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“O Ye Fair Ones” — Revisited

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“O YE FAIR ONES” — REVISITED

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *The best explanation for the name “Nephi” is that it derives from the Egyptian word nfr, “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” “fair,” “beautiful.” Nephi’s autobiographical wordplay on his own name in his self-introduction (and elsewhere throughout his writings) revolves around the evident meaning of his name. This has important implications for how the derived gentilic term “Nephites” was understood over time, especially among the Nephites themselves. Nephi’s early ethno-cultural descriptions of his people describe them as “fair” and “beautiful” (vis-à-vis the Lamanites). These early descriptions subsequently become the basis for Nephite ethno-cultural self-perceptions. The Nephites’ supposition that they were the “good” or “fair ones” was all too frequently at odds with reality, especially when Nephite “chosenness” was understood as inherent or innate. In the end the “good” or “fair ones” fell (Mormon 6:17-20), because they came to “delight in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). The Book of Mormon thus constitutes a warning against our own contemporary cultural and religious tendency toward exceptionalism. Mormon and Moroni, like Nephi their ancestor through his writings on the small plates, endeavor through their own writing and editorial work to show how the “unbelieving” descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites can again become the “good” and the “fair ones” by choosing to come unto Christ, partaking of his “goodness,” and doing the “good” stipulated by the doctrine of Christ.*

Nephi’s “Good” Name

It has now been over two decades since John Gee first proposed that the name Nephi derives from the Egyptian lexeme *nfr*,¹ the final weak

1 John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189-91; idem, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1-5.

–*r* of which had come to be pronounced as –*i* by Lehi’s time. Since *nfr* indisputably means “good, fine, goodly” (of quality),² “good, fair” (of character)³ and “beautiful, fair” (of appearance)⁴ or “kind” as an adjective, and “beauty,” “good,” “kindness” and “goodness” as a noun,⁵ I posited more than a decade ago⁶ that Nephi created a deliberate wordplay on his own name in his autobiographical introduction:

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

Nephi implies here that his name is appropriate because of his “goodly” parentage and because his father Lehi had inculcated him with his own “learning” — an education which must have included a foundational knowledge of “the *goodness* and mysteries of God.” Nephi’s “goodly” upbringing, in large measure, set him on the trajectory that he describes later in 1 Nephi 2:16,⁷ in which he attains to the “great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” mentioned in 1 Nephi 1:1. Additional evidence for the derivation of Nephi’s name from Egyptian *nfr* and its association with “good” and “goodness” surfaces

2 Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 2000), 131. Hereafter cited as CDME.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971) 2:252–63.

5 CDME, 132. See also Friedrich Junge (*Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction*. 2nd English ed. [tr. David Warburton; Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2005], 338), who cites “nominal derivatives: *nfr* (what is) good, being good, well being, benefactions, goodness, good thing; *n3 nfr.w* (completely spelled) good things, good deeds; *nfr.w* (with semogram stroke or papyrus roll) beauty, goodness.”

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

7 1 Nephi 2:16: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore I did cry unto the Lord and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.”

in 2 Nephi 5:29-31; 33:4, 10, 14;⁸ Mosiah 9:1; and Helaman 5:6-7;⁹ 8:7, among other passages (see below).

Since the meaning of Nephi's name as *nfr* — especially in the senses of "good, fair" (of character) and "beautiful, fair" (of appearance)¹⁰ — has implications for the derived gentilic term "Nephites," I further suggested in a previous study¹¹ that Mormon's lament in Mormon 6 with its plaintive refrain "O ye fair ones" constitutes a wordplay on (or a play on the meaning of) the name Nephi and its gentilic derivative "Nephites":

O ye *fair ones*, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye *fair ones*, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!

Behold, if ye had not done this, *ye would not have fallen*. But behold, *ye are fallen*, and I mourn your loss.

O ye *fair sons and daughters*, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, *ye fair ones*, how is it that ye could have *fallen*! (Mormon 6:17-19)

In support of this thesis, I cited 3 Nephi 2:16; 9:2; and 4 Nephi 1:10 as texts corroborating synonymy between Nephites and "fair ones."

As I will endeavor to show in the study that follows, the Book of Mormon contains considerable additional evidence that the Nephites' self-understanding from an earlier period was that they were — morally, ethically, culturally, religiously — the "good" or "fair ones"

8 Matthew L. Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181-95.

9 Matthew L. Bowen, "He Is a Good Man: The Fulfillment of Helaman 5:6-7 in Helaman 8:7 and 11:18-19," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 165-70. Helaman uses wordplay on "Nephi" in the explanation of the giving of the names of Nephi and Lehi to his sons: "Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you *the names of our first parents* who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that *they were good*. Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do *that which is good*, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them" (Helaman 5:6-7). See also Bowen, "Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," 2.

10 CDME, 131.

11 Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones': An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi," *Insights* 23/6 (2003): 2-3.

vis-à-vis the Lamanites and others. Moreover, this evidence has important implications for the overall message of the books of Nephi and Nephi's small plates as well as for Mormon and Moroni's editorial intent. Book of Mormon writers uniformly problematize the Nephites' view of their own chosenness as an exclusive status.

The Nephites' self-perception that they were the "good" or "fair ones" was often at odds with reality. During times in which Nephite pride waxed strong and righteousness waned, the Nephites perceived their chosenness as intrinsic rather than extrinsic. I will further endeavor to show that wordplay (or play on meaning) involving the name Nephi and Nephites in terms of "good," "better," and "fair ones" constituted a key part of the prophetic rhetoric of Jacob, Jarom, Amaleki, Zeniff, Nephi the son of Helaman, Samuel the Lamanite, Mormon, Moroni, and the Lord himself. It emerges that this prophetic rhetoric had its origin in Nephi's descriptions of his own people, who themselves helped define Nephite self-perceptions.

In the end, the Nephites — the "good" or "fair ones" — "delight[ed] in everything *save that which is good*" (Moroni 9:19). Mormon and Moroni aimed to show their latter-day audience — which would largely consist of descendants of the Lamanites and Nephites — why it was that the "good" or "fair ones" fell. Like their ancestor Nephi, Mormon and Moroni both explain how the "unbelieving" descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites can again become the "good" and the "fair" by choosing to come unto Christ, partaking of his "goodness" and doing the "good" stipulated by the doctrine of Christ.¹² In so doing, they will "return to the Lord from whence they have fallen" (D&C 113:10) and thus be "restor[ed] from their lost and fallen state" (2 Nephi 25:17).

Nephi as the "Good[ly]" or "Fair One"

The term *nfr* is not only a compound in numerous Egyptian names, it also constitutes a common name on its own.¹³ As Gee explains, "It is

12 On Nephi's presentation of the gospel and the doctrine of Jesus Christ by Nephi and his successors, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; idem, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 26–56; "see also idem, "How to Come unto Christ," *Ensign* 22 (September 1992): 7–13; idem, "The Gospel According to Mormon," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68/2 (May 2015): 218–34; idem, "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16/2 (2015): 51–75.

13 Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," 190. He notes that *nfr* "is attested as a man's name from Dynasty 1 through the late period ... and as a woman's name in

the proper form of a proper name of the proper gender from the proper place and proper time."¹⁴ He further observes that "most European and Latin American Latter-day Saints are already pronouncing the name more or less correctly as /nɛfi/ or /nefi/, since originally it was most likely pronounced 'něfě' or 'nāfě' (rhyming with 'heh-fee/hay-fee') rather than the current 'nefi'"¹⁵ — that is, neh-fee, nay-fee.

All of this helps us better appreciate the Lord's commandment to Nephi, as recorded by Nephi himself, when the Lord commissioned Nephi to make the small plates:

And I, *Nephi*, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far. And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven *many things upon them which are good in my sight, for the profit of thy people*. Wherefore, I, *Nephi*, to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things. (2 Nephi 5:29-31)

The Lord's commandment to Nephi "thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight" constitutes a transparent play on Nephi's name and its meaning.¹⁶ Moreover, the Lord was suggesting to Nephi the overarching theme and content of the plates: "good" things "for the profit" of Nephi's people. In other words, the "many things upon them which are good" were to help the people of Nephi live up to the "good" implied in the name Nephi. The observation that the Lord wanted the Nephites to be truly "good" requires no imagination, for he clearly wants all of his children to be good. However, the Nephites were to embody and exemplify "goodness" and to be ambassadors of the "goodness of God" in a special way. The Lord was preparing the Nephites, by virtue of his covenant, to "show forth good examples" to reclaim¹⁷ the Lamanites from their covenant delinquency. The small plates of Nephi were a way to instruct the Nephites how to do and become the "good" he wished them to do and become, and to bring others to "partake of his goodness":

the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom, and Greek period" (note 11).

14 Ibid.

15 Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," 191.

16 Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," 181-82, 194.

17 Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:14, 20; see also 2 Nephi 25:23.

He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit [that is, good]¹⁸ of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Nephi 26:24)

Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden. (2 Nephi 26:28)

*for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and *partake of his goodness*; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)*

Nephi recognized that everything the Lord does is for the “benefit” or “good” of the human family. His invitation is ever to come and “partake of his salvation” or to “partake of his goodness.” The Lord, in “do[ing] that which is good among the children of men” and “invit[ing] all to come unto him,” establishes the model for the human family. Nephi recognized its implications for himself and for the Nephites — the “good” ones — in particular, as pertaining to their brethren, the Lamanites. These statements may have had additional implications for their role among the “others” (Gentiles) in the land of promise.¹⁹

Thus, the Lord’s commandment to Nephi and these statements plausibly explain the content of Nephi’s introduction and conclusion to his own record, which I have described elsewhere as a prominent example of Nephi’s use of *inclusio*:

18 English *benefit* < Old French *bienfet* < Latin *benefactum bene facere*, “to do good.”

19 John Gee and Matthew Roper “‘I Did Liken All Scriptures unto Us’: Early Nephite Understandings of Isaiah and Implications for ‘Others’ in the Land,” in *Fullness of the Gospel: Foundational Teachings of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 51–65.

1 Nephi 1:1 (opening bracket)	2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 (closing bracket)
<i>I, NEPHI</i> having been born of <i>goodly parents</i>, therefore <i>I was taught somewhat</i> <i>in all the learning of my father</i>; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, <i>having had a great knowledge</i> <i>of the goodness</i> <i>and the mysteries of God</i>, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.	And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it <i>persuadeth them to do good</i>; <i>it maketh known unto them of their</i> <i>fathers</i>; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal. (2 Nephi 33:4) And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and <i>they teach all men that they</i> <i>should do good</i>. (2 Nephi 33:10) And <i>you that will not partake</i> <i>of the goodness of God</i>, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:14)

As in 2 Nephi 5, Nephi’s use of “good” terminology in 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 plays on the meaning of his own name and completes the circuit that he began in 1 Nephi 1:1, closing the *inclusio*. Additionally, the mention of “mak[ing] known unto them of their fathers” and “teach[ing] to [do] good” evokes Nephi’s description of the “goodly parents” who “taught” him and instilled in him a knowledge of the “goodness of God.” Of course, the final mention of the “goodness of God” in 2 Nephi 33:14 answers his mention of “the goodness and mysteries of God” in 1 Nephi 1:1.

However, Nephi’s *inclusio* on “good” and “goodness” constitutes far more than an ornamental literary statement on the aptness of the name Nephi for its bearer — the “good[ly]” or “fair” one. Nephi’s *inclusio* frames the narrative history of the separation of the Nephites from the Lamanites and Nephi’s adumbration of the doctrine of Christ. Since Nephi’s small plates were, at least in part, a national political

document,²⁰ doing and learning the “good” that Nephi describes and partaking of the “goodness” of God — that is, adhering to the doctrine of Christ — necessarily distinguished “those who ... did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 5:9) from “the people who were now called Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14). In other words, Nephi’s writings defined what it meant — or at least what it should have meant — to be “Nephite.” While Nephi’s writings demarcated ethno-cultural and religious boundaries for his people, Nephi did not intend these boundaries to be exclusivist,²¹ although many Nephites of later generations seemed to so regard them.²² Nephi’s descriptions of “Nephite”-ness vis-à-vis “Lamanite”-ness gave rise to longstanding Nephite cultural self-perceptions and rhetoric that, during times of Nephite wickedness and apostasy, reinforced false notions of innate or intrinsic chosenness and righteousness.

The “Nephites” as the “Good” or “Fair Ones”

Nephi gives ethno-cultural descriptions of the emergent Nephites in at least two prominent places within his writings. Nephi’s language helped create and define Nephite self-perceptions for many subsequent generations. Nephi records the “grand vision” of the future of his own people and their eventual fall in what now comprises 1 Nephi 11–14. In this vision Nephi sees the latter-day Gentiles whom he characterizes as “exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain” (1 Nephi 13:15).

Similarly, when Nephi later mentions the schism of the Lehiite party into the Nephites and Lamanites, he describes the former as the “exceedingly fair and delightsome” (2 Nephi 5:21) in contradistinction to the latter (2 Nephi 5:21–25). As I have noted elsewhere, Nephi’s cultural descriptions here and in 1 Nephi 12:22–23 become enormously important to his brother Jacob and later Nephite writers who detail Lamanite “unbelief” (a term that perhaps constitutes an appropriation of

20 Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27/4 (1987): 15–37.

21 2 Nephi 25:23 “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren [i.e., the Lamanites], to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God”; Jacob 4:3: “we labor diligently to engraven these words upon plates, hoping that our beloved brethren [i.e., the Lamanites] and our children will receive them with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they may learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents.”

22 See, for example, Alma 26:23–25.

the expression *l'-'mn* in Deuteronomy 32:20 as a pun on "Laman[ites]" but also strongly criticize Nephite exceptionalism.²³

Nephi "seals" his personal writings by testifying that his words persuade and teach all to do good and by exhorting all—especially the Jews and his and his brothers' descendants — to believe in Christ and to "partake of the goodness of God." Jacob then takes up Nephi's good / goodness theme in the early part of his own writings: "Wherefore we labored diligently among *our people* [that is, the people of Nephi], that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of *the goodness of God*" (Jacob 1:7). Jacob, like his brother Nephi, understood that the Nephites could remain truly "Nephite" only to the degree that they gave heed to the "good" doctrine of Christ.

Jacob, in a sermon delivered at the temple in the land of Nephi, chided the wealth-seeking Nephites for pride and immorality. Like Nephi, he emphasized the importance of doing "good" in connection with having "hope" in Christ: "And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and *ye will seek them for the intent to do good*—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted" (Jacob 2:19).²⁴ The "good" that Jacob instructs the Nephites to do here is the "good" that that their pride has prevented them from doing — taking care of their society's most vulnerable members.

Jacob, however, declares that had it not been for "a grosser crime," he would have "rejoiced exceedingly" because of the Nephites: they sought "to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David and Solomon his son" (Jacob 2:22-23).²⁵ In other words, the Nephites — like David and

23 Matthew L. Bowen, "Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 240-63.

24 King Benjamin quotes Jacob 2:19 in his sermon at the temple in Zarahemla: "And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you — that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God — I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding *the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief*, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants" (Mosiah 4:26).

25 See, e.g., 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 11.

Solomon²⁶ were *not* doing “good”²⁷ in their families and in their family relationships.

In contrast to some Nephites during his time and in later years, Jacob understood that Nephite “chosenness”²⁸ was not intrinsic or inherent. It was extrinsic and *was* predicated on covenant obedience. Jacob chided the Nephites — the self-perceived “good” or “fair ones” — for their covenant failure, their “wickedness”:

For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that *the cries of the fair daughters of this people*, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against *the men of my people*, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Jacob 2:31–32)

Here Jacob invokes Nephi’s description of the Nephites as “fair” or “fair ones,” but he notably limits his application of “fair” to the “daughters” — that is, the Nephite women. The Nephite husbands — “the men of my people” — had become, to a great degree neither “good” nor “fair” in terms of their sexual mores and the discharge of their family obligations (“the wickedness and abominations of their husbands”). The conduct of many of the “good” or “fair ones” was in fact “bad”:

26 See, e.g., 2 Samuel 6 LXX and 4QSama 2 Samuel 13:21 (LXX: “But he did not grieve the spirit of his son, Amnon [*kai ouk elupēsen to pneuma Amnon tou huiou autou*; i.e., he did not displease, upset or antagonize Amnon] because he loved him, for he was his firstborn [LXX: *hoti ēgapa auton, hoti prōtotokos ēn*; 4QSama: *ky ḥbw ky bkwrw*]”); 1 Kings 1:6 (“And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?”); 1 Kings 11:1–8.

27 Regarding David’s “taking” of Bathsheba as his wife in 2 Samuel 11:27, the KJV describes the sin thus: “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” The text literally says: “*But* the thing that David had done *was evil* [*wayyēra*] in the Lord’s eyes.” This evil act becomes the basis for the Lord’s “rais[ing] up evil against” David out of his own house — i.e., out of his own family.

28 On the roots of Nephite “chosenness” see 1 Nephi 1:20; 3:29. Samuel the Lamanite alludes to the Nephites’ “chosenness” in Helaman 15:3: “Yea, wo unto this people who are called the people of Nephi except they shall repent, when they shall see all these signs and wonders which shall be showed unto them; for behold, they have been a chosen people of the Lord; yea, the people of Nephi hath he loved, and also hath he chastened them; yea, in the days of their iniquities hath he chastened them because he loveth them.”

Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds. (Jacob 2:35)

Here Jacob initiates an unfavorable comparison of the Nephites with the Lamanites. Of all the sins of which the Lamanites had been guilty, they, unlike the Nephites, had been generally free from the sin of breaking the hearts of their wives and losing the confidence of their children through sexual immorality. By implication, their "bad examples" extended not only to their families, but to the Lamanites themselves. Jacob's "concrete diction"²⁹ and "sensitive style"³⁰ emotively hammer the point home.

A major point, if not the whole point, of the Lord bearing with Nephite covenant disobedience was the prospect of Lamanite reclamation and restoration (see, for example, Enos 1; Jarom 1:2-3). As the "good[ly] ones" or "fair ones," the Nephite men were not "show[ing] forth good examples unto them in me [the Lord]" as Ammon and his brothers (the royal sons of Mosiah) would do years later (Alma 17:11).

On the contrary, the Lamanites were showing forth good examples in their discharge of marriage and family responsibilities. The Lamanites had already become the "better" ones: "Behold, their husbands love their

29 John S. Tanner, "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 25-69; idem, "Jacob and His Descendants as Authors," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 52-66. See especially p. 59: "When Jacob does speak ... he spoke vividly and even eloquently. Notice the concrete words [diction] in the phrase 'instead of *feasting* upon the pleasing word of God [they] have *daggers* placed to pierce their souls and *wound* their delicate minds'; or consider 'the *sobbings* of their hearts ascend up to God. ... Many hearts *died*, *pierced* with *deep wounds*'" (Jacob 2:9, 35; emphasis in the original). He continues, "Here are strong words welded to strong feelings."

30 Ibid. Tanner also notes: "Like many sensitive people, Jacob did not preach harsh messages easily. Many times he openly shared his anxiety with his audience, as in the preface to the temple discourse discussed above. The structure of that sermon may also reflect his reluctance to speak harshly. He first addressed the relatively easy issue (pride) and then, reluctantly, moved to the 'grosser crime,' whoredoms (Jacob 2:22-23)."

wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, *how much better* [literally, good/fair, that is, *nfr*] *are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?*" (Jacob 3:7). Given that both Egyptian and Hebrew form comparatives with an adjective + preposition,³¹ we can discern Jacob playing on the meaning of "Nephi" to trade on the Nephites' self-perception that they were the "good" or "fair ones," especially when contrasted with the Lamanites.

At the outset of his brief record, Jacob's grandson and Enos's son Jarom states that the things/words on "small" plates "are written for the intent of *the benefit* of our brethren the Lamanites" (Jarom 1:2) — that is, written for the *good* (the Latin root *bon-/ben-* in "benefit" means "good") or even the *making good* of the Lamanites.³²

Amaleki too, the final author on Nephi's small plates, concludes his record by recalling and invoking the "good" of which Nephi spoke when he concluded his own writings:

And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and *believe* in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and *in all things which are good*; for *there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord*; and that which is evil cometh from the devil. (Omni 1:25)

Contemporary with Amaleki, the last writer on Nephi's small plates, we have Zeniff's personal writings which Mormon preserved in Mosiah 9–10. Zeniff's autobiographical introduction to his writings, also modeled on Nephi's autobiographical introduction, again demonstrates that the concept of "Nephites" as "good"/"fair ones" continued to define self-perception during this period of Lamanite and Nephite history:

31 Hebrew and Egyptian both create a two-member comparative construction using a regular adjective with a preposition (*m-* or *min* in Hebrew, *r* in Egyptian). See Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:522–23; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 47.

32 Perhaps these ideas are present in the terminology that underlies the translation term *benefit*.

1 Nephi 1:1	Mosiah 9:1
I, NEPHI, <i>having been born</i> of goodly parents, therefore I was taught <i>somewhat in all the learning of my father;</i> and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, <i>having had a great knowledge of</i> the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.	I, Zeniff, <i>having been taught</i> in all the language of the Nephites, and having had a knowledge of the land of Nephi, or of the land of our <i>fathers'</i> first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them — but when <i>I saw that which was good</i> among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed.

Zeniff's self-introduction is remarkable not only for the way he adapts Nephi's autobiography with its onomastic play on "Nephi" and "good," but also for the way in which Zeniff describes his preconceptions of what defined what was essentially "Nephite" vis-à-vis what was essentially Lamanite. Zeniff had been sent as a spy among the Lamanites because of his knowledge of the land of Nephi — presumably he had lived there before the Nephite exodus described in Omni 1:12–19 and because he could blend in among them. The Nephites who were attempting to recolonize the land of Nephi had planned a preemptive strike against the Lamanites. Zeniff himself, however, had a change of heart when he "saw that which was good among" the Lamanites. In other words, Zeniff came to recognize that the Nephites did not have a monopoly on "goodness," as Jacob had emphasized many years previously (Jacob 3; see above). Zeniff's later contention with the leader of the Nephite re-colonists, which led to the slaughter of most of them, and his self-described "overzealous"³³ attempts to re-inherit the land of Nephi on peaceful terms,³⁴ would have later (then unseen) repercussions for Nephite attempts to reclaim

33 Mosiah 9:3; quoted by Limhi in Mosiah 7:21. See further John Gee, "Limhi in the Library," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 54–66.

34 Note the wordplay on "peace" and Shilom in Mosiah 9:5–6: "And it came to pass that I went again with four of my men into the city, in unto the king, that I might know of the disposition of the king, and that I might know if I might go in with my people and possess the land in peace [Heb *šālôm* = "peace"]. And I went in unto the king, and he covenanted with me that I might possess the land of Lehi-Nephi, and the land of Shilom."

and restore the Lamanites from covenant delinquency. For example, “the language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites” by the wicked priests of King Noah (Mosiah 24:4). This development proved to be a necessary precursor to Ammon and his companions’ attempts to teach the Lamanites the gospel a generation later (see Alma 17–27).

Nephite self-perception comes into play again in a prominent way in the same narrative cycle. Mormon later chronicles the struggles and suffering of the Zeniffite-Nephites in the wake of Zeniff’s son Noah’s disastrous rule. When King Noah, his corrupt priests, and some of the Zeniffite men abandoned their wives and families in the face of the Lamanite threat (cf. Jacob’s criticism of the Nephites in Jacob 2–3), some stayed behind and forsook those responsibilities. Mormon’s comment is probably best understood as reflecting Nephite self-perceptions:

And it came to pass that those who tarried with their wives and their children caused that *their fair daughters* should stand forth and plead with the Lamanites that they would not slay them. And it came to pass that the Lamanites had compassion on them, for they were charmed with *the beauty of their women*. (Mosiah 19:13–14)

Just as Zeniff had compassion on the Lamanites because, contrary to all presuppositions, he saw “that which was good among them” (Mosiah 9:1), a generation or so later the Lamanites had compassion on Zeniff’s people because — according to Mormon’s record — the Lamanites recognized (were “charmed with”) what was “fair,” “beautiful,” or “good” (that is, *nfr*) among them.

Another lucid manifestation of the Nephite “good”/“fair” self-perception emerges during the account of Ammon, Aaron, Omner, Himni, and their associates’ mission among the Lamanites. Aaron, the onetime Nephite crown prince who refused to inherit his father’s kingdom, is confronted by an Amlicite/Amalekite while attempting to preach in one of their synagogues:

Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold *are not this people as good as thy people?* (Alma 21:5)

Here it is important to bear in mind that the "Amalekites" in the present text of Alma 21–24, 27, 43 are the "Amlicites" of Alma 2–3,³⁵ and thus Nephite dissenters. The thrust of the Amlicite/Amalekite's language here, including Alma's wordplay on Nephi/Nephite and "good," is this: "we and our religion (after the order of Nehors)³⁶ are every bit as Nephite — and legitimate — as you and your religion." In other words, the Amlicite/Amalekite invokes his "Nephite"-ness as a way to neutralize Aaron's testimony.

The association of the names Nephi and Nephite with the semantic range evident in *nfr* persists well into later Lamanite and Nephite history. Mormon offers a distinctly negative evaluation of the Nephites living during the time of Nephi the son of Helaman. Again, he does so in terms of the meaning of Nephi's name, a play on its meaning being evident in his assessment of Nephite public morality: "For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and *they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good*, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted" (Helaman 5:2).

Mormon's words pointedly allude to Mosiah II's declaration in Mosiah 29:26–27.³⁷ The "time [had] come that the voice of the people chose iniquity." However, Mormon's paraphrastic citation uses the evil/good dichotomy, rather than Mosiah's iniquity/right, which invokes the meaning of Nephi and Nephites as "good[ly] ones." This is later confirmed by Mormon's inclusion of Helaman's explanation of his giving his sons the names Nephi and Lehi, with the clear wordplay on "Nephi"

35 Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1605–09. See also John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 324–25.

36 See especially Alma 21:4: "And it came to pass that Aaron came to the city of Jerusalem, and first began to preach to the Amalekites. And he began to preach to them in their synagogues, for *they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors.*"

37 Mosiah 29:26–27: "Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law — to do your business by the voice of the people. And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land."

(see Helaman 5:6-7).³⁸ The Nephites of this era, by and large, were not choosing or doing the “good” that 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 prescribed, Nephi and Lehi being important exceptions (see the public recognition that Nephi was “a good man” in Helaman 8:4).³⁹

Nephi himself chided the Nephites of Zarahemla who, in his words, had become “lifted ... up *beyond that which is good* because of [their] exceeding riches” (Helaman 7:26). The rhetorical echoes of Nephi’s name and echoes of the admonitions to do “good” that conclude the latter’s personal writings can be further heard in Samuel the Lamanite’s sermon to the wicked Nephites at Zarahemla. This criticism must also be understood in view of the Nephites’ self-perception that they are the “good”/“fair ones”: “ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you” (Helaman 14:31). The well-read Lamanite prophet also uses a wordplay similar to Jacob’s in Jacob 3. Samuel warns “it shall be better [lit. good] for them than for you except ye repent” (Helaman 15:14).

Mormon further states that following Samuel the Lamanite’s sermon atop the walls of Zarahemla and his delivery of several important prophecies regarding Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection, Satan used rumors and contentions among the Nephites “that he might *harden the hearts of the people against that which was good* and against that which should come” (Helaman 16:22). Satan was taking aim at the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31-33) and the prophecies regarding his coming, the belief that had traditionally defined the Nephites vis-à-vis the Lamanites, Nephite dissenters, and others.

Like the Amalekite in the synagogue in which Aaron taught, Giddianhi, “governor” of the Gadianton robbers, uses a rhetorical appeal to the Nephites’ self-perception as “good” or “fair ones” in his letter to Lachoneus, in which he demands the surrender or submission of the Nephites to the Gadianton robbers: “And behold, I am Giddianhi; and I am the governor of this the secret society of Gadianton; *which society and the works thereof I know to be good*; and they are of ancient date and they have been handed down unto us” (3 Nephi 3:9). The Gadianton organization, of course, was “Nephite” in origin — founded amid a

38 Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of the Name Nephi,” 2; idem, “He Is a Good Man,” 165-70.

39 Ibid.

Nephite political crisis by the Nephite Kishkumen⁴⁰ [Kishcumen]⁴¹ and his wicked Nephite associates before their being taken over by the Nephite Gadianton.

The Lamanites, for their part, had become more "Nephite" in many ways than the Nephites themselves at this period of history.⁴² Mormon alludes to traditional Nephite cultural and religious self-understanding, again using wordplay on the name "Nephites" in terms of the concept of *nfr*:

And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly *fair*,
and they were *numbered among the Nephites*,
and were *called Nephites*. (3 Nephi 2:16)

The play on the meaning of Nephi in terms of "fair" occurs in epistrophe or antistrophe — that is, the "repetition of a closing word or words at the end of several (usually successive) clauses."⁴³ The repetition of "Nephites"/"fair" emphasizes the dramatic change in how the converted Lamanites were perceived by those Nephites who remained faithful.

At the time of the destruction that attended the death of Jesus Christ, Mormon reports the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies, including the Nephites' lamentations (see especially Helaman 13:33, 36 and the reported fulfillment in 3 Nephi 8:24-25; cf. Mormon 1:18).⁴⁴ At

40 Helaman 1:9-12; 2:3-14; 6:12.

41 See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Five: Alma 56–3 Nephi 18* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2008), 2881-82.

42 See especially Helaman 5:34-41; 15:3-18; 3 Nephi 6:14; but cf. 3 Nephi 1:28-30.

43 Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 16.

44 Helaman 13:33: "O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us"; Helaman 13:36: "O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, *and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them.*" Mormon reports the fulfillment of the lamentation portion ("O that I/we had repented ...") in 3 Nephi 8:24-25: "And in one place they were heard to cry, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day*, and then would our brethren have been spared, and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out*; then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moroniha. And thus were

least one of those laments included the “fair” language connected with Nephite self-perception: “And in another place they were heard to cry and mourn, saying: O that we had repented before this great and terrible day, and had not killed and stoned the prophets, and cast them out; *then would our mothers and our fair daughters, and our children have been spared*” (3 Nephi 8:25).

Mormon records that the Lord himself used the same language in describing why so many of the Nephites had fallen — or perished — in the cataclysm: “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of *the fair sons and daughters of my people*; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!” (3 Nephi 9:2). We can appreciate the poignancy of the lament in 3 Nephi 8:25 and the Lord’s explanation of the Nephites’ fall: the Lord’s people (“my people”) the “fair ones” had fallen “because of their iniquity and abomination,” sins which included the murdering of the Lord’s prophets (8:25).

Following the Savior’s ministry among “the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared,”⁴⁵ Mormon continues to describe these Nephites and Lamanites in terms that play on the meaning of the name *Nephi* and evoke the traditional Nephite self-description: “And now, behold, it came to pass that *the people of Nephi* did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an *exceedingly fair and delightful people*.” (4 Nephi 1:10). Here, as in 3 Nephi 2, the Lamanites who had fully embraced the Nephite gospel are described as “fair ones.” Mormon’s use of the verb “became” suggests that to be “good,” “fair,” or “Nephite” was (or should have been) more than an exclusive status conferred on one at birth. In other words, one can *become* or *un-become* “chosen” to the degree that one “chooses” or does not choose to embrace Christ’s covenant and the “good” stipulated in the doctrine of Christ.⁴⁶

the howlings of the people great and terrible.” Mormon reports the fulfillment of the “slippery” riches prophecy in Mormon 1:18: “And these Gadianon robbers, who were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again” (Mormon 1:18).

45 3 Nephi 10:18.

46 See David A. Bednar, “Tender Mercies of the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 100–01.

By the end, however (just a few short generations later), the Nephites fell and ceased to be “Nephites” — “good” or “fair ones” — in any meaningful sense. This final, thoroughgoing fall occasioned Mormon’s famous “O ye fair ones” lament (Mormon 6:17-20; see in detail below). As Mormon explained it to his son Moroni, the Nephites of that time “delight[ed] in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19; see below). This in large measure explains Moroni’s exhortation as he wrote the conclusion to his father’s personal writings: “O then ye unbelieving [that is, descendants of the Lamanites and Nephite dissenters] turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day (Mormon 9:6).

Fair Ones Fallen I: “The Slain of the Fair Sons and Daughters of My People”

After Mormon found the small plates of Nephi among the other plates of Nephi — that is, among the larger body of records that “had been delivered into [his] hands,” the former became an important source, resource, and reference for Mormon. Mormon describes the contents of the small plates as “pleasing me.”⁴⁷

The literary dependence of Mormon’s autobiography on Nephi’s biography is evident at several points. For example, Mormon “*began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of [his] people*” (Mormon 1:2), just as Nephi “*was taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father*” (1 Nephi 1:1). Similarly, when Mormon states, “And notwithstanding *I being young, was large in stature*; therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader” (Mormon 2:1), he reminds us of Nephi’s autobiography: “And it came to pass that *I Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature* and also having desires to know the mysteries of God, wherefore *I did cry unto the Lord and he did visit me*” (1 Nephi 2:16). Mormon further has the latter statement in mind when he writes: “*And I, being fifteen years of age and being somewhat of a sober mind, therefore I was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus*” (Mormon 1:15). Mormon clearly has Nephi in mind, playing on the meaning of Nephi’s name in Nephi’s statements: “I, **Nephi**, having been born of **goodly** parents . . . yea, *having had a great knowledge of the goodness* and the mysteries of God”

47 Words of Mormon 1:4.

(1 Nephi 1:1) as well as Nephi's concluding remark about the importance of "partak[ing] of the goodness of God" (2 Nephi 33:14). Mormon humbly infers that he had become his ancestor⁴⁸ Nephi's spiritual heir and that he was a worthy heir.

As Nephi's spiritual heir, Mormon endeavors to show the fulfillment of Nephi's words inasmuch as he sees their fulfillment before and during his own time. In describing the fulfillment of prophecy, Mormon uses language that evokes the language of Nephi's original vision and its resultant prophecies:

1 Nephi 12:2; 2 Nephi 26:6-7	3 Nephi 8-9, especially 3 Nephi 9:2
And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and I saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and I saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and I saw the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and I saw many cities that they were sunk; and I saw many that they were burned with fire; and I saw many that did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof. And it came to pass after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes <i>who had not fallen</i> because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. (1 Nephi 12:4-5) And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts. O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for <i>the loss of the slain of my people</i>! For I, <u>Nephi</u>, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just. (2 Nephi 26:6-7)	"great and terrible thunder"; "exceedingly sharp lightnings" (3 Nephi 8:6-7); cities "take fire"/"sink," etc. (vv. 8-10, 14-16); "the whole earth became deformed, because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and lightnings, and the quaking of the earth" (v. 17); "And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest did cease ... and then behold there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land ..." (v. 19) Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, <i>because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people</i>; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are <i>fallen</i>! (3 Nephi 9:2) Second catalogue of cities "burned with fire," "sunk," etc. (3 Nephi 9:3-12)

Mormon recognized multiple fulfillments of Nephi's prophecy in 2 Nephi 26, which is based on vision of "the things which [his] father

48 Mormon 1:5: "And I, Mormon, being a descendant of Nephi, (and my father's name was Mormon) I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me." Cf. 3 Nephi 5:20: "I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi."

saw” in 1 Nephi 11–14. The first fulfillment came with the “fall” (cf. Hebrew *npl* = “fall”) of many of the Nephites, perhaps also a pun that exploits homonymy between Hebrew *npl* (the Hebrew “p” is aspirated)⁴⁹ and Egyptian *nfr*.⁵⁰ Moreover, we are reminded here of Isaiah’s language “How art thou fallen [nāpaltā] from heaven ...” (Isaiah 14:12; 2 Nephi 24:12) and “Babylon is fallen, is fallen! [nāpēlā nāpēlā]” (Isaiah 21:9), language of which Nephi and his spiritual successors were surely cognizant⁵¹ and sought to evoke.

Nephi saw that one actualization of the “fall” of “the great and spacious building” (1 Nephi 11:35–36)⁵² would be the “fall” of the prideful Nephite nation — his “seed”: “And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for *I had beheld their fall*” (1 Nephi 15:5).

The language of the woe oracle recorded in 3 Nephi 9:2 incorporates or reflects the language of 2 Nephi 26:7 (“O ... the slain of my people! For *I, Nephi* [*nfr* = good, fair], have seen it,” along with 1 Nephi 11:36 (“*the fall* thereof was exceedingly great”); 15:5 (“I beheld *their fall*”) and 1 Nephi 13:15 (“exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain”); and 2 Nephi 5:21 (“exceedingly fair and delightsome”). The “fall” of the “fair sons and daughters of my people [this is the Lord speaking]” was even more anguishing to the Lord than it was to the Nephites’ anguished patriarch, Nephi himself.

49 There is no separate letter for the unaspirated consonant “p” and the aspirated consonant “f” in Hebrew.

50 Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2.

51 The quotation of Isaiah 14 from the brass plates onto the small plates in 2 Nephi 24 and Lehi’s allusion to the Isaiah 14:12 in 2 Nephi 2:17–18 confirm Nephi and his successors’ familiarity with Isaiah 14 in its entirety. It is also wholly reasonable that Isaiah 21 was on the brass plates and that Nephi et al. were familiar with it.

52 Lehi appears to formulate the description “the great and spacious building,” at least as record by Nephi, in 1 Nephi 8:26, 31. Nephi uses the slight variant “large and spacious building” (which may or may not reflect an actual difference in the underlying text) in 1 Nephi 11:35 and 12:18. The adjectival phrase “large and spacious” is also applied by Lehi to the field seen in his dream in 1 Nephi 8:9, 20.

Fair Ones Fallen II: Nephi’s and Mormon’s Anguished Souls

Mormon wants his audience to understand that he shared the Lord’s and Nephi’s anguish regarding the “fall” of the “fair ones.” Accordingly, Mormon’s account of second fulfillment of 2 Nephi 26:6-7, especially v. 7, comes in Mormon 6 with the final “fall” or destruction of the Nephite nation. Mormon sorrowed — and stated that those “who realize whence their blessings come” would sorrow that the Nephites “might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11); that is, the Nephites might have “tasted and kn[own] of the goodness of Jesus” as Mormon had done. They had, however, become too hardened. Instead of “sorrowing ... unto repentance, because of the goodness of God” (another play on “Nephi”), they succumbed to “the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:15). Mormon wishes to show us that here Nephi’s prophecy came to complete fulfillment, to an even greater degree than in 3 Nephi 8-9.

Like the woe oracle/lament 3 Nephi 9:2, Mormon’s moving lament in Mormon 6:17-19 incorporates the language of Nephi’s lament in 2 Nephi 26:7, as well as 1 Nephi 11:36 (“the fall thereof was exceedingly great”); 13:15 (“exceedingly fair and beautiful”); 15:5 (see below); and 2 Nephi 5:21 (“exceedingly fair and delightsome”):

1 Nephi 15:5; 2 Nephi 26:7; 3 Nephi 9:2	Mormon 6:17-19
And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that <i>mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall.</i> (1 Nephi 15:5)	

1 Nephi 15:5; 2 Nephi 26:7; 3 Nephi 9:2	Mormon 6:17–19
<i>O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people!</i> For I, Nephi, have seen it, and it well nigh consumeth me before the presence of the Lord; but I must cry unto my God: Thy ways are just. (2 Nephi 26:6–7) Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, <i>because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people</i>; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that <i>they are fallen!</i> (3 Nephi 9:2)	And <i>my soul was rent with anguish, because of the slain of my people</i>, and I cried: <i>O ye fair ones</i>, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! <i>O ye fair ones</i>, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! Behold, if ye had not done this, <i>ye would not have fallen</i>. But behold, <i>ye are fallen</i>, and I mourn your <i>loss</i>. <i>O ye fair sons and daughters</i>, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, <i>ye fair ones</i>, how is it that <i>ye could have fallen!</i>

By mentioning his “soul rent with anguish, because of the slain of [his] people,” Mormon connects his anguish to the “anguish of [Nephi’s] soul for the loss of the slain of [his] people.” Their anguish in their sphere is akin to the Lord’s “anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” which caused “blood” to extrude “from every pore” (Mosiah 3:7; cf. D&C 19:18), anguish that seemingly evoked the Lord’s woe oracle/lament in 3 Nephi 9:2. In other words, Mormon wishes us to understand his own suffering within the context of Nephi’s and the Lord’s suffering.

Additionally, Mormon’s repetition of the refrain “[O] ye fair ones” and the phrase “O ye fair sons and daughters” emotively connects the vast scene of the slaughter of a people that should have embodied the “goodliness” and “goodness” of their ancestor, to the visions and revelations that so anguished him. The repetitious wordplay reverberates the name *Nephi* against the backdrop of what has come to pass in all of his irony: the “fair ones” have become the “fallen ones.”⁵³ It was needless

53 Cf. the Nephilim (*nēpīlīm*, sometimes interpreted “fallen ones,” though this interpretation is disputed and far from certain) described in Genesis 6:4, those with whom the Lord’s Spirit ceased to “strive” (Genesis 6:3). Mormon so described the Nephites: “the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers; and they are without Christ and God in the world; and they are driven about as chaff before the wind” (Mormon 5:18). He made the following statement to Moroni twice in two separate letters: “I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them” (Moroni 8:28; 9:4).

“loss,” and yet “loss” from which Mormon and Moroni hoped future “good” could come. The scattered descendants of such a “lost and fallen” people, however, would need to know just how far their ancestors had fallen: “They delight[ed] in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:19). Hence, they need to understand the remedy: Christ, the source of all “good.”

“They Delight in Everything Save That Which Is Good”

Mormon’s other major lament over the Nephites is a private one, included in a letter written by Mormon to his son Moroni and preserved for us by the latter. This letter, comprising the contents of Moroni chapter 9, is easily one of the most haunting scenes in all of scripture. Mormon exclaims:

O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. Behold, I am but a man, and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands. And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written. (Moroni 9:18-19)

When Jacob reprimanded the Nephite men near the beginning of Nephite history, it was for the suffering of the Nephite women and children (Jacob 2:31-35). Mormon also particularly cites the suffering of the Nephite women and children, but here that suffering “exceed[s] everything.” It has become unspeakable and beyond Mormon’s ability — and perhaps any writer’s ability — to record.⁵⁴ Among the doomed Nephites, the women and children suffered most from the wickedness of the adult men, as so often happens in human history.

The Nephites had been collectively and individually wicked in times past, but the Nephites had become the individual and collective antithesis

54 Mormon also makes almost the very same point in his own personal record: “And it is impossible for the tongue to describe, or for man to write a perfect description of the horrible scene of the blood and carnage which was among the people, both of the Nephites and of the Lamanites; and every heart was hardened, so that they delighted in the shedding of blood continually. And there never had been so great wickedness among all the children of Lehi, nor even among all the house of Israel, according to the words of the Lord, as was among this people” (Mormon 4:11-12).

of everything implied in the name *Nephi* and its gentile derivative *Nephites*. Far from delighting in and embodying what is "fair" or "good," they delighted "in everything save that which is good" (Mormon 9:19).

Mormon refuses to recapitulate the harrowing details of what he is witnessing to his son Moroni, who had been witnessing similarly awful scenes of wickedness: "And now, my son, I dwell no longer upon this horrible scene. Behold, thou knowest *the wickedness of this people*; thou knowest that *they are without principle, and past feeling; and their wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites*" (Moroni 9:20). Mormon's description of Nephite wickedness helps us understand the extreme degree to which they "delight[ed] in everything save that which is good." The erstwhile "good[ly] ones" or "fair ones" were now "without principle" and "past feeling." Moreover, Mormon's assessment that the Nephites' "wickedness doth exceed that of the Lamanites" should be understood in terms of his possibly contemporary comment about the Lamanites becoming in the future — and perhaps already becoming — "a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people, beyond the description of that which ever hath been amongst us, yea, even that which hath been among the Lamanites, and this because of their unbelief and idolatry" (Mormon 5:15). Simply put, Mormon's own people, the "good[ly] ones" or "fair ones," had collectively become the worst, least "fair" people imaginable.

Fair Ones Good Again: "Lay Hold upon Every Good Gift" and "Put on Thy Beautiful Garments"

With his own people — the "fair ones" — destroyed, just like the onetime "fair" Jaredites,⁵⁵ and on the run from the Lamanites, Moroni preserves a sermon delivered by Mormon to an audience of faithful Nephites during the waning days of their society. This sermon, drawing on earlier writings by Nephi and Amaleki, uses *good* as a *Leitwort* (lead-word or keyword), and this use should be understood in terms of the observations on the Nephites and the "good" or "fair ones" rendered heretofore.

These statements of Mormon would have been particularly poignant during this period when the Nephites' church, society, and belief in Christ were failing:

⁵⁵ Ether 7:4; 13:17; cf. Ether 8:9-10, 17. Moroni's use of this term in his abridgement/translation of the Book of Ether in connection with the Jaredites, who fell from the Lord's favor and were destroyed, is meant to evoke the use of "fair" elsewhere in connection with the Nephites.

... if their *works be good*, then *they are good also*. (Moroni 7:5; see especially Helaman 5:6-7)

... a man being evil cannot do that which is *good*. (Moroni 7:6)

... a man being evil cannot do that which is *good*; neither will he give a *good* gift. (Moroni 7:10)

... a bitter fountain cannot bring forth *good water*; neither can a *good fountain* bring forth bitter water. (Moroni 7:11)

... *all things which are good cometh of God*; and that which is evil cometh of the devil. (Moroni 7:12)

... *that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually*; wherefore, *every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good*, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. (Moroni 7:13)

... Take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or *that which is good and of God* to be of the devil. (Moroni 7:14)

... For, behold, my brethren, *it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil*; and the way to judge is as plain. (Moroni 7:15)

... he [the devil] *persuadeth no man to do good*, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. (Moroni 7:17; cf. 3 Nephi 9:2!)

... I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may *know good from evil*; and *if ye will lay hold upon every good thing*, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ. (Moroni 7:19)

... And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can *lay hold upon every good thing*? (Moroni 7:20; 2 Nephi 31; Helaman 3:29)

... there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were *good*; and all things which are *good cometh of Christ*; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no *good* thing come unto them. (Moroni 7:24; cf. 3 Nephi 9:2; Mormon 6:17)

... And thus by faith, *they did lay hold upon every good thing*; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. (Moroni 7:25)

... Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, *which is good*, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you. (Moroni 7:26)

... They who have faith in him will *cleave unto every good thing*. (Moroni 7:28)

Mormon — drawing on Nephi's writings in 2 Nephi 26, Nephi's adumbration of the doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31–32, Nephi's good inclusio, and Amaleki's writings at the conclusion of Nephi's small plates (Omni 1:25) — implores his people to "lay hold" upon and cleave to "every good thing" as if to the "rod of iron" or "word of God" (1 Nephi 1:11; 15:23–25)⁵⁶ and "word of Christ,"⁵⁷ since every good thing has its source in God the Father and Jesus Christ.

When that entreaty failed to persuade and preserve the Nephites from going to their ruin, Moroni included his father's sermon wholesale in the concluding portion of his own personal writings, implicitly redirecting it to the descendants of the fallen Nephites (especially the posterity of Nephite dissenters/deserters) and the Lamanites. Moroni hoped that his father's sermon would eventually persuade these descendants to do "good," follow the doctrine of Christ, and, through the atonement of Christ, again become the "fair" ones (Mormon 9:6).

This best explains Moroni's recapitulation of substantial portions of his father's sermon in his final exhortation in Moroni 10, where he writes "as seemeth [him] good ... unto the Lamanites,"⁵⁸ including the descendants of the Nephites who were preserved among them. Again, his strong emphasis is on embracing, doing, laying hold upon, and becoming "good":

And *whatsoever thing is good* is just and true; wherefore, *nothing that is good denieth the Christ*, but acknowledgeth that he is." (Moroni 10:6)

56 On the Egyptian wordplay evident in Nephi's equation of the "rod" with the "word" (both Egyptian *mdw*), see Matthew L. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?" *Insights* 25/2 (2005): 2–3. Cf. also 1 Nephi 17:26, 29; Helaman 3:29.

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

58 Cf. especially 2 Nephi 5:30.

And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be *none that doeth good* among you, no not one. For if there be *one among you that doeth good*, he shall work by the power and gifts of God. (Moroni 10:25)

And again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and *lay hold upon every good gift* and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.” (Moroni 10:30)

Moroni’s declaration here that “nothing that is good denieth the Christ” must be understood in the context of the Lamanites “put[ting] to death every Nephite that [would] not deny the Christ” (Moroni 1:2), which Moroni tells us the Lamanites were doing at the outset of his record. Many Nephites denied the Christ and so ceased to be Nephites.⁵⁹ Moroni, for his part, “w[ould] not deny the Christ,” as he tells us. Although many ethnic “Nephites” who survived the great war of extinction by deserting to the Lamanites continued to live as cultural Lamanites, Moroni was the only true “Nephite” left because he “[would] not deny the Christ.” Many of the Nephites had not only denied the Christ, but (in Mormon’s words) had been “denying the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:28).

All of this, of course, had (and has) implications for the descendants of the dissenting/deserting Nephites. The writings of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni are written not only to the Lamanites, but to the descendants of Nephi and his other brothers whose posterity mixed with them. By “do[ing] good” and “laying hold upon every good gift,” all of these Nephite/Lamanite descendants could, through the atonement of Christ, become “good” again, and thus “be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6).

It is in this earlier consideration of Moroni in Mormon 9:6 where we see Moroni articulate even more beautifully in one of his final pleas, wherein he employs the language of Isaiah:

And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and *put on thy beautiful garments* [*libšî bigdê tip’arêtêk*], O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:31, quoting Isaiah 54)

⁵⁹ Moroni 9:24, in fulfillment of 1 Nephi 13:30 and Alma 45:14. Cf. especially D&C 3:16–20.

Moroni's final exhortation to the scattered descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites is almost a plea: "put on the authority of the priesthood"⁶⁰ and become what the Lord intended you collectively and individually to become: good, fair, and "purified even as he is pure" (Moroni 7:48).

Conclusion: "Written For the Intent of the Benefit of Our Brethren the Lamanites"

Nephi's small plates and all that they contained were, in Jarom's words, "written for the intent of the benefit [making/doing good] of our brethren the Lamanites" (Jarom 1:2). Just as we see a consistent pattern throughout the Book of Mormon of the Nephites being associated with the descriptions "good," "fair," and "beautiful" — all within the range of meaning of Egyptian *nfr* — we see an almost equally consistent pattern of prophetic criticism levied against the Nephites for failing to live up to the standard implied in that name.

The "good" or "fair ones" eventually "fell" because they abandoned the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31–32). That doctrine which teaches men and women how to come unto Christ and to partake of his "goodness" (2 Nephi 26:28, 33; 33:14; Jacob 1:7), to do "good" (2 Nephi 33:4, 10), also teaches them how to "lay hold on every good thing" (Mormon 7:19–21, 25) and "every good gift" (Moroni 10:30).

The warning of the Book of Mormon is clear: it includes any "highly favored people of the Lord"⁶¹ who become so depraved as to "delight in everything save that which is good" (Moroni 9:19). Without the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and his atonement, we will all alike "perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever" (2 Nephi 2:5). Rather than "revile against that which is good" (2 Nephi 28:16), all of us need to recognize that "all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them" (Moroni 7:24). In so doing, we can all become the *un-fallen* "fair" ones spoken of by Moroni in Mormon 9:6. "Evil" can finally "be done away," we can be "persuaded to do good continually," and we can "come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved" — the express purposes for which Moroni and his forebearers were commanded to write (Ether 8:26; cf. especially Ether 4:11–12).

⁶⁰ D&C 113:8.

⁶¹ See especially Mosiah 1:13; Alma 9:20; Alma 27:30; 48:20. This phrase derives from Nephi's "highly favored" status; see 1 Nephi 1:1; 3:6; 2 Nephi 1:19; Mosiah 10:13.

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