a plausible explanation for there being no immediate resumption of translation activities, thus allowing time for continued efforts to recover the manuscript or confirm it had been destroyed. It also provided a period of time during which Joseph contemplated the lost manuscript, the possible reasons for its disappearance, the implications of such a loss, and possi-

26. Later when the revelation was revised for publication in the D&C, the phrase "and he [God] will only cause thee to be afflicted for a season" was changed to "which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you," and the future tense in "will again be called to the work" was changed to the present tense "art again called to the work" (D&C 3:10), indicating that Joseph was apprehensive about the original wording. Consideration of the possible implications of these changes requires a more lengthy treatment than is possible here; however, it should be noted that the phrase change to "which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you" is compatible with a shift from an early interpretation (Faulring, 8; 1833 BoC II), in which Joseph is not held responsible or does not acknowledge being held responsible for doing wrong in giving the manuscript to Harris, to a later one (1835 D&C XXX; 1971 D&C 3:10) in which such a conclusion can more easily be drawn. See also n3 discussion about whether Joseph's culpability was in giving the manuscript to Harris or just asking a third time.

ble explanations. Sometime between the summer of 1828 and May 1829 Joseph recorded D&C 10 which outlined the solution to the lost manuscript problem according to Plan 2. In that same time frame he resumed dictating from Mormon's plates, completing the bulk of the latter part of the Book of Mormon. After finishing with Mormon's plates, he returned to the book's forepart and began dictating from "the plates of Nephi." He probably did so still unaware of the small plates and the record of Lehi. It is possible that with this level of understanding (Plan 2) Joseph dictated a limited, early version of Nephi's record (surviving verses might include 1 Ne. 1:1-3). During this period the issue of compatibility of the material he was dictating with the lost manuscript must have been a significant concern. This inference follows from the fact that Joseph's revelation explained that an enemy acting under the devil's influence had taken the manuscript for the purpose of destroying him. It would have been unnatural for Joseph not to be concerned about the compatibility issue. Of particular concern would have been certain information missing from Nephi's record that had appeared in the lost manuscript, such as Lehi's genealogy and prophecies and general (post-Lehi, pre-Benjamin) Nephite history. At some point during his translation of Nephi's record, Joseph's understanding of the book's structure grew to include the record of Lehi. It seems possible that for a time he had an understanding of the Book of Mormon structure (Plan 3) which explained certain missing information (Lehi's genealogy and prophecies) through the record of Lehi which was separate and distinct from Nephi's (still one and only) plates. It is also possible that a portion of the replacement Book of Mormon chapters (or an early version thereof) was dictated while he had such an understanding (verses like 1 Ne. 1:16-17, 6:1). Eventually his understanding grew to include the separate small plates of Nephi (Plan 4) which explained not only Lehi's genealogy but additional missing information (general pre-Benjamin Nephite history) through a second record of Nephi, separate and distinct from the original one used by Mormon. The majority of the replacement chapters (1 Ne. 9-Words of Mormon) must have been dictated after Joseph reached this level of understanding.

The small plates of Nephi were the key to the eventual successful completion of the Book of Mormon. Not only that, but Nephi's and Mormon's delayed knowledge concerning them apparently contributed materially to the structure of the book and the way Joseph's knowledge of that structure progressed. The delay in Nephi's being commanded to make the small plates can be seen as a plausible reason for there being no mention of them in the first part of his large plates. This in turn can be seen as a plausible reason for Mormon's not mentioning the small plates in the lost manuscript. (This would not fully explain, however, the com-

plete absence of references to the small plates in the large plates; nor would it explain the absence of such references in Mormon's post-Benjamin abridgment.) Thus Joseph's not being aware of the small plates initially is not unrelated to nor unlike Mormon's not being aware of them initially as he began to abridge the plates of Nephi (Words of Mormon 1:3). Nor is it unlike Nephi's not being aware of them initially: "and I knew not at the time when I made them that I should be commanded of the Lord to make these plates" (1 Ne. 19:2).

To say the least, the structure of the Book of Mormon with its myriad of plates is complicated. Describing just its basic structure (Plan 4), once it is understood in hindsight, is a significant task. Keeping straight all the details must have been a challenge for those associated with Joseph Smith during the time of its coming forth, as well as for Joseph himself. It seems no surprise that on one occasion when pressed *impromptu* in public to explain the details of the Book of Mormon's origin Joseph demurred saying, "[I]t was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon;" and also, "that it was not expedient for him to relate these things."²⁷ It is also perhaps not so surprising that on the occasion of laying the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House Joseph brought forth the Book of Mormon manuscript to bury and was overheard to say, "I have had enough trouble with this thing."²⁸

Joseph Smith's understanding of the Book of Mormon structure evolved incrementally. In the beginning he had a simple, relatively monolithic view of the book. With the lost manuscript crisis and D&C 10, his understanding began to change toward a more complex structure. Eventually his understanding reached the final structure as given in the book itself. Based on the text of the Book of Mormon and its likely order of transcription, a series of four plans has been proposed that outlines a plausible progression in Joseph's understanding. That Joseph progressed in his understanding of the book's structure even after D&C 10 seems beyond doubt. Specifically, D&C 10 indicates that he did not understand the separate, unique existence of the small plates of Nephi. This may be viewed as somewhat unusual given that the small plates played a key role as the replacement for the lost manuscript. The wording of D&C 10 does demonstrate, however, an understanding of the book's structure which is consistent with Joseph's understanding at the time.

Was Joseph Smith influenced by the textual description of the Book of Mormon structure or did he influence it? Did his understanding

27. B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 1:218.

28. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946, 1971), 276.

progress because of what he learned from the plates as he dictated or did the structure of the plates he described increase in complexity because his understanding (or imagination) did? Existing evidence seems to allow either construction. It may have been that Joseph learned about the book's structure from the book itself as he dictated it. In that case the revelation he recorded (D&C 10) was slightly incorrect (although consistent with his current understanding). On the other hand, it may have been that the source of information for Nephi and Mormon was the mind of Joseph Smith. In that case Joseph's progression in understanding was reflected in that of Nephi and Mormon. In either case Martin Harris's "perfidy" of June 1828 in losing the Book of Mormon manuscript proved to be the cause of significant unexpected developments not only for the main characters in Joseph's book, but for Joseph himself. For in the beginning Joseph, like Mormon, did not know that there was going to be an additional set of Nephi's plates and, like Nephi, he did not foresee that he would be commanded to write a second record—one concerned more with prophecy than with history.