

## Alma 36

### A Call to Repentance, a Prophetic Call

*Kevin L. Tolley*

Elder Neal A. Maxwell once commented, “The Book of Mormon will be with us ‘as long as the earth shall stand.’ We need all that time to explore it, for the book is like a vast mansion with gardens, towers, courtyards, and wings. There are rooms yet to be entered, with flaming fireplaces waiting to warm us. The rooms glimpsed so far contain further furnishings and rich detail yet to be savored. . . . Yet we as Church members sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry hall.”<sup>1</sup> Many aspects of the Book of Mormon need further examination since the book contains a seemingly inexhaustible fountain of truths. Although many insights have already been discovered, further scrutiny will undoubtedly reveal additional views on this literary masterpiece. Alma 36, a unique and popular discourse of Alma to his son Helaman, is one example of a section with immense doctrinal understanding that certainly merits further examination.

For decades, Alma 36 has been used as an example to demonstrate the book's ancient literary qualities. For example, John W. Welch's work illustrates the chiasmic structure of the text and demonstrates the subtle fingerprints of antiquity.<sup>2</sup> His work has been immensely influential in how Alma 36 is viewed and continues to inspire modern readers.<sup>3</sup> On a literary level, Alma 36 is a masterful example of chiasm, a complex literary device of reverse parallelism. However, the real spiritual power and majesty of Alma 36 lies at the heart of the message, a dramatic depiction of conversion as one young man turns to Jesus Christ and receives forgiveness.

One powerful perspective in Alma 36 is Alma's rehearsal of his own call to the ministry. Looking at the chapter from this wider context, clues become apparent that Alma was preparing this son to assume the prophetic mantle and become the ecclesiastical leader of the Nephites once Alma passed away. In this paper I will explore connections between Alma the Younger's experience depicted in Alma 36 and the companion text of Mosiah 27 and will define the qualities of prophetic *call narratives* in both. Through this story, as I will show, Alma, in effect, passes the prophetic baton to his son.

## **The Call Narrative in the Bible and the Book of Mormon**

Before looking at Alma's call narrative, it will be worthwhile to look at how biblical call narratives influenced Book of Mormon literature. The Book of Mormon begins in Jerusalem, a place of "many prophets" (1 Nephi 1:4).<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah was among these prophets, and Nephi had access to either all or part of his writings. Jeremiah's writings were still among the scriptural heritage of the Nephites.<sup>5</sup> This increased number of prophets in the city was accompanied by an increasing wave of imitators.<sup>6</sup> Amid this apparent competition between valid and invalid prophetic representatives, Jeremiah set a standard of who could be trusted in this visionary capacity. Furthermore, Jeremiah's writings continued to heavily influence the Nephite perspective

on prophetic call narratives.<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah establishes a criterion for a true prophet sent by the Lord when he says, “For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word?” (Jeremiah 23:18). Although this English rendering captures the main concept, it lacks many of the nuances of the Hebrew text. In Jeremiah 23:18, “perceived” is the King James translation for the Hebrew verb *ra’ah*, (ראה) which means, in its most basic sense, “to see.”<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, to be a true messenger one must see and hear what has taken place in the “counsel of the Lord.” This “counsel of the Lord” is another phrase that has deeper meaning than what the English rendering would suggest. Jeremiah 23:18 reads “counsel,” meaning “advice,” when the Hebrew text reads “council.” The Hebrew term used here is *sôd* (סוד) which has been defined as “the assembly of Yahweh” or a “council of the holy ones.”<sup>9</sup> The validity of a prophetic call is contingent upon the experience of standing in the assembly of Jehovah as a witness of one who “saw and heard.”<sup>10</sup> It was “the privilege of the truly inspired prophet to stand in its midst (i.e., the *divine council*) and hear the word of Yahweh.”<sup>11</sup> This experience with the divine council is considered the “dominant rubric for authority” for a prophet.<sup>12</sup> This was a means of “vindication and legitimization of the prophet in his office.”<sup>13</sup> It is clear “the experience made a man a prophet.”<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that without this experience with the divine council, one has not been sent by Jehovah. From this point, “the prophet was called to proclaim the will of the deity which issued from the assembly.”<sup>15</sup> Once a person has legitimately witnessed the divine council and has been commissioned to preach, he is obligated to “justify his exceptional status in the eyes of the majority.”<sup>16</sup>

Jeremiah then becomes an archetype to the Book of Mormon people of what it means to be a prophet. Subsequently, Nephi frames his father’s narrative to include Jeremiah’s criterion as one who “saw and heard” (1 Nephi 1:6, 19; 9:1; emphasis added throughout).<sup>17</sup> Nephi described his father’s vision by writing, “the heavens open[ed], and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne” (1 Nephi 1:8),<sup>18</sup> establishing a familiar context of the aforementioned assembly of

Yahweh. This ensures the reader that his father is a commissioned prophet and has been sent forth with the message from the council that he has both seen and heard.<sup>19</sup> Alluding to these parallels associated with Jeremiah, Nephi's account of Lehi's early years becomes the new standard of prophetic calls for the rest of the Book of Mormon.<sup>20</sup>

Nephi uses the prophetic phrase "see and hear" not only to introduce the validity of his father's commission, but also uses this phrase to establish himself and his ministry as a prophet to his future audience<sup>21</sup> when he introduces and concludes his first major visionary experience with this same phrase (1 Nephi 10:17; 14:28).<sup>22</sup>

Nephi's use of this verbal clue of a call narrative will influence other Book of Mormon authors. Jacob had to defend his own prophetic call against the anti-Christ Sherem later in the Book of Mormon. He withstood his critic by alluding to his own prophetic call in which he had "heard and seen" (Jacob 7:12, reversing the word order).<sup>23</sup> Previously, on the small plates, Jacob's call had been well established.<sup>24</sup> Mormon's abridgment of Alma the Younger's call to the ministry is clearly influenced by Nephi's writings;<sup>25</sup> Alma is also placed in the same prophetic milieu as one who has "*heard and seen*" (Mosiah 27:32).

Having established the concept of the call narrative as the foundation of prophetic authority in the Bible as well as the Book of Mormon, this paper will emphasize these elements specifically as they manifest in Alma 36 and Mosiah 27. Mormon includes three word-for-word speeches Alma gives to his three sons (Alma 36–42) "according to his own record" (Alma 35:16). The first of these three discourses is given to his eldest son, Helaman (Alma 36–37). Although the events of the angelic visitation to Alma have already been included by Mormon in Mosiah 27, Mormon chose to include Alma's personal recounting in Alma 36.<sup>26</sup> Both Alma 36 and Mosiah 27 focus on the same event from different perspectives. While Alma 36 is a first-person autobiography of a father sharing a life-changing experience with his son,<sup>27</sup> Mosiah 27 tells the same story from a second-person perspective as part of a larger narrative to a much larger audience. Combining

these two narratives, one can clearly see the telltale signs of a traditional call narrative.<sup>28</sup>

### *Specific elements of the call narrative*

Many scholars have tried to categorize commonalities between various call narratives.<sup>29</sup> These lists help one to see order and consistency among these various experiences in the numerous texts. Because none of the accounts contain all the elements of a call narrative, scholars tend to emphasize varied elements in their lists. The following description reviews four scholars' approaches to categorizing the various aspects of call narratives.

Norman Habel takes an intrabiblical approach, comparing various calls and trying to determine commonalities.<sup>30</sup> He emphasizes the interaction between the prophet and the divine, the actions of deity in issuing the call, and the reactions of the potential prophet as he struggles with the daunting assignment. Since its publication in 1965, Habel's list of nine elements has been the primary source others are compared to and has become the academic standard for understanding prophetic calls.

Soon after Habel's list was published, Klaus Baltzer devised his own list.<sup>31</sup> While a number of similarities are present, the main difference is that where Habel looks carefully at the interaction between the prophet and heaven, Baltzer emphasizes the commission of the individual and highlights the divine direction given to him rather than the reaction of the prophet.

Herbert Marks takes a psychological-philosophical perspective.<sup>32</sup> Using the philosophies of Sigmund Freud and Immanuel Kant, Marks tries to look at the psychological effects call narratives have on an individual. Overlaying modern psychological theory on the biblical text, Marks's classifications are both overt and implied in the text. The model stresses the emotional reaction of the prophet to the call but deals only briefly with aspects of the divine commission.

John J. Collins compiled the most exhaustive list of criteria, primarily using later apocryphal literary sources to fill in many of the

gaps left by earlier prophetic works.<sup>33</sup> Although some of these criteria appear in Lehi's initial vision, many of them appear only in later biblical writings. Collins's list of aspects is much longer and more detailed.

A comparison of the combined narratives in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36 using the above four lists of prophetic call criteria provides support that Alma was being called. In the subsequent sections, I will describe the six key elements indicating that Mosiah 27 and Alma 36 describe the call narrative of Alma.

## Alma 36 and Mosiah 27 as a Call Narrative

### *Situation*

The call of a prophet in the Old Testament typically occurs on the mountain of God, in the heavenly temple, or in the earthly temple. Prophets are called into service from the midst of a heavenly council (Jeremiah 23:16–18).<sup>34</sup>

Mosiah 27 and Alma 36 contrast various settings, from the initial shock of the angel, to sinking into the “darkest abyss” (Mosiah 27:29), to standing in the council of Jehovah (Alma 36:22) as Alma progresses through to his call. Many of the elements coincide with those found in call narratives. Two basic elements will be discussed here: (1) images associated with the initial visitation of the angel and (2) the pinnacle setting of standing before God to be instructed.

Alma's traumatic confrontation with the divine is primarily depicted in Mosiah 27:11. The “angel of the Lord appeared . . . as it were in a cloud,” with “a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake” (compare Alma 36:7). The quaking was severe enough to cause them to think that the earth would “part asunder” (Mosiah 27:18). This earthshaking interaction has strong parallels to Isaiah's initial contact with the heavenly temple where God is depicted enthroned, surrounded by a seraphic council (Isaiah 6:1–2). His vision is obscured by “smoke” while a thunderous chorus shakes the earth, causing even the “posts of the door” to move (Isaiah 6:4). With Isaiah's call, Isaiah

first had a bittersweet experience with a seraph before he was commissioned as a messenger of God.

Similarly, in Alma's firsthand account in Alma 36, Alma tries to describe the indescribable: What is it like to enter God's presence? Alma resorts to quoting Lehi as a comparison, by saying that "methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (Alma 36:22). Alma goes on to offer a full-blown quotation of 1 Nephi 1:8, "the longest word-for-word quotation of one Book of Mormon author by another."<sup>35</sup> This twenty-two-word quote is significant because it attaches his experience with the great patriarch Lehi. Alma was in the council of God, just like Lehi.<sup>36</sup> Mormon confirms this connection with another quote from 1 Nephi. Nephi frames his father Lehi's prophetic call narrative to include Jeremiah's criterion as one who "saw and heard" (1 Nephi 1:6, 19; 9:1). Mormon includes this phrase when describing Alma's recounting to the people what "they had heard and seen" (Mosiah 27:32).<sup>37</sup>

Alma's experience also includes an angelic guide (or guardian) to the divine council (Mosiah 27:11–17; Alma 36:5–6) which is a typical motif, along with a cloud to veil the divine presence.<sup>38</sup>

### *Entrance recommend*

Before the participants enter the presence of God, angelic guides ensure their worthiness and often ask questions to safeguard the sanctity of the heavenly realm. Before Nephi's visionary experience depicted in 1 Nephi 11–14, he was brought to the divine mountain or the setting of divine council (1 Nephi 11:1), he was interviewed (1 Nephi 11:2–7), and then he was admitted with a guide.<sup>39</sup> This pattern is an oft-repeated motif in temples, both ancient and modern. Psalms 15 and 24 were possibly used as part of an interview given to pilgrims who came to the temple before they entered sacred space.<sup>40</sup> It appears that Alma too was greeted, interviewed, cleansed, and admitted into the council of the Lord. Looking at Alma's testimony in

Alma 36 and Mormon's version of the experience in Mosiah 27 can offer an important insight.<sup>41</sup> Alma 36 describes the angel as primarily accusative, giving a singular warning, "If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God" (Alma 36:9). Mosiah 27 gives additional information to Alma's exchange with the angel.

The details of the angel's commission are further clarified as the angel asks Alma a series of questions (Mosiah 27:14–15). Although the questions have no parallel to the questions asked in the entrance hymns (Psalms 15, 24) or to Nephi's interview, the fact remains that there was an interrogation before entering the divine council. The three questions the angel asks Alma appear to be based on the angel's authority. The angel asks, "And now behold, can ye dispute the power of God? For behold, doth not my *voice* shake the earth? And can ye not also *behold* me before you?" (Mosiah 27:15). Interestingly, the angel bases his authority on what Alma *sees* and *hears*;<sup>42</sup> these questions are also asked after the angel specifically commands Alma to *stand*. These clues all point back to Jeremiah's criterion for a prophet, "For who hath *stood* in the counsel of the Lord, and hath [*seen*] and *heard* his word?" (Jeremiah 23:18; emphasis added). It is true that Mosiah 27 speaks primarily of Alma's interaction with the angel as opposed to the Lord himself, but it should be remembered that representatives of the council are often sent as mediators to help cleanse, guide, and instruct the initiate into the council.<sup>43</sup> The angel here is a member of the council and instructs Alma before he enters.

### *The prophet's response*

There are numerous accounts of the physical toll it takes to have too close a contact with the divine.<sup>44</sup> Call narratives often highlight this emotional strain. Such visions are frequently filled with fantastic images that can overwhelm the psyche. Isaiah and Ezekiel are confronted with bewildering images of fantastic creatures (Isaiah 6:2; Ezekiel 1:5–11). Anxiety arises in the prophet as he resists the call when the magnitude of the experience begins to overwhelm him. Feelings of



wanting to run or hide become apparent as excuses spill out. Moses exclaims, “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11), and Jeremiah exclaims, “I am a child” (Jeremiah 1:6). The prophet’s inadequacy is framed in the feelings of guilt and unworthiness.<sup>45</sup> These feelings eventually lead to repentance and turning to God.

Alma’s experience gives us more information about his emotional state at the time of his call than any other prophet. Alma describes “wading through much tribulation, repenting night unto death” (Mosiah 27:28), being in the “gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity,” being “in the darkest abyss,” and being “racked with eternal torment” (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:12). He explains being “tormented with the pains of hell” and “inexpressible horror” (Alma 36:13–14). He truly wanted to hide, to “be banished and become extinct both soul and body” (Alma 36:15), and he wanted to escape the “pains of a damned soul” (Alma 36:16).

Feelings of emotional inadequacy are often portrayed in what Marks calls the “prophetic stammer.”<sup>46</sup> This is demonstrated in Moses’s “slow tongue” (Exodus 4:10), in the verse describing him with “uncircumcised lips” (Exodus 6:12),<sup>47</sup> and in Isaiah’s “unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). Jeremiah ironically claims, “I cannot speak” (Jeremiah 1:6), and this feeling is also shown in the mutism of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:26). Enoch also declares, “I am slow of speech” (Moses 6:31). The call is typically associated with an inability to speak. Both in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36, Alma is physically unable to move after the initial visitation of the angel. An emphasis is clearly placed on his inability to speak. Alma says, “it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs” (Alma 36:10; Mosiah 27:19). Repentance and forgiveness are what ultimately give him the ability to speak. Clean lips are also what authorize Isaiah to begin his ministry (Isaiah 6:6–9). When the unconscious Alma the Younger was delivered to his father, Alma the Elder “caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast” so that “God . . . would *open the mouth* of Alma, that he might *speak*” (Mosiah 27:22).

### *Transformation through forgiveness and acceptance*

In these patterns, the prophet receives a new identity. While Collins puts this new identity after the official commission, Marks places it before the commission. This transformation is at a crucial point, the point at which the prophet lets go of his sins and insecurities and relies solely on God. Marks writes that the prophet is left to “disavow the absence that assails him and so to remain captive to the demonic power of the real which only symbolization can undo.”<sup>48</sup> Essentially, the prophet can stay in his unclean state or submit to God. This key moment in Alma’s spiritual journey is depicted at the center of the chiasmic structure of Alma 36. Alma relates this shift when he writes that he remembers “one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me” (Alma 36:17–18). The turning point for Alma becomes the prelude to the description of the heavenly council that comes a few verses later as Alma describes a new setting open to his view, with “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God” (Alma 36:22). The pivotal point in Alma’s spiritual journey and the center of the chiasmic structure in Alma 36:17–18 is clarified by Alma 36:22, which places the event in a setting, the divine council at the advent of his call to the ministry.

From this point, Alma receives a new identity; he is “born of God” (Mosiah 27:24, 28; Alma 36:5, 23).<sup>49</sup> The designation “child of God” is used in various ways in the scriptures. Many times, it is used in a way that denotes achievement rather than a given element of everyone’s identity (Mosiah 27:25; compare Moroni 7:48). Psalm 82:1–6 suggests that the title is contingent on worthiness and acceptance into the council of God. Moses was given the title only after his call (Moses 1:4, 6, 7).

### *Commission*

Once the prophet has been found worthy to stand in the council, the Lord issues a specific commission.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes this commission is graphically demonstrated as the “word of the Lord” and is literally placed in the mouth of the prophet (Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 3:3). This commission comes as the prophet accepts his new role. Consider Isaiah’s call when the Lord declares, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” and Isaiah replies, “Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8). This commission dialogue, however, is absent from both Alma 36 and Mosiah 27. Alma simply sees the divine council (Alma 36:22); from that time forth he begins to preach “without ceasing” (Alma 36:24). One clue in Mosiah 27 might indicate a commission. After the angel appeared and instructed Alma, the Lord himself said to him, “Marvel not that all mankind . . . must be born again; yea, born of God, . . . and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:25–26). The Lord essentially gives him the topic that would mark his preaching for virtually his entire prophetic career, that all must be “born again” (Alma 5:49; 7:14). Alma himself had experienced this change prior to his call, and because he was intimately acquainted with this change, he was uniquely qualified to carry out his commission.

### *Message*

The topic of Alma’s initial sermon as a commissioned representative of the divine council is best outlined in Mosiah 27:24–27. This initial sermon is framed in true chiasmic form:

- A. *I have repented of my sins, . . .*  
    *I am born of the Spirit. . . .*
- B. *all mankind, yea, men and women,*  
    *all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be*
- C. *born again; yea,*  
    *born of God,*

- D. *changed* from their carnal and fallen state, to  
 a state of righteousness, being *redeemed* of God,  
 C'. *becoming* his sons and daughters; And thus they  
*become* new creatures; and  
 B'. *unless they* do this, *they* can in *nowise* inherit the  
 kingdom of God. I say unto you, *unless* this be the case,  
*they* must be *cast off*; and this  
 A'. I know, because  
 I was like to be cast off.

The words Alma uses in his initial discourses after regaining consciousness and being in the divine council (Mosiah 27:24–27) are a direct quotation from the Lord (Mosiah 27:25). The phrases Alma uses here become trademark phrases he would use throughout his future preaching.<sup>51</sup>

## Helaman Designated as Prophetic Heir Apparent

Alma 36 is more than an amazing linguistic masterpiece that skillfully illustrates the personal change of an individual. Embedded in the text are clues indicating that the text also depicts a retelling of Alma's call narrative to his son Helaman. If the chapter's intent was solely to teach repentance, it might be better suited to his youngest son Corianton. Considering the underlying message of a prophetic call, it would seem fitting that Alma relate the story to his eldest son, Helaman, the heir apparent to his prophetic office. Immediately after retelling of the dramatic shift in Alma's life, he relinquishes the sacred artifacts<sup>52</sup> to his son.<sup>53</sup> Much of the vocabulary that Alma uses to describe the experience to his son Helaman is the same vocabulary the angel uses with Alma himself.<sup>54</sup> Helaman is shown as Alma's successor in the line of Nephite prophets.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Alma's discourse to his son Helaman reflects subtle aspects of his own call to the ministry. Although the account of Alma's life-altering event was included earlier in the Book of Mormon, the story is repeated in Alma 36 just as the prophetic mantle is transferred to the next generation. When read together, Alma 36 and Mosiah 27 contain all the hallmarks of a call narrative. Alma's call narrative itself stands as the preparatory soil in which the new prophet is planted.

KEVIN L. TOLLEY has worked for Seminaries and Institutes of Religion for eighteen years and is currently a coordinator in Southern California.

## Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, but Thine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 33.
2. John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 33–52; and John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114–31. John W. Welch, "Three Accounts of Alma's Conversion," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1996), 150–53. For critical response to Welch's work, see Earl M. Wunderli, "Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm," *Dialogue* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 97–112; Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, "Response to Earl Wunderli's Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm," *Dialogue* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 164–73.

3. Welch's discovery of chiasmus in Alma 36 has received such acceptance that it has become part of the curriculum for seminaries and institutes of the Church. See Church Educational System, *Book of Mormon: Student Manual, Religion 121 and 122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 232.
4. Compare the description found in 2 Chronicles 36:15–16, where God sends many “messengers” during the time of King Zedekiah. However, the people “mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and mis-used his prophets.” Some of these prophets might have included Jeremiah (ca. 626–587 BC), Zephaniah (ca. 640–609 BC), Obadiah (ca. 587 BC), Nahum (ca. 612 BC), and Habakkuk (ca. 626–605 BC). Although the previous prophets have biblical books named after them, Urijah does not, but he is mentioned in Jeremiah 26:20–23. He very well could have been a part of this prophetic entourage.
5. Once Nephi recovers the brass plates, Lehi discovers that “many prophecies” of Jeremiah were recorded on the brass plates (1 Nephi 5:13). Along with this, Nephi apparently had an intimate knowledge of Jeremiah's personal ministry (see 1 Nephi 7:14). The brass plates, along with Jeremiah's prophecies, became a part of the Nephite scriptural heritage as the brass plates were passed along through the generations. Mormon writes that he had access to at least some parts of Jeremiah's literature (Helaman 8:20).
6. Compare Jeremiah 6:13–15; 14:14–16; 23:9–40; 27:15 (9–17); 28:12 (1–17); Lamentations 2:14.
7. Stephen Smoot writes, “The Book of Mormon exhibits, in many respects, an intimate familiarity with ancient Israelite religious concepts. One such example is the Book of Mormon's portrayal of the divine council. Following a lucid biblical pattern, the Book of Mormon provides a depiction of the divine council and several examples of those who were introduced into the heavenly assembly and made partakers in divine secrets.” See Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua, A Student Journal for the Study of the Ancient World* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 2.
8. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1157.

9. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 745. The same word is used in various places in the Old Testament, including Amos 3:7, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret [Hebrew *sodh*, or “Council of Yahweh”] unto his servants the prophets.” Joseph Fielding McConkie suggests, “What Amos is telling us is that the Lord does not act independently of the heavenly council where all prophets are instructed and ordained.” See Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Premortal Existence Foreordinations and Heavenly Councils,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 186.
10. See David E. Bokovoy, “The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon: Still Losing the Battle,” *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 8–9; emphasis added.
11. David Smyth Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 168.
12. Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 626.
13. Klaus Baltzer, “Considerations regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 4 (1968): 568.
14. Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 33–34. Being a witness of the divine council is not exclusively the only criterion for being a prophet or special witness. Obviously, one must be “called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof” (Articles of Faith 1:5).
15. E. Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 216. Mullen later states, “This is the true prophet’s claim to authority. From the pronouncement of the council he receives the decree that he is to deliver. Those prophets who have not participated in the council are unable to proclaim the divine decree.” See Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 219.
16. Von Rad, *Message of the Prophets*, 33–34.
17. Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 35–54; John W. Welch, “The Calling of a Prophet,” in *The Book of*

*Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman, and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 35–54; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, the World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 4–13; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 46–54; John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 421–448.

18. The “heavens were opened” for Ezekiel; this also began his “visions of God” (Ezekiel 1:1). The opening of the heavens is a rare expression in the Hebrew Bible, showing up only in Ezekiel 1:1. Although the phrase is rare in biblical writings, it shows up eight times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 1:8; 11:14, 27, 30; 12:6; Helaman 5:48; 3 Nephi 17:24; 28:13), each time associated with the phrase “saw and heard.” The phrase is used far more in the New Testament; see Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:21; Mark 1:10; John 1:57; Acts 7:56; Revelation 4:1; 11:19; 15:5; 19:11.
19. David Bokovoy suggests, “Lehi appears, like Isaiah, as a messenger sent to represent the assembly that had convened in order to pass judgment upon Jerusalem for a violation of God’s holy covenants. Nephi’s account may represent this subtle biblical motif through a reference to Lehi assuming the traditional role of council member, praising the high god of the assembly.” See David E. Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah’s Prophetic Call,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 37.
20. Smoot, “Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible,” 16.
21. David Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking the Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11,” *Interpreter, A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 2–4, 11.
22. In describing his experience with the angelic guide, Nephi uses the word *saw* over thirty times and *look* or *looked* over twenty times. Compare the chiasmic inclusion:
  - A. *I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord* (1 Nephi 11:1)
  - B. *the Spirit said unto me* (1 Nephi 11:2)
  - C. *I desire to behold the things which my father saw* (1 Nephi 11:3)



D. *Thou knowest I believe* [introduction to the divine council]  
(1 Nephi 11:5)

D'. *I saw and heard* [expression of being in the divine council]  
(1 Nephi 14:28)

C'. *I saw the things which my father saw* (1 Nephi 14:29)

B'. *the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me* (1 Nephi 14:29)

A'. *I saw while I was carried away in the Spirit* (1 Nephi 14:30)

Adapted from "'The Things Which My Father Saw': The Chiastic Inclusion of 1 Nephi 11–14." See [www.studioetquoquefide.com/2015/05/the-things-which-my-father-saw-chiastic.html](http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2015/05/the-things-which-my-father-saw-chiastic.html).

Although Nephi explains what he had "heard" (1 Nephi 14:27), the real emphasis is on what he saw. Nephi has an angelic guide who accompanies him through much of what he would see and hear. The angelic guide continually asks Nephi to *look* and then questions him concerning what he has seen (1 Nephi 11:14; 13:2), allowing him to report on what he understands. Compare this with the prophetic call of Jeremiah as found in the first chapter of his book. Jeremiah's call is followed by a visionary experience that parallels Nephi's. Jerusalem's future destruction is laid out in an exchange between the "word of the Lord" and Jeremiah, where he is asked, "What seest thou?" in a vision that depicts Jerusalem's future. The reply is given by Jeremiah, followed by the Lord saying, "Thou hast well seen" (Jeremiah 1:11–12). The pattern is repeated when "the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou?" Jeremiah recites back what he has seen (Jeremiah 1:13). Compare the interrogative exchange between the divine and the prophet in Jeremiah 34:3–4 and Zechariah 4:2, 5. See Bokovoy, "'Thou Knowest That I Believe,'" 2–4, 11.

23. Quotes given in reverse word order are often employed in biblical writings; this literary device is referred to as "Seidel's Law." Moshe Seidel, "Parallels between Isaiah and Psalms," *Sinai* 38 (1955): 149–72, 229–40, 272–80, 335–55. For further examples of Seidel's Law in the Book of Mormon, see David Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments, Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (Tooele, UT: Heritage Distribution, 2003), 56–60.

24. Nephi had previously compared his own experience with that of Isaiah when he said that Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2), possibly connecting Isaiah’s experience outlined in Isaiah 6 with his own. Nephi desired so strongly that his posterity have access to Isaiah’s experience with the divine council that he made sure it was included in the small plates (2 Nephi 16). Nephi then connects Jacob’s experience with what he and Isaiah had experienced when he said, “my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:3). All three prophets have had a “see and hear” experience (1 Nephi 14:28; Isaiah 6:9; Jacob 7:12). Elder Holland alludes to Isaiah, Nephi, and Jacob as the three messianic witnesses of the small plates. See Jeffery R. Holland, “For a Wise Purpose,” *Ensign*, January 1996, 12–19; Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 35.
25. Mark Alan Wright suggests that after centuries of likely integration and convergence with cultures of ancient America, Alma might have been influenced by Mesoamerican traditions. See Mark Alan Wright, “According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding: The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 51–65; Mark Alan Wright and Brant Gardner, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 25–55.
26. Additional accounts of the angelic visitation appear in Alma 38:6–8; 26:17–20; and possibly 27:25–26.
27. Deuteronomy 6:2, 7, 20 implies that it is the father’s responsibility to teach his sons (compare 1 Nephi 1:1). Enoch sees God’s throne (2 Enoch 9:4; 14:19; 28:8) and the panoramic vision of the world’s history and judgments (2 Enoch 19:1–29:3), and is commissioned to teach what he has experienced (19:1–29:3). He is later told to “instruct your sons and all the members of your household” of his experience and later declares, “hear, ye men of old time, and see” (2 Enoch 37:2; emphasis added). In the Testament of Levi, Levi is told to “listen, therefore concerning the heavens which have been shown you” (Testament of Levi 3:1; emphasis added), or in other words to “hear and see.” Then he is instructed to “give understanding to your sons

concerning this” (Testament of Levi 4:5–6). And immediately after the “gates of heaven were opened,” he “saw the holy temple, and the most high sitting on a throne of glory” (Testament of Levi 5:1–2). In the Apocalypse of Abraham, Abraham is shown God’s throne (Apocalypse of Abraham 18). He is told, “*hear, Abraham. This which thou seest*” (25:9; emphasis added). Then he is asked to go to his posterity or “inheritance” with what he has seen, heard, and known (29:21).

28. The casual reader of the Book of Mormon will not necessarily pick up on these subtle aspects, in part because it involves a close reading of two accounts of the same event, which are divided by dozens of chapters in the Book of Mormon. Having these two accounts of a singular call narrative is fairly uncommon in the scriptures. Most of the call narratives described in the Hebrew Bible appear only once for each instance: Gideon (Judges 6:11b–12a); Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1–14); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–8); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4–10); Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1–28); Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19). It is true that Saul/Paul’s conversion experience is described more than once in the same book (Acts 9:7; 22:9). With a critical view of Exodus, there are three accounts of Moses’s call woven together ([E] Exodus 3:11; [J] Exodus 4:1, 10; [P] Exodus 6:12). Accounts of the call of various prophets have been embellished in later pseudepigraphic accounts. Compare the section “Ascension of Isaiah,” in M. A. Knibb, “Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 146–76. Alma’s account is unique since it appears in two scriptural accounts from two different authoritative sources, one given in the first person and the other a prophetic retelling.
29. Norman Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77, no. 3 (1965): 297–323; Baltzer, “Considerations regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet,” 567–81; Herbert Marks, “On Prophetic Stammering,” in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory*, ed. Regina M. Schwartz (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 80; John J. Collins, “The Jewish Apocalypse,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 28. See also Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the*

*Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

30. Habel, "Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," 297–323. Stephen D. Ricks applied this model to demonstrate Enoch's call narrative; see Stephen D. Ricks, "The Narrative Call Pattern in the Prophetic Commission of Enoch (Moses 6)," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 97–105.
31. Klaus Baltzer emphasizes the commission. See Baltzer, "Considerations regarding the Office and Calling," 567–81.
32. Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," 80.
33. Collins, "Jewish Apocalypse," 28. Blake Ostler later skillfully applied Lehi's visionary experience to Collin's model. See Ostler, "Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission," 91.
34. See Moses ([E] Exodus 3:1–3, 4; [P] Exodus 6:2); Gideon (Judges 6:11b–12a); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–2); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4); Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1–28); Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19).
35. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 9.
36. There are other parallels between Lehi's and Alma's experience.

#### Lehi (1 Nephi 1)

"went forth" (1:5)

"prayed . . . on behalf of his people" (1:5)

a "pillar of fire" (1:6)

"saw and heard" (1:6)

"quake and tremble" (1:6)

"returned to his own house" (1:7)

"he cast himself upon his bed" (1:7)

#### Alma (Mosiah 27; Alma 36)

"went about" (Alma 36:6)

"destroy the church" (Mosiah 27:10; Alma 36:7)

an "angel" (Mosiah 27:11; Alma 36:6)

"heard and seen" (Mosiah 27:32)

"astonishment" (Mosiah 27:12; compare Alma 36:7)

"he was laid before his father" (Mosiah 27:19)

"fell to the earth" (Mosiah 27:12, 18; Alma 36:7, 10, 11)

“overcome with the Spirit” (1:7)	“three days and three nights” (Mosiah 27:19; Alma 36:10)
later gets a “book” (1:11)	later passes a book (Alma 37)

Later Alma begins his discourse with the phrase “give ear” (Alma 36:1), a phrase primarily used by those whose writings are found on the small plates, namely Lehi (2 Nephi 4:3), Nephi (2 Nephi 28:30), Jacob (2 Nephi 9:40), and Isaiah (2 Nephi 8:4; 18:9; 25:4).

37. While it is clear that Alma was singled out in this visionary event (Mosiah 27:13), it is unknown exactly how much the sons of Mosiah experienced. While Alma was clearly invited into the divine council (Alma 36:22), we are not sure the degree to which the sons of Mosiah were also privy to the council. Mosiah 27 describes the sons of Mosiah as bystanders, and Alma 36 is primarily an autobiography with the sons of Mosiah pushed further into the background. Because we do not have firsthand accounts from the sons of Mosiah, it is unknown how much they experienced. It is interesting, however, to note that Mormon chose to use the phrase “saw and heard” to apply to Alma *and* the sons of Mosiah. As used in the Book of Mormon, the phrase “saw and heard” (along with the slight variations of the phrase) is typically associated with an individual being allowed access to the heavenly council (Lehi: 1 Nephi 1:6, 19; Nephi: 1 Nephi 14:28; Jacob: Jacob 7:12). This suggests a possible divine experience for the sons of Mosiah also. Mormon appears to use the phrase to describe his own experience with the divine (see Mormon 3:16, 21). The phrase is also applied to groups who have similar experiences (three hundred who saw the “heavens open” [Helaman 5:48, 50]; the Nephites who saw beyond a ring of fire and angelic beings to the Savior who communed with the Father [3 Nephi 17:24–25]; the Nephite Twelve after their ascension to heaven [3 Nephi 28:13–14]). See Kevin L. Tolley, “To ‘See and Hear,’” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 139–58.
38. Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19; 23:20–23; 33:7–11; 40:36–38; Numbers 9:15–17, 21–23; Psalms 78:14; 99:6–7; 1 Kings 8:10–12; Ezekiel 10:3–4.

39. Bokovoy, ““Thou Knowest That I Believe,”” 1–23. Compare Jeremiah 34:3–4 and Zechariah 4:2, 5.
40. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 126. See also Donald W. Parry, ““Who Shall Ascend into the Mountain of the Lord?”: Three Biblical Temple Entrance Hymns,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith, Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 734–39.
41. The sequence of events depicted in Mosiah 27 are not portrayed in the same order as Alma 36. Mosiah 27 describes Alma’s direct interaction with deity before his torment, while Alma 36 describes it before he sees the divine council. According to Mosiah 27, a basic sequence of events is (1) angelic visitation (Mosiah 27:11–17); (2) Alma physically depleted (Mosiah 27:18–23); (3) Alma receives instruction from the Lord (Mosiah 27:25–27); and (4) a description of Alma’s torment (Mosiah 27:28–31). Alma 36 chronologically depicts the order of events changing the sequence and details of two events: (1) angelic visitation (Alma 36:6–11a); (2) Alma physically depleted (Alma 36:11b); (3) a description of Alma’s torment (Alma 36:12–17); and (4) Alma’s vision of God (Alma 36:18–22).
42. Brant Gardner states that “the angel reminds Alma<sub>2</sub> of three indubitable markers of divinity: the cloud, the voice of thunder, and the shaking of the earth. The angel’s repetition should confirm that these markers are significant, not simply descriptive.” See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:453.
43. Compare Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6); Lehi (1 Nephi 1: 9–10); Nephi (1 Nephi 11:2–14).
44. Daniel 8:26; 10:8–9; 1 Nephi 1:7; Acts 9:4; 9:17–18; Alma 36:10; compare Mosiah 27:12, 18–19; Joseph Smith—History 1:20; Moses 1:10; JST Luke 4:1.
45. See Moses ([E] Exodus 3:11; [J] Exodus 4:1, 10; [P] Exodus 6:12); Gideon (Judges 6:15); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:11); Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3–5, 6a); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5b); Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3–5).

46. Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," 83.
47. Scholars have suggested a number of reasons for Moses's inability to speak: (1) personal inadequacies; (2) lack of knowledge; (3) linguistic disability; (4) medical impediment; (5) moral failing; (6) numinous fear; (7) expression of humility/modesty; (8) lack of faith. Compare Numbers 20:1–13. See Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 98–101.
48. Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," 80.
49. Joseph Spencer wrote, "Alma uses the familiar phrase 'born again.' He is the only person in the Book of Mormon to do so. Similarly, the term "born of God" appears nine times in the Book of Mormon, and eight of those are in quotations from Alma. Although several Nephite prophets preach about becoming children of God, these particular terms are nearly unique to Alma." See Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 12.
50. See Moses ([E] Exodus 3:10; [J] Exodus 3:16–17; [P] Exodus 6:6–8, 10–11); Gideon (Judges 6:14); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8–10); Isaiah (Isaiah 40:6–7); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5b); Ezekiel (implied in Ezekiel 2:6, 8); Micaiah (1 Kings 22:20–21).
51. For key phrases from this initial sermon that are reused in later sermons, see "born again" or "born of God" (Alma 5:14, 49; 7:14; 36:5, 23–24, 26); "a mighty change" (Alma 5: 7, 12–14, 26); "redeemed" (Alma 5:21, 27); "cast off your sins" (Alma 13:27); "ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven" (Alma 5:51; compare 7:14); "the kingdom of God" (Alma 5:24; compare 5:28, 50–51). S. Kent Brown wrote that "virtually every one of Alma's recorded sermons, whether they were formal discourses or spontaneous addresses, are characterized by the recollection of one or more features of his three-day conversion experience." See S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 126.
52. These artifacts included the current record of prophetic writings (Alma 37:1), the brass plates (Alma 37:3), the twenty-four plates (Alma 37:21), and the Liahona (Alma 37:38).
53. Joseph Spencer suggests that Alma relating his personal experience, specifically to his son Helaman, is only as "part of the larger ceremonial event of passing the Nephite records and relics from father to son. Consequently,

questions thoroughly concerned with the passing of the records structurally frame the actual narrative of conversion.” He continues to suggest that Alma 36 is part of a larger “ceremonial context.” Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 3–4. This transfer of artifacts might have been in association with a transfer of office. Alma is highlighted in the Book of Mormon as a high priest (Mosiah 29:42; Alma 4:4, 18; 8:11, 23; 5:3; 16:5), an office also held by Alma the Elder (Mosiah 23:16). Grant Hardy writes, “Helaman was Alma’s oldest son and successor as high priest.” Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142.

54. Both the angel’s commission (Mosiah 27:16) and Alma’s recounting (Alma 36:2) highlight key terms such as *remember*, *captivity*, *fathers*, *bondage*, and *delivered*.
55. After the apparent transfiguration of Alma (Alma 45:18–19), Helaman is shown as the next prophet following in the same footsteps as Lehi and Nephi. Helaman is commissioned to go “forth among the people to declare the word” (Alma 45:20, compare 1 Nephi 1:18; 15:1–2). His message is rejected (Alma 46:1, compare 1 Nephi 1:19; 15:9–10), and like Lehi and Nephi before him, his life is put in danger (Alma 46:2, compare 1 Nephi 1:20; 5:2).