

ENOS ENCODED: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN THE SMALL PLATES

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There shall be no other name given nor no other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ the Lord Omnipotent.

—Mosiah 3:17; *emphasis added*¹

If the Book of Mormon possesses, in the words of the late Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “divine architecture,” then it follows that one task of theology ought to be to seek God in the structure of the book.² In this vein, Adam Miller argues that “theological readings aim to develop a text’s latent images of Christ.”³ Given that the Book of Mormon is, whatever else it may be, a narrative, then those searching for God in it would do well to pay attention to the ways the text’s narrative structure (i.e., its “divine architecture”) develops “latent images of Christ.” Miller gestures toward a methodology for divining Christ in texts when he writes that

1. All citations from the Book of Mormon come from Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (Yale University Press, 2009). I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, which have served to strengthen my argument. The essay is dedicated to my friend Ken Kohler, who has greatly enriched my appreciation for the Book of Mormon.

2. Neal Maxwell, “The Children of Christ” devotional, Brigham Young University, Feb. 4, 1990.

3. Adam S. Miller, “An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32” (2014), 6, Maxwell Institute Publications 7, Brigham Young University Scholars Archive, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/7>.

the power of theology “derives from its freedom to pose hypothetical questions: *if* such and such were the case, *then* what meaningful pattern would the text produce in response?”⁴ In what follows I offer such a theological reading of the small plates of Nephi, paying particular attention to the book of *Enos*.⁵

My point of departure is the following hypothetical question: What image of Christ emerges if we take Jarom and Abinadom at their word? After receiving the small plates from Enos, Jarom asks, “What could I write more than my fathers have written?” (Jarom 1:2). Given that he does in fact write more, I take his question to be rhetorical, especially since he, too, received revelations and prophesied. Nevertheless, he declares that “the plan of salvation” recorded by his fathers “sufficeth me” (Jarom 1:2). Abinadom similarly states: “that which is sufficient is written” (Omni 1:11). Following Miller’s approach, I assume that when Abinadom writes “that which is . . . written,” he refers to the record of the small plates up through *Enos*. My task is therefore to flesh out the meaningful pattern that emerges from the small plates when we begin with this assumption.

Using the tools of narratological analysis, I will show how Enos’s experience configures the narrative of the small plates in a way that highlights its underlying transformative ethos. The narrative desires not just that readers be convinced that Jesus is the Christ (see the Book of Mormon title page), but also that they be transformed by entering into a particular sort of relationship with Him. Enos models how to do this through his wrestle before God.

To aid the reader in following my argument, I offer an overview of the sections that follow. In the first section, I introduce key

4. Miller, “Experiment,” 4.

5. To avoid confusion, I will refer to names of people in Roman text and books named after people in italics. Thus, Enos refers to the man, *Enos* to the book named after him. However, when citing scriptural sources, I will use Roman text: e.g., Enos 1:2.

narratological terms that inform my interpretation of the small plates. These terms help flesh out some of the narrative implications of the language used by Jarom and Abinadom. In this section I also briefly explain how the small plates make use of the hermeneutic and proairetic narrative codes, drawing on the work of literary theorist Roland Barthes. In the second and third sections, respectively, I develop a hermeneutic reading of the small plates (with an emphasis on the vision of Lehi in 1 Ne. 1, which gives the small plates a narrative beginning) and a proairetic reading of *Enos*. These two sections contain the meat of my argument. Whereas the hermeneutic reading is concerned with the enigmatic figure that Lehi sees in the opening chapter of the small plates, I will show how the text traces an emerging awareness among the Nephites that this figure is the promised Messiah, who is ultimately identified with Jesus. The proairetic reading will focus on Enos's wrestle, which is both (1) inspired by his father's preaching about the gathering of Israel and (2) framed as a ritualistic sacrifice. It is in the relationship between the hermeneutic and proairetic codes where the transformative ethos of the small plates is most clearly manifest. In the fourth section, I explore some of the implications of reading Enos's wrestle through a sacrificial lens before offering some concluding remarks.

Enos and the Small Plates: A Methodological Primer

To understand how Enos's experience configures the narrative of the small plates, it is important to lay out the narratological concepts that inform my analysis. The first is what narrative scholar Peter Brooks calls the sense of an ending and its role in creating narrative meaning: "The sense of a beginning . . . must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending. We might say that we are able to read present moments—in literature and, by extension, in life—as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give

them the order and significance of plot.”⁶ Narrative meaning is a function of the relationship between the component parts of a narrative like its beginning and its ending. Endings specifically have structuring power; they link the parts of a narrative together in a way that allows meaning to emerge. Implicit in Jarom and Abinadam’s language of sufficiency is the claim that *Enos* endows the small plates with the sense of an ending. As such, what happens in *Enos* retrospectively conditions how we understand the beginning of the small plates (even after having already read the beginning). In this way, *Enos* gives the narrative of the small plates the “order and significance of plot.”

The second narratological concept, coherence, is related to the first. According to the literary scholar H. Porter Abbot, there is a long-standing assumption in the history of interpretation that narratives possess “some kind of deep coherence.” Narratives are, in other words, “‘whole’ in the sense that everything in a narrative somehow *belongs* and contributes to its meaning.”⁷ Narrative meaning may be a function of the relationship between the different parts of a narrative, as Brooks explains, but it is also predicated on the assumption that these parts logically cohere. The assumption that the small plates constitute a coherent whole means that their beginning and end contribute to their meaning. Given that the small plates contain numerous books and authorial voices, the argument that they constitute a coherent whole is not immediately apparent. Sharon J. Harris has recently argued that *Enos* is a written instantiation of an oral text.⁸ As an anonymous reader of my essay remarked, one implication of Harris’s argument is that *Enos* could be viewed as a “freestanding” book, one that could be

6. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 94.

7. H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93.

8. “Enos as Every-body,” in *A Wrestle Before God: Reading Enos 1*, edited by Adam Miller (Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar, 2024), 1–10.

read as narratively independent of the small plates. As intriguing as Harris's argument and its implications are, the reading I propose in this essay would be completely elided if we read *Enos* as separate from the small plates. Reading the small plates as a narrative whole thus allows us to see important insights that would otherwise be obscured.

The third narratological concept, closure, is also related to the first. Philosopher Noël Carroll has argued that "closure yields a feeling of completeness. When the storyteller closes her book, there is nothing left to say."⁹ Whereas Brooks's point about endings is that they structure narratives and thus contribute to the production of narrative meaning, closure broaches the terrain of emotion. The feeling of completeness implies a sense of satisfaction that the storyteller has said what she wanted to say. Jarom and Abinadom's language, which is remarkably similar to Carroll's, suggests they are satisfied with the way *Enos* completes the small plates. Even though there is more text that comes after *Enos*, it is *Enos* that provides a sense of closure.

What is it about the closure in *Enos* that Jarom and Abinadom find so satisfying? Sharon J. Harris offers a clue when she points to the dictation order of the Book of Mormon: "Mormon may have organized the record [the Book of Mormon] so that these [*Enos*, *Jarom*, *Omni*] constituted its final message, the last statement that would eventually go to the remnant of the house of Israel."¹⁰ The implication of the Book of Mormon's dictation order is clear for Harris: "In the small plates we find the deepest and richest expansion of the whole covenantal story."¹¹ I share Harris's sense of the importance of the small plates, especially as they relate to God's covenant with the house of Israel, though I believe *Enos* is unique among the "itty bitty" books in providing a sense of

9. Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007): 2.

10. Sharon J. Harris, *Enos, Jarom, Omni: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Neal A. Maxwell Institute), 7.

11. Harris, *Enos*, 7.

narrative closure.¹² I will return to these issues below. For now, I want merely to draw attention to the narrative (and theological) significance implicit in the structure of the small plates.

The three narratological terms adduced above help explain the narrative implications of Jarom and Abinadom's language about the sufficiency of the small plates up through *Enos*. Specifically, they serve to justify treating the small plates as a single coherent narrative, one that can be read in meaningful ways, and they highlight the role of *Enos* in configuring the plates' narrative meaning. In this way, they lay the preliminary groundwork for my reading of the small plates.

When we turn to the text itself, what stands out is that the small plates open with Lehi's vision of an unidentified figure and close with Enos's repeated prayers, which he describes as a wrestle before God. The sense of a beginning in the small plates is thus marked by mystery and unanswered questions, and the sense of the plates' ending is marked by actions that succeed each other in rapid sequence. As Roland Barthes explains in his literary theory book *S/Z*, questions correspond to the hermeneutic code and actions to the proairetic code, both of which codes foment the reader's desire to know how the story will go.¹³ I will address the role of each code in turn as it relates to the small plates. To illustrate the hermeneutic code, Barthes points to the title of Balzac's novella: "SARRASINE * The title raises a question: *What is Sarrasine?* A noun? A name? A thing? A man? A woman? This question will not be answered until much later, by the biography of the sculptor named Sarrasine. Let us designate as *hermeneutic code* (HER) all the [textual] units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate

12. The "itty bitty" language comes from Harris, *Enos*, 2.

13. As Brooks states, "The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is hence desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative." Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 52.

the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution.”¹⁴ In the small plates, Nephi activates the hermeneutic code when he introduces his reader to a mysterious figure whom his father sees and whose identity is not immediately known: “One descending out of the midst of heaven” (1 Ne. 1:9). Whether intentionally or not, Nephi creates narrative suspense by withholding the identity of the unknown figure and thus induces the reader to keep reading.¹⁵ The satisfaction of that desire comes as the reader learns over the course of the small plates that this figure is the Messiah, who is also the Holy One of Israel, who is, ultimately, Christ.¹⁶ Nephi gestures toward this chain of identity when he writes of “that day . . . [when] they shall believe in Christ and worship the Father in his name . . . and *look not forward any more for another Messiah*” (2 Ne. 25:16; emphasis added).¹⁷ In other words, the resolution of the enigma surrounding the mysterious figure that Lehi sees culminates with (the revelation of) Christ. By fomenting his readers’ desire to keep reading through his use of the hermeneutic code, Nephi seeks from the outset of his record to narratively bring his readers to Christ.

There is more to the story, though, than the revelation of Christ’s identity as the One Lehi sees in vision. The hermeneutic code in 1 Nephi may drive the reader toward Christ, but it does not constitute the ending that retroactively configures the meaning of *Christ*. This

14. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller (Hill and Wang, 1974), 17.

15. Given the fact that Nephi begins writing the small plates thirty years after arriving in the promised land, a case can be made that he intentionally withholds the identity of the figure his father sees.

16. The chain of identification includes myriad more names/titles. See Susan Ward Easton, “Names of Christ in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, July 1978, 60–61; and Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 2009).

17. If 2 Ne. 25:16 gives us Christ = Messiah, 2 Ne. 1:10 gives us Holy One of Israel = Messiah.

function belongs to the book of *Enos*. And, notably, *Enos* draws heavily on the proairetic code. Literary critic Dino Felluga offers a clear definition and example of the proairetic code: “The proairetic code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. For example, a gunslinger draws his gun on an adversary and we wonder what the resolution of this action will be. We wait to see if he kills his opponent or is wounded himself. Suspense is thus created by action rather than by a reader’s or a viewer’s wish to have mysteries explained.”¹⁸ The clearest example of the proairetic code in *Enos* can be seen in what Benjamin Keogh calls Enos’s “prayer cycles.”¹⁹ Although *Enos* himself frames his experience as a singular wrestle, the text clearly distinguishes four separate cycles that are repeated in quick succession and that involve an immediate resolution of an action (i.e., Enos receives an answer to his prayers even if the fulfillment of that answer lies in the future). Unlike the case of 1 Nephi, in which the identity of the figure that Lehi sees is only resolved after substantial textual delay, the reader is not kept waiting for the Lord’s responses to Enos’s prayers.

This repetition of resolution points up an important function of the proairetic code in *Enos*. Every time the Lord answers his prayer, Enos turns around and prays again. In a sense, they are bound up in a positive reward loop—the satisfaction of Enos’s desire augments his desire, which leads to further satisfaction. But the process does not just augment desire, it redirects it.²⁰ After praying for himself, Enos then prays for the Nephites and finally again for the Lamanites. Like Lehi after he tastes the fruit of the tree, Enos, too, turns outward when the fruit of his labor (prayer) produces its own variety of sweet fruit.

18. Dino Felluga, “Modules on Barthes: On the Five Codes,” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Jan. 31, 2011, Purdue University, accessed Apr. 25, 2024, <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/narratology/modules/barthesplot.html>.

19. Benjamin Keogh, “Re-Reading: Enos, God, and Conversation,” in Miller, *A Wrestle Before God*, 97.

20. See Harris, *Enos*, 29–30.

Perhaps more important than augmenting Enos's desire, the process also changes him. As Enos himself recognizes, his "faith began to be unshaken in the Lord" (Enos 1:11). This change gets at what is perhaps the most important function of the proairetic code in *Enos*. Although the Book of Mormon's stated interest is convincing Jew and Gentile that "JESUS is the CHRIST" (see the title page)—an identification encouraged by Nephi's use of the hermeneutic code—Enos shows what it looks like to enter into a relationship with Christ. In this way, his wrestle serves to underscore the underlying transformative ethos of the small plates.

The Radical Novelty of "Christ": A Hermeneutic Proposition

When the Book of Mormon was first published to the world, much was made of its doctrinal congruence with the Bible.²¹ On one point, however, it was decidedly incongruent; namely, that of its "pre-Christian knowledge of Christ," which Terryl L. Givens identifies as "one of the most radical and pervasive themes in the Book of Mormon."²² The book's own authors, as Adam Miller has argued, were "extraordinarily self-conscious about their peculiar, anticipatory brand of pre-Christian Christianity."²³ NepHITE Christianity makes its appearance early in the

21. See Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 186.

22. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 199. On the Book of Mormon as a Christological text, see Jay E. Jensen, "The Precise Purposes," in *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator*, edited by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 25–36; Robert L. Millet, "'The Most Correct Book': Joseph Smith's Appraisal," in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, edited by Gaye Strathairn and Charles Swift (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2007), 55–71.

23. Adam S. Miller, *An Early Resurrection: Life in Christ before You Die* (Deseret Book, 2018), 2.

text. As Givens has noted, there is a significant shift in language from a preference for “Messiah” in 1 Nephi to a preference for “Christ” in 2 Nephi.²⁴ The shift may seem like just a matter of semantics, given that the two terms mean the same thing (“anointed one” in Hebrew and Greek, respectively). However, whatever the concerns raised by the small plates’ distinction between “Messiah” and “Christ”—both in terms of historical claims and translation theory—the fact of the matter remains that they treat “Christ” as a novel expansion of the Nephites’ understanding of messianism.²⁵ For his part, Givens sees the shift in language as theologically resonant. More than mere rhetoric, he argues, it underscores the Book of Mormon’s radical reconfiguration of covenant theology.²⁶ Indeed, the revelation of “Christ” substantially

24. See Teryl L. Givens, *2nd Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 26–27. This linguistic shift is actually more extensive than Givens states. Of the more than forty references in the Book of Mormon to the “Holy One,” only four appear outside of the small plates, and of these four, only one registers the fuller expression “Holy One of Israel,” namely, when Jesus quotes Isaiah in 3 Nephi 22:5. (The other three occur at Alma 5:52, Helaman 12:12, and Mormon 9:14.) By way of comparison, “Holy One of Israel” occurs over thirty times in the Old Testament and not a single time in the New Testament. Of the seventy some references to the “Lamb” or “Lamb of God,” only nine occur after Omni. Skousen prefers “Lamb” instead of “Lord” at 1 Nephi 13:24. He also counts an additional reference to “the Lamb” at 1 Nephi 13:34. See Skousen, *Book of Mormon*, 749. The only two references to “Messiah” outside the small plates are in Mosiah 13:33 and Helaman 8:13.

25. In a sense, “Christ” in the small plates functions more like a proper noun than a title. When Nephi and Jacob use it, they are always referring to a specific individual. It was only after I began this essay that I became aware of James Faulconer’s interview with the Neal L. Maxwell Institute, in which he makes the same point about the novelty of Christ as the Messiah in the Book of Mormon. See Blair Hodges, interview with James E. Faulconer, Neal L. Maxwell Institute, MIPodcast 106, Apr. 17, 2020, <https://mi.byu.edu/mip-bti-faulconer/>.

26. See Givens, *2nd Nephi*, 19–27.

reconfigures Nephite messianism, reorienting both the Nephites' religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy.²⁷

As revolutionary as Nephite messianism may be, it does not appear tout à coup in the Book of Mormon.²⁸ Rather, Nephi presents it as an emergent phenomenon, showing how an Israelite family from circa 600 BC came to link "the covenants of the Lord" to a figure, Christ, who, at least by this name, was not necessarily familiar to them.²⁹ Nephi does this by making use of the hermeneutic code. In the opening chapter of the Book of Mormon, he describes Lehi's vision of "One descending out of the midst of heaven" (1 Nephi 1:9). Although subsequent textual clues will link this figure to Jesus, and despite the tendency of many a modern reader probably to do so from the outset, strictly speaking, the text is rather vague at this point.³⁰ Nephi underscores this sense of vagueness with an indefinite article a few verses later to describe Lehi's learning about "the coming of *a* Messiah" (1 Nephi 1:19; emphasis added). Reading the indefinite article against the grain of emergent Nephite messianism, Joseph M. Spencer offers a fascinating analysis of Nephi's

27. For example, the Nephites continued to live the Law of Moses even as they taught their children "the deadness of the law" in order that their children "may look forward unto that life which is in Christ"? (2 Nephi 25:27).

28. Joseph M. Spencer, *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* (Greg Kofford Books, 2021), 58.

29. The phrase "covenants of the Lord" comes from the Book of Mormon title page. I will use the term *Nephite messianism* in this essay to refer to the Nephites' brand of messianism that identifies Christ as *the* Messiah.

30. The fact that a modern reader steeped in Christian codes would associate the figure with Jesus from the outset does not necessarily undermine the sense of suspense created by the hermeneutic code. The hermeneutic code is part of the structure of the small plates that exists independently of readerly assumptions. People reread familiar stories all the time, even when they know how the stories end. Consider mystery novels, the paradigmatic example of the hermeneutic code. The enduring popularity of a work like Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* suggests that knowledge of how a story ends does not diminish readerly interest in it.

report of Lehi's messianic prophecies in the context of Jerusalem at the time of Josiah. Notably, Spencer grounds his interpretation on Lehi's audience. Had Lehi's audience "been universally aware of a strong prophetic tradition focused on the then still-future coming of Jesus Christ," writes Spencer, "it would have made sense for the narrative to report on Lehi's prophecies regarding *'the Messiah.'*"³¹

Where Spencer reads the indefinite article in the context of seventh and sixth century BC Jerusalem, I read it in the context of the narrative of the small plates. From a strictly textual perspective, it is not necessary to determine whether Lehi means Jesus Christ when he prophesies of a messiah. Indeed, in 2 Ne. 11:2–3, Nephi excludes his father from the list of those who had seen the "Redeemer" (who is implicitly linked to Christ later in the chapter). Whether or not Lehi has in mind *the* Messiah, Nephi clearly *is* invested in resolving the textual ambiguity in this direction, though he also postpones the resolution of the question. When he first reports his father's vision of "One descending out of the midst of heaven" (1 Ne. 1:9), his reader finds herself in the position of Barthes from the Sarrasine example above: full of questions. Who is this One? Given that he descends from heaven, is he the God sitting upon his heavenly throne from the previous verse? Subsequent verses only serve to proliferate questions: Who are the twelve that Lehi sees? Are they Jesus's twelve apostles? What is the book Lehi is bid to read? Who is the unnamed messiah in the book? Is it the One who gives him the book? Notably, Nephi does not initially provide any answers to these questions. In fact, he even intentionally withholds information: "I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written" (1 Ne. 1:16). On balance, 1 Nephi is full of questions that Nephi implicitly poses but does not answer. Narratively, these unanswered questions create suspense and compel the reader to keep reading.

31. Spencer, *Anatomy*, 59.

In 1 Ne. 10:4, however, Nephi begins to satisfy his reader's desire for answers. He writes, "Six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem—a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews, yea, even a Messiah, *or in other words, a Savior of the world*" (emphasis added). Again, the repetition of indefinite articles emphasizes the nonspecificity of the figure in question. However, Nephi immediately includes the parenthetical expression "or in other words," indicating that he recognizes that the link between *Messiah* and *Savior* was not obvious, and that he needed to clarify the unorthodox, or at least unfamiliar, idea.³² Similarly, in verses 5 and 6 he adopts demonstrative adjectives rather than definite articles to make the same rhetorical point: "*this* Messiah," "*this* Redeemer," "*this* Redeemer." Not until he uses a definite article in verse 7—"the Messiah"—does he linguistically normalize for his readers the titles/roles of the Jewish prophet his father had seen. In this way, Nephi's development of Nephite messianism is reflected in his manipulation of the hermeneutic code.

The complete satisfaction of readerly desire does not come from Nephi but Jacob, who, like his brother, uses language that points to the Nephites' emerging awareness of Christ as central to their understanding of messianism. In his first recorded discourse to the people, Jacob interrupts his message about Christ's mission with a parenthetical explanation about His name: "Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—that he should come among the Jews, among they which are the more wicked part of the world. And

32. The small plates contain other similar gestures of rhetorical clarification. In 1 Nephi 11:33, the angel shows Nephi the "apostles of the Lamb." Nephi then adds the phrase "for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord," as though such knowledge were unfamiliar. Likewise, Lehi learns about multiple key doctrines, including the scattering of Israel and the fall of Lucifer, only after reading the brass plates. His expressions "for it appears" in 1 Ne. 22:3 and "I . . . must needs suppose" in 2 Nephi 2:17 both suggest the information he is learning is new to him and his family.

they shall crucify him—for thus it behooveth our God—and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God” (2 Ne. 10:3). I have already addressed how the small plates use the term “Christ” as something other than a title comparable to “Messiah.” What interests me here is what Jacob’s language suggests about who knew what when. His audience is apparently hearing the name Christ for the first time, else why explain what “Christ” means if they already know? Jacob, too, however, indicates that he had only learned Christ’s name the previous night. Although an angel had revealed the name Jesus Christ previously to Nephi (in 1 Ne. 12:18, 1830 ed.), according to Royal Skousen, Nephi never shares it with Jacob.³³ Had Jacob learned the name previously from his brother, or from reading the plates, why mention the angel but not these sources? In short, the language of the small plates underscores my view that Nephite messianism, including especially the central position of (Jesus) Christ therein, is an emergent phenomenon.

The hermeneutic code is not the only element of Nephi’s narrative that emphasizes the emergent nature of the Nephites’ Christ-centric messianism. The structure of the narrative itself accomplishes the same task. As the reader follows the story of the Book of Mormon’s original family, she accompanies them virtually on their journey toward their awakening to Christ.³⁴ By doing so, she experiences her own sort of

33. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, part 1 (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 258–59. It should be noted that the reference to “Jesus Christ” at 1 Ne.12:18 in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon is replaced by “the Messiah” in the 1837 edition. The current edition used by the LDS Church retains the same language as the 1837 edition.

34. To be sure, within the narrative structure, each character makes his own unique contribution. Thus, Lehi emphasizes the redemptive role of a Messiah, Jacob learns the Redeemer’s name is “Christ,” and Nephi ends his record with the small plates’ most elaborate articulation of “the doctrine of Christ” (see 2 Nephi 31). My point is that the reader is present for each of the contributions and sees them as part of a single unveiling story.

vicarious awakening to Christ.³⁵ Nephi encourages this attitude of narrative identification by adopting the technique of *mise-en-abyme*.³⁶ In 1 Ne. 1 he begins a record about a Messiah and His redemptive role vis-à-vis the House of Israel with an account of a patriarch from the House of Israel reading a book about “the coming of a Messiah and also the redemption of the world” (1 Ne. 1:19). Lehi and the reader thus come to learn that Christ is the Messiah through their respective and related reading experiences—Lehi by reading the book given him by one of the twelve (1 Ne. 1:11) and the reader by reading the story of Lehi (i.e., the small plates). The Book of Mormon is, as they say, meta.

Undergirding the narrative structure of the small plates is a geographic logic that contributes to the emergence of Nephite messianism. The farther the Lehtes (and later the Nephites) travel from the Holy Land, the clearer and more developed their understanding of Christ becomes. Consider the following progression. While still in Jerusalem, Lehi sees a vision of an oblique “One descending out of the midst of heaven” and learns about “the coming of a Messiah” (1 Ne. 1:9, 19). Then, while wandering *away* from Jerusalem in the wilderness, he learns that this Messiah will be “a Savior of the world” (1 Ne. 10:4). This Messiah is further linked to the Lamb of God, and by the end of

35. In narratological terms, Nephi avails himself of two key operations described by Paul Ricoeur: emplotment and configuration. Ricoeur defines emplotment as “a synthesis of heterogeneous elements . . . , the events or incidents which are multiple and the story which is unified and complete” (21). In the small plates, the revelation of “Christ” is the synthesizing element around which Nephi and the other authors construct their narrative. In this sense, if we look closely at their narrative decisions, we see that they point to this central element of emplotment. As for the reader’s vicarious reawakening to Christ, consider the following remark by Ricoeur: “Following a narrative is reactualizing the configuring act which gives it its form” (27). Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood (Routledge, 1991), 20–33.

36. On identification, see Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Blackwell, 2008), 23–50.

his life, Lehi appears to have a fuller and more established understanding of this “Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God,” though he never explicitly connects this figure to “Christ” (2 Ne. 1:10). Only after the family is settled (initially, albeit temporarily) in the New World does Jacob reveal the name of “Christ” to the people. This revelation is followed by yet further wandering in the wilderness until the Nephites settle down in the Land of Nephi (a *new new* Promised Land?). Only at this point, with the Nephites at their furthest remove from their home Holy Land, does Nephi pen the small plates’ most extensive excursus on the doctrine of Christ in 2 Ne. 31. As Spencer has observed, “only in a radically new setting could a pre-Christian Christianity get off the ground.”³⁷ Indeed, Nephi seems to argue that with a new promised land comes a new covenant.³⁸ Perhaps not surprisingly then, he draws heavily on the Exodus pattern in the construction of his narrative, as George S. Tate has shown.³⁹ In doing so, Nephi weaves together the Old World covenant of the Bible and the New World covenant of the Book of Mormon into a common tapestry of God’s salvific work.⁴⁰ This weaving together of the two covenants

37. Spencer, *Anatomy* 63. Spencer further argues that the Israelite’s failure to understand Lehi’s “Christian messianism” may be what forced Lehi and his family to flee their homeland in the first place (63).

38. This new covenant does not replace the old one so much as it subsumes it. See chapter 2 of Givens, *2nd Nephi*.

39. George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, edited by Neal E. Lambert (Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University, 1981), 245–262. Another example is the way Lehi draws on Moses’ final address in Deuteronomy for his own final words to his family. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 26–35.

40. In Tate’s words, “[the Book of Mormon’s] typology is more conscious because the narrators are understood to possess the Christological key to the fulfillment of the types.” Tate, “Typology,” 257.

appears with exceptional potency in the account of Enos, to which I now turn.

Wrestling Before God: A Proairetic Transformation

At first glance, there are obvious similarities between the way Nephi opens 1 Nephi and the way Enos begins his account. As Harris has observed, both are hunters, both begin their writings with first-person pronouns, and both mention the influence of their parents.⁴¹ (In his case, Enos only mentions his father.) If we accept that Enos draws on these similarities intentionally, then a fundamental difference between his and Nephi's writing styles becomes more significant. Nephi avails himself of the hermeneutic code, implicitly posing numerous questions that he does not immediately answer, as a way of driving the narrative. For his part, Enos favors the proairetic code. He drives the narrative by recounting the various actions he undertakes, including four consecutive prayers that all receive an answer in short order. Whereas Nephi's narrative choices are aimed at identifying the Messiah, Enos's emphasize his wrestle before God, an experience that will transform his relationship not just with God but also with his brethren (Nephites and Lamanites).

Scholars have emphasized the importance of Enos's experience in different ways. Elizabeth Brocious and Benjamin Keogh, for example, both emphasize the formulaic nature of Enos's prayers. Brocious sees Enos's conversion narrative as a unique take on the idea of *ordo salutis*—the logical sequence of steps in salvation—from Christian (specifically Reformed) theology.⁴² In addition to Enos's, the Book of Mormon collects other formulaic conversion narratives and in this sense functions

41. Harris, *Enos*, 22.

42. Elizabeth Brocious, "Elements of Salvation: The Pattern of Conversion in Enos and Other Book of Mormon Narratives," in Miller, *Wrestle Before God*, 53–76.

as “a sort of *salutis* history.”⁴³ Keogh argues that Enos’s “prayer cycles” reflect a chiastically structured, ongoing conversation with God. As Enos accepts God’s invitation to keep the conversation going, not only does he draw closer to God, but he also enters into a covenant with God that reorders his relationship to God.⁴⁴ For her part, Harris emphasizes the covenantal resonance of *Enos*, specifically the covenant involving the House of Israel, even going so far as to note the “temple-like overtones” of Enos’s experience.⁴⁵

Like Brocious and Keogh, I believe the formulaic nature of *Enos* matters, though I would draw attention to the way it highlights the proairetic code. Enos’s actions—which include soul-hungering (v. 4), crying in mighty prayer (v. 4), raising his voice to the heavens (v. 4), pouring out his whole soul (v. 9), and praying “with many long struggles” (Enos 1:11)—reveal not only the intensity of his desire, but the manifestation of that intensity in deed. At the same time, the reader also finds her (narrative) desire aroused and then satisfied as each of Enos’s actions creates suspense—Will God answer? What will He say?—that is then immediately resolved. There is satisfaction in knowing both *that* God answers Enos’s prayers and *how* He answers them. In this way, the proairetic code in *Enos* drives the narrative by satisfying the reader’s desire to know what happens next, in contrast to the hermeneutic code in Nephi’s writing, which ties desire to knowledge, not action.

As with Jarom and Abinadom, the reader’s narrative satisfaction is bound up with the theological implications of Enos’s experience. To understand what is at issue in Enos’s wrestle, I will contrast my view with what we might call the common view sometimes found in scholarly commentary and, at least in my experience, Sunday school classes. The common view tends to make two assumptions: (1) Enos’s wrestle

43. Brocious, “Elements of Salvation” 76.

44. Keogh, “Re-Reading.”

45. Harris, *Enos*, 25.

is a metaphor for prayer, and (2) his prayer is part of the repentance process.⁴⁶ We can render this view as an analogy: Wrestle : remission of sins :: Prayer : forgiveness of sins. The analogy makes sense in light of Enos 1:2, 4–5. Unfortunately, this view has led some—perhaps in an effort to make Enos’s experience relevant to modern readers (see 1 Ne. 19:23)—to smuggle in certain assumptions, arguing backward from Enos’s remission of sins to his presumed motivation for praying in the first place. For instance, Bruce Satterfield precedes his quotation of Enos 1:2 with the following assertion: “Once Enos recognized his fallen spiritual condition, he began to repent.”⁴⁷ This phraseology posits Enos’s decision to repent as conditional upon the prior recognition of his fallen condition. However, Enos does not frame the matter this way. Notice the chain of correlation suggested by the repetition of the conjunction “and”: “I went to hunt beasts in the forest, *and* I remembered the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life and the joy of the saints; *and* the words of my father sunk deep into my heart, *and* my soul hungered, *and* I kneeled down before my Maker, *and* I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul” (Enos 1:3–4; emphasis added). Enos kneels to pray not ostensibly because of the perceived gap between him and God—a gap opened

46. See Dennis L. Largey, “Enos: His Mission and His Message,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 141–156, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-jacob-through-words-mormon-learn-joy/enos-his-mission-his-message>. Emphasis in the original. On this view, the image of wrestling points up the nature or extent of Enos’s exertion.

47. Bruce Satterfield, “The Paradigm of Enos,” available on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed Apr. 4, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210413104516/https://emp.byui.edu/SATTERFIELDDB/Papers/Paradigm%20of%20Enos.htm>.

up by his sinfulness—but in response to his father’s message that sunk deep into his heart.⁴⁸

What, then, did Jacob say that so impacted Enos, and how do his words affect our understanding of Enos’s wrestle? The key phrase from Enos 1:3 is “joy of the saints.” Harris finds echoes of these words in Psalm 132 and links Enos’s wrestle to the Abrahamic covenant. Specifically, she understands Enos’s wrestle as a ritualistic sacrifice in which he offers his soul to God through his broken heart and contrite spirit.⁴⁹ I share Harris’s view of the importance of the covenant as well as her understanding of Enos’s wrestle as an offering. However, in place of Psalm 132, I propose 2 Nephi 9:18, which references both the saints and their joy, as the source for Jacob’s words: “But behold, the righteous, the *saints* of the Holy One of Israel, they which have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they which have endured the crosses of the world and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and their *joy* shall be full forever” (emphasis added).⁵⁰ The broader context of Jacob’s remarks (a two-day discourse spanning 2 Ne. 6–10) comes from Jacob’s gloss of Isaiah and relates to the Abrahamic covenant and Christ’s role in it. Before reading *Isaiah* directly to the people, Jacob is at pains to

48. Keogh offers a middle ground approach when he observes that Enos “is an inheritor of the common [i.e., fallen] human condition.” Keogh, “Re-Reading,” 99.

49. See Harris, *Enos*, 26–29.

50. In this same discourse, Jacob makes numerous references to joy/gladness/happiness (2 Ne. 8:3, 11; 9:3, 14, 43, 51, 52) and saints (2 Ne. 9:19, 43). David R. Seely also identifies 2 Nephi 9:18 as the source text for Enos 1:3, but he seems content to highlight Jacob’s definition of a saint and his association of the joy of the saints with eternal life. He does not take up the broader context of Jacob’s words. See David R. Seely, “Enos and the Words Concerning Eternal Life,” in Nyman and Tate, *Book of Mormon*, 221–233, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-jacob-through-words-mormon-learn-joy/enos-words-concerning-eternal-life>.

remind them that they are a remnant of the House of Israel (2 Ne. 6:5). He seems to be saying, “pay attention, this pertains to you.”⁵¹ Then after reading *Isaiah*, the first point he makes has to do with God’s covenant relationship with the House of Israel: “I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord, that he hath covenanted with all the house of Israel” (2 Ne. 9:1). In other words, Jacob specifically addresses the scattering and gathering of Israel and the role to be played therein by the Holy One of Israel, whom we know from our analysis of the hermeneutic code to be Jesus Christ.

Jacob’s message about the joy of the saints is thus sandwiched between references to covenants and the House of Israel (2 Ne. 9:1, 53), while everything in between relates to the saving power of Jesus’ atonement. In this way, Jacob orders his remarks to highlight the Atonement as the lynchpin that binds the House of Israel to God through covenants. Verses 41, 42, 45, 50, and 51 all contain injunctions, which culminate with the injunction to “come unto the Holy One of Israel” (i.e., Jesus Christ; v. 51). The theologian Howard Thurman once wistfully declared: “How different might have been the story of the last two thousand years on this planet grown old from suffering if the link between Jesus and Israel had never been severed!”⁵² Anticipating Thurman’s sentiment by some 2,500 years, Jacob rhetorically links the doctrine of the gathering of scattered Israel to the figure of Jesus Christ. And this, I maintain, is the theological context in which Jacob’s message about the joy of the saints sinks deep into Enos’s heart and drives him into the forests where he wrestles before God.

In his description of his wrestle, Enos laces his narrative with references to the Old World, not unlike the way Nephi does in the opening account of his father’s vision. As Matthew L. Bowen notes, there are

51. On Jacob’s gloss of Isaiah, see lecture 12 of Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi’s Record* (Greg Kofford Books, 2016).

52. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Bacon Press, 1976), 16.

“several instances in which Enos utilizes wordplay on his own name, the name of his father ‘Jacob,’ the place name ‘Peniel,’ and Jacob’s new name ‘Israel’ in order to connect his experiences to those of his ancestor Jacob in Genesis 32–33.”⁵³ Similarly, as John Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper note, the expression *before God* in *Enos* 1:2 would be rendered as “*liphney ’el*, literally ‘to the face of God,’” which recalls Peniel, the place where the Old Testament Jacob wrestled.⁵⁴

In one important respect, however, Enos’s language differs from that of the Bible (as well as that of the Book of Mormon in the only other verse that mentions wrestling). Whereas Genesis 32:24 and Alma 8:10 both refer to a wrestle *with* someone, Enos states that he wrestles *before* God.⁵⁵ Thus, as significant as the connections are between Enos and the biblical Jacob, I propose that Enos’s wrestle be read according to a different biblical dynamic; namely, that of sacrifice. Such a reading is justified by Amaleki’s expansion of Enos’s own language. In verse 9, Enos “pour[s] out [his] whole soul unto God” (*Enos* 1:9). Later, Amaleki evokes these words but makes a significant emendation: “come unto Christ . . . and *offer* your whole souls *as an offering* unto him” (*Omni* 1:26; emphasis added). In Amaleki’s reframing of Enos’s experience, *pour out* becomes *offer* . . . *as an offering*. Indeed, the repetition of the verb *offer* only serves to reiterate the sacrificial frame through which Amaleki’s words allow us to read Enos’s wrestle.⁵⁶

Christians in the Book of Mormon operate under two different, if complementary, sacrificial logics. They keep the Law of Moses

53. Bowen, “And There Wrestled a Man,” 152.

54. John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, “Jacob and Enos: Wrestling before God,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 21, no. 5 (2001): 2.

55. Similarly, he refers to his “struggling *in* the spirit” and his “strugglings *for*” the Lamanites, but never to a struggle *with* someone (*Enos* 1:10, 11; emphasis added).

56. In her provocative analysis, Harris frames Enos’s soul offering as an example of kenosis. See Harris, *Enos*, 27–30.

(2 Ne. 5:10; 2 Ne. 11:4; 2 Ne. 25:24) even as it points them toward Christ, who required the sacrifice of a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Ne. 2:7).⁵⁷ Although the Book of Mormon does not offer many details about what the Law of Moses looked like among the Nephites, it seems safe to assume it probably included something resembling the five types of offerings described in the Old Testament.⁵⁸ In *On Sacrifice*, Moshe Halbertal distinguishes between a gift and an offering in the context of biblical sacrifice.⁵⁹ Unlike a gift, which is exchanged between equals, and which establishes an obligation for reciprocation, an offering occurs within a hierarchal structure. Offerings from an inferior (human) to a superior (God) are always marked by the term *minchah*, “something that is brought forward or *laid before*.”⁶⁰ I submit that in wrestling *before* God, Enos effectively gives to God his “own soul” as an offering (*minchah*; Enos 1:4).

Redeeming Relationships

At issue in the sacrificial (re)framing of Enos’s wrestle is a different understanding of Enos’s relationship with God. Indeed, Enos’s experience dramatizes the transition from the Old World model of sacrifice, grounded in the Law of Moses, to the New World model grounded in Christ. According to Halbertal, offerings that occur outside the confines of the Law of Moses carry with them the possibility of rejection and

57. In this sense, Christ reiterates the new sacrifice in 3 Ne. 9:20, he does not introduce it.

58. On the Nephite Law of Moses, see Clark Goble, “What Was the Nephite Law of Moses?,” *Times and Seasons*, July 29, 2016. The five offerings are the burnt offering, peace offering, cereal or meat offering, sin offering, and guilt offering. See Sylvain Romerowski, “Old Testament Sacrifices and Reconciliation,” *European Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2006): 13–24.

59. Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

60. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 10 (emphasis added).

trauma.⁶¹ It will be remembered that Enos may not have been ordained as a priest, and he therefore would not necessarily have possessed the authority to offer sacrifices.⁶² To illustrate the danger inherent in unauthorized offerings, Halbertal points to the examples of Cain, Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu, and Job. As Job recognized, to attract God's notice was risky business.⁶³ Halbertal refers to the "horror of visibility" behind Job's desire for anonymity (see Job 7:12–17).⁶⁴ Better to go unnoticed than risk rejection.

Like the Old Testament examples cited by Halbertal, Enos's experience is also marked by a degree of vulnerability.⁶⁵ That the Lord accepted his offering thus calls for careful consideration. The fact that his sacrifice and its outcome differ from the fatal sacrifice of Nadav and Avihu or the rejection of Cain suggests the broken heart and contrite spirit—mentioned in 2 Ne. 2:7 and 4:32, though not explicitly referred to as a sacrifice until Jesus does so in 3 Ne. 9:20—is a different sort of ritual. To read Enos's soul offering in light of this new Christian ritual has three important implications.

The first relates to Enos's alleged solipsism. By word count alone, *Enos* is an extraordinarily egocentric text. Consider just verse 27, which contains five first-person singular personal pronouns, three possessive adjectives, and two second-person personal pronouns, which all orbit around the gravitational center of rhetoric that is Enos. The ostensible

61. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 15–18.

62. Unlike with Jacob and Joseph, there is no indication that Enos was ordained. See John Tanner, "Jacob and His Descendants as Authors," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Deseret Book; Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 56.

63. See Job 10:11, 16–17. In the Book of Mormon, see also 2 Ne. 9:44 and Jacob 2:10.

64. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 16.

65. Fatimah Salleh, *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These* (By Common Consent Press, 2020), 134.

self-centeredness of the text has not gone unnoticed by commentators. Harris, for example, wonders whether Enos does not suffer from a bit of a savior complex.⁶⁶ Whatever Enos's failings on this front, the interpretive frame of Christian sacrifice allows for an alternative, perhaps more charitable, reading.

Take the aforementioned risk of rejection inherent in sacrifice. As Halbertal has argued, approaching God was something of a doubled edged sword: "The one who is offering a sacrifice wishes to appear before God, to be made visible. . . . And yet being in the spotlight before power can be terrifying."⁶⁷ That risk gave rise to a unique function of ritual; ritual became "a protocol that protects from the risk of rejection."⁶⁸ The cost of such protection, however, was that it "erase[d] the individuation of the one who [was] approaching."⁶⁹ As the example of Enos shows, in contrast to the loss of individuation embedded in the sacrificial logic of the Law of Moses, the Christian ritual of a broken heart and contrite spirit affirms rather than elides the individual. Christ invites all to come unto him, not as some indistinguishable part of a larger group, but each as an irreducibly unique child of God. As with Enos, one must expose one's whole soul to the "piercing eye of the Almighty God" (Jacob 2:10), but doing so prepares one to hear the Lord declare "*thy* sins are forgiven *thee*, and *thou* shalt be blessed" (Enos 1:5; emphasis added).

The second implication concerns love. For Halbertal, "love is a noninstrumental relationship outside . . . the sphere of exchange."⁷⁰ Given that God can always reciprocate a gift with a greater gift, how can man make a genuine sacrifice, one that is an expression of love rather than an effort merely to obtain something else from God? How,

66. Harris, *Enos*, 47.

67. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 15.

68. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 15.

69. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 16.

70. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 22.

in other words, do we escape the logic of the gift cycle and enter into a relationship with God that is not governed by exchange? Drawing on the story of Abraham, Halbertal writes, “The urge to bestow is essential to love, but the loving partner wants that bestowing to be *part* of the relationship and not the *reason* for it.”⁷¹ God desires a relationship with us in which bestowing takes place, but He does not want us to enter into a relationship with him *because* he gives us something. As King Benjamin teaches his people, we are perpetually “unprofitable servants” in the realm of exchange anyway (Mosiah 2:21).

God’s “horrifying request” to Abraham arose in response to the “anxiety of instrumentality” that haunts the gift cycle.⁷² Only a sacrifice as significant as one’s child (or oneself, according to Halbertal) could break out of the gift cycle and be considered an expression of love. Thus, John writes; “God so *loved* the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son” (John 3:16; emphasis added). The gift of His son is an expression of God’s love. Through the Son, He desires that we enter into a relationship with Him, one that is marked by love, not the “anxiety of instrumentality.” Entering into this type of relationship, I maintain, is precisely what Enos exemplifies in his wrestle before God. Updating this dynamic for our times, the late Elder Maxwell reminded us that “the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar” is our will.⁷³ Everything else already belongs to Him. Thankfully, in God’s divine calculus, the offering of our will is sufficient. Thus, Elder Maxwell sounds this hopeful note: “Consecration thus constitutes the only unconditional surrender which is also a total victory!”⁷⁴

71. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 24 (emphasis in the original).

72. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 24.

73. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” Oct. 1995, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1995/10/swallowed-up-in-the-will-of-the-father?lang=eng&abVersion=V01&abName=GLOB88>.

74. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up.”

The third implication of understanding Enos's wrestle as a Christian sacrifice is that the relationship between God's love and sacrifice helps to clarify Enos's remission of sins. If Enos does not set out to receive a remission of sins, why does he receive it? And why does he experience guilt? The common reading of Enos assumes he must have committed some grave sin.⁷⁵ I posit a different explanation. Sylvain Romerowski has argued that the ritualistic protocols associated with Old Testament sacrifices reinforced "a sense of perpetual guilt, of guilt and unworthiness never really dealt with."⁷⁶ Does Enos 1:6 reflect the logic of guilt inherent in Old Testament sacrifices rather than Enos's remorse for some specific infraction he had committed?⁷⁷ If this is the case, it is significant that in asking the Lord, "how is it done?" (Enos 1:7), the Lord points him immediately to his "faith in Christ" (v. 8). Only Christ's infinite and eternal sacrifice (Alma 34:10) can overcome the guilt logic of Old Testament sacrifices, or what Mark Wrathall refers to more broadly as "the entire economic model of justice."⁷⁸ What Enos learns, and what Alma and Amulek will later develop, is the doctrine that Christ's atonement has less to do with the payment of debts than it does with the healing of relationships.⁷⁹ In other words, Christ satisfies the demands of justice and opens up to Enos the means of redemptive mercy.⁸⁰ This is what Keogh means when he says that "covenant

75. President Kimball, for example, wrote: "Like all of us—for none of us is perfect—he [i.e., Enos] had strayed. How dark were his sins I do not know." Qtd. in Satterfield, "Paradigm of Enos."

76. Romerowski, "Old Testament Sacrifices," 21.

77. Incidentally, the presence of guilt may explain why Amaleki interprets Enos's experience the way he does.

78. Mark A. Wrathall, *Alma 30–63: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2020), 82.

79. The language of debts versus healing comes from Wrathall, *Alma 30–63*, 82.

80. See Mosiah 15:9 and Alma 34:14–16.

expresses a relational relocation.”⁸¹ In finding himself thus reoriented to God, Enos really has found “a more excellent way—and all it requires is participation.”⁸²

Enos’s remission of sins thus points us beyond the transactional nature of the economic model of justice. What is more, Enos 1:5 is not the only verse in Restoration scripture that treats the remission of sins in this way. In D&C 110:5, the Lord remits Joseph Smith’s and Oliver Cowdery’s sins as preface to their visions in the Kirtland temple, including their vision of the Savior. Similarly, in D&C 29:3, Joseph and six elders have their sins remitted before they “receive these things.” In none of these cases do the people involved approach the Lord specifically in search of a remission of sins the way, for example, Joseph did on other occasions.⁸³ And yet in each case the remission of sins precedes some significant occurrence. In D&C 110:5, it is accompanied by the Lord’s declaration, “you are clean before me.” In section 29, the Lord declares, “I am in your midst” (D&C 29:5). In these verses, the remission of sins operates as a preparatory or initiatory act for entering into a more intimate relationship with God, a sort of ritualistic cleansing that precedes greater proximity to God.⁸⁴ In this sense, Enos’s experience resonates with the sacrificial purpose of both the Old-World tabernacle and the temples of the Restoration period.⁸⁵

Viewing Enos’s wrestle before the Lord through the lens of sacrifice allows us to see the connection between redemption and relationships.

81. Keogh, “Re-Reading,” 105.

82. Keogh, “Re-Reading,” 105.

83. See Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:29; and Joseph’s 1832 account of the First Vision.

84. There is no reason to see this understanding of the remission of sins as incompatible with the understanding in the common view of Enos, which attributes to him some specific, if unnamed, sin. Both things can be true.

85. In addressing the “temple-like overtones” of Enos’s experience, Harris relates Enos 1:3 to both Psalm 132:12 and D&C 109:80. See Harris, *Enos*, 25.

By offering his soul, Enos opens himself to redemption, which is marked by the ritualistic remission of his sins, and in this way, he enters into a new relationship with God. What is more, the moment he does so, his attention then turns outward to his own people, the Nephites, and then to his brethren the Lamanites, despite his “deeply adversarial relationship” with them.⁸⁶ As the prophet Joseph once said, “A man filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race.”⁸⁷

Conclusion

The small plates are a narratively complex record. For a variety of reasons (e.g., the multiplicity of authorial voices), it can be difficult for readers to follow the plot of the story that the plates tell. By drawing upon the tools and concepts of narratology, I have laid out one (in my view, productive) way of reading them. Understanding the function of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes in the text allows us to see how the narrative both shapes the reader’s understanding of the story and drives her desire to see how the story will end.

What is more, a specific focus on the narrative structure of the small plates reveals certain insights that would otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Nephi’s use of the hermeneutic code gives greater salience to the emergent nature of Nephite messianism, which identifies Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The prevalence of the proairetic code in *Enos* suggests that developing a certain type of relationship with Jesus—through a sacrificial wrestle, in Enos’s case—is more important than just understanding His messianic identity. In this way, the two codes work together by coupling knowledge with action. In this way, they

86. Salleh, *Book of Mormon*, 136.

87. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:227.

underscore the transformative ethos that lies at the core of the small plates.⁸⁸

That the small plates emphasize a transformative ethos places the Book of Mormon in good stead with other religious texts. According to Karen Armstrong, “scriptural traditions prescribe different ways of living in harmony with the transcendent . . . [and] nearly all . . . present us with the human being who has achieved this transformation and achieved a more authentic mode of being.”⁸⁹ If the Book of Mormon was truly written for our day—a claim made not just by modern LDS prophets, but also by the text’s self-conscious prophetic authors—certainly one reason must have to do with its insistence on transforming, and not just convincing, its reader. Indeed, this insistence is woven into the very structure of the record.

88. It is interesting to note that the abridgement of the large plates begins with the discourse of King Benjamin, which culminates with his people’s Christian sacrifice (see Mosiah 4:1–3). Enos’s experience of coming unto Christ *individually* is followed almost immediately by the people of King Benjamin coming unto him *communally* by taking upon them Christ’s name (Mosiah 5:7–8).

89. Joseph Smith made a similar argument about the Book of Mormon’s call to a more authentic mode of being when he declared that one may “get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by [those of] any other book.” Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461. Armstrong traces the waning art of scripture in our modern world to the fact that “instead of reading [scripture] to achieve transformation, we use it to confirm our own views.” Karen Armstrong, “The Lost Art of Reading Scripture,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Summer 2020, <https://tricycle.org/magazine/karen-armstrong-scripture/>.

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