

# Parallels between Psalms 25–31 and the Psalm of Nephi

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The beautiful and carefully crafted Hebrew poetry found in the book of Psalms has comforted, inspired, admonished, and encouraged readers for millennia. According to R. Scott Burton, “Our English name ‘Psalms’ comes from the Septuagint . . . title of the book, *psalmoi*, plural of *psalmos*, meaning ‘the twitching or twanging with fingers,’ associated mostly with the strings of a musical instrument.”<sup>1</sup> While there is some debate regarding the authorship of individual psalms, there is no dispute regarding their power and influence. Second only to the book of Isaiah, Psalms is the most frequently quoted book in the New Testament and was often quoted by the Savior.<sup>2</sup>

The Book of Mormon contains a variety of literary styles, and it should come as no surprise that the Psalms may have inspired the ancient prophet Nephi as he wrote upon the small plates. Nephi’s soul-searching introspection found in 2 Nephi 4:16–35 is, “for many Latter-day Saints, one of the most cherished and moving passages in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>3</sup> George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, in their 1955 *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, titled that scriptural passage “A Song of Nephi” and called it “a remarkable piece of

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poetry composed by Nephi.”<sup>4</sup> Hugh Nibley called it “a thanksgiving hymn by Nephi, astonishingly like the Thanksgiving Hymn of the Dead Sea Scrolls.”<sup>5</sup> The most popular name for those verses, the “Psalm of Nephi,” was coined by Sidney B. Sperry in his 1947 book *Our Book of Mormon*, in which he argues that it is the only psalm in the Book of Mormon.<sup>6</sup> Latter-day Saint theologian Robert Millet has written, “The honest in heart could hardly read Nephi’s psalm, taste its spirit, and then be critical of the Book of Mormon. Inspired poetry and music are especially attractive to the Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

We cannot determine with certainty the specific influences that affected Nephi as he drafted his psalm, but it is not unreasonable to entertain the possibility that Nephi may have turned to the brass plates for consolation and inspiration. The purpose of this essay is to suggest that Psalms 25–31 may have had a particular influence upon Nephi as he wrote his psalm.<sup>8</sup>

All seven of Psalms 25–31 are attributed to King David, although some questions remain regarding their provenance.<sup>9</sup> As the biblical scholar Konrad Schaefer notes, “Words and catch phrases do connect many psalms,” and it appears that psalms “which share a common theme or genre were grouped” together anciently.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have proposed several ways to classify the psalms; Psalms 25–31 appear in what is often identified as the first of five “books” of the Psalter (Psalms 1–41).<sup>11</sup> In Psalm 25 the Psalmist “weaves together various attitudes which include trust in and longing for God’s response (vv. 1–2, 5b, 15, 16, 20–21), guilt over past sin (vv. 7, 11, 18), the enemy threat (vv. 2, 15, 19)” —all topics addressed by Nephi in his psalm.<sup>12</sup> Psalms 26 and 27 discuss the Psalmist’s love for the temple, which Nephi most certainly shared (see 2 Nephi 5:16, for example). Psalm 28 is a petition to the Lord to hear his prayers and an acknowledgement that God has answered those prayers. Psalm 29 declares the power of God, which is a frequent theme in the psalm of Nephi. Psalm 30 is a plea for God’s mercy, and Psalm 31 is a declaration of rejoicing in the Lord. In Psalm 31 the Psalmist moves quickly “from complaint to rejoicing,” as Nephi does in 2 Nephi 4:28.<sup>13</sup>

Why might Nephi have turned to those specific psalms for inspiration? In short, because he could have found in those few psalms most of the themes and emotions he was trying to express. Suggesting that the psalm of Nephi was written during an extremely challenging period in Nephi’s life is an understatement. Even a cursory look at the opening chapters of 2 Nephi show that stresses and external pressures were building on Nephi from all sides.

In addition to the responsibilities Nephi had as a father and husband, Lehi, his beloved prophet-father, had recently died; Lehi's death is recorded only a few verses before Nephi's psalm (2 Nephi 4:12). Upon Lehi's death, Nephi became both the spiritual and political leader of his growing family kingdom. "Not many days" after the death of Lehi, Laman and Lemuel—the continually disgruntled and murmuring older brothers who were jealous of their younger brother's spiritual gifts and many talents—became angry with Nephi "because of the admonitions of the Lord" given for their benefit (2 Nephi 4:13). They became so incensed, in fact, that in the verses immediately following his psalm Nephi explains not just once, but twice, that Laman and Lemuel "did seek to take away" his life (2 Nephi 5:2 and 5:4). As a result, Nephi determined to "depart from them and flee into the wilderness" taking "all those who would go with" him (2 Nephi 5:5). After traveling "in the wilderness for the space of many days" (2 Nephi 5:7), Nephi and his followers began again in a new location.

The depth of Nephi's despair may be illustrated by the fact that Nephi seems to consciously omit the blessing he received from his dying father. Blessings for other family members are recorded in the opening chapters of 2 Nephi, but, as Grant Hardy has suggested, "It is possible that Nephi omitted his blessing because he did not want to appear as if he had let his father down."<sup>14</sup> Hardy suggests that Nephi deflects his readers' attention from his omission by including his psalm, which he declares is "a literary exercise in which he tries to work through some significant spiritual and psychological anxieties."<sup>15</sup>

We would expect a man of God like Nephi to turn to the scriptures on the brass plates for guidance. In fact, we find a number of scriptures that document his reliance on the brass plates—for example, see 1 Nephi 15:20; 1 Nephi 19:22–24; 1 Nephi 22:1, 30; 2 Nephi 11:8; and 2 Nephi 25:1–8. So we would expect Nephi to turn to the brass plates for inspiration and consolation during a period of great personal challenge following his father's death. And where in the scriptures might he have gone for help in dealing with discouragement and adversity? What better place is there to turn for consolation and encouragement in times of tribulation than the book of Psalms? Most telling of the role that the brass plates may have played in the writing of his psalm is that Nephi explicitly mentions them in the verse immediately preceding his psalm (2 Nephi 4:15). Nephi explains that on the small plates, where he would

record his psalm, “I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass” (2 Nephi 4:15). He further explains, “My soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15). The influence of the brass plates seems obvious. Clearly, Nephi was studying and pondering the scriptures on the brass plates, searching for inspiration to deal with his personal challenges, and then he proceeded to share what he had learned and experienced. Wouldn’t this be a perfect application of Nephi’s own admonition to “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23)?

If we assert that Nephi was inspired by the psalms on the brass plates, we must address the issue of whether the brass plates included the book of Psalms. While there are questions about the age and authorship of some of the later psalms, the earliest psalms are widely attributed to King David and are generally believed to have been composed in the eleventh century BC, almost half a millennium before Lehi left Jerusalem. It seems probable that Psalms would have been recorded on the brass plates. The earliest surviving manuscripts of Psalms, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, show that the first eighty-nine psalms were nearly always arranged in the same sequence we have today.<sup>16</sup>

The best evidence that the book of Psalms was included on the brass plates is probably contextual—that is, evidence in the writings of the prophets in the Book of Mormon who had access to the brass plates showing that they were familiar with it. One example of a possible connection between Nephi and the book of Psalms, outside of Psalms 25–31, is found in a distinct metaphorical concept of diggers of a pit (wicked men) falling into the pit they dug. Compare 1 Nephi 14:3 and 22:14 with Psalms 7:15, 35:7–8, and 57:6. Another example is Nephi’s reference to “pure hearts and clean hands” in 2 Nephi 25:16 which parallels the reference to “clean hands, and a pure heart” in Psalm 24:4—the only scripture in the Old Testament that uses this same terminology. As we demonstrate in this essay, we believe that the psalm of Nephi provides the strongest evidence of such familiarity.

The psalm of Nephi has received a good deal of attention from Book of Mormon scholars, and writers have analyzed the psalm of Nephi from a variety of viewpoints. The various analyses offer ample evidence that the psalm of Nephi was carefully and meticulously crafted. Richard Dilworth Rust has noted the “strength and lyricism” in the parallelism and chiasmus that are

present in Nephi's psalm.<sup>17</sup> Latter-day Saint scribe John W. Welch observed that there was "an old liturgical requirement for showing respect and tenfold perfection in calling upon the divine name, especially when seeking atonement."<sup>18</sup> The name "Lord" appears exactly ten times in Psalm 25 and again in Psalm 30.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, as Welch noticed, there are ten references to "Lord" within the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:16–17, 26, 30–34) showing the care with which Nephi constructed his psalm.<sup>20</sup>

Sandra and Dennis Packard looked closely at the historical setting of Nephi's psalm and provided verse-by-verse commentary.<sup>21</sup> Steven P. Sondrup analyzed the psalm as an excellent example of Hebrew poetry.<sup>22</sup> Sidney B. Sperry declared that the psalm of Nephi "is a true psalm in both form and ideas. Its rhythm is comparable to the notable cadence of David's poems. It not only praises God, but lays bare to us the very depths of Nephi's soul. A study of this psalm reveals how the scriptures delighted Nephi."<sup>23</sup> Steven Barton suggests that the psalm of Nephi exhibits several general characteristics of ancient Hebrew poetry: parallelism, a chiasmic structure, and various Hebraisms.<sup>24</sup>

In 1926, the German theologian Hermann Gunkel outlined a method he labeled form-critical analysis to analyze psalms as a poetic art form.<sup>25</sup> Gunkel categorized four general types of psalms: hymns, thanksgiving songs, community laments, and individual laments. He identified Psalms 25–28 and 31 as individual laments, Psalm 29 as a hymn, and Psalm 30 as a thanksgiving psalm. Gunkel also listed five basic elements that appear in individual laments: an invocation, a complaint, a confession of trust, a petition, and a vow of praise. In 1997, Matthew Nickerson applied Hermann Gunkel's analysis method to 2 Nephi 4:16–35 to determine if it is "a psalm in the biblical sense of the term."<sup>26</sup> Nickerson methodically concluded that the psalm of Nephi is "a classic example of an ancient poetic form: the psalm of individual lament. . . . Clearly Nephi was participating in an ancient literary tradition when he wrote his psalm."<sup>27</sup>

We believe the specific connections between Nephi's psalm and Psalms 25–31 reviewed later in this essay provide further support for the conclusion that Nephi was writing in the ancient psalmist tradition. We concur with R. Scott Burton's observation that Nephi's psalm exhibits "a good deal of indebtedness to the Old Testament psalmic imagery and phraseology—Nephi seems, at times, to be quoting Old Testament psalms,"<sup>28</sup> but Burton did not attempt to identify specific

psalms that may have provided Nephi's inspiration. If, indeed, Nephi read from Psalms for inspiration or used them as a model as he carefully composed his psalm, it is reasonable to assume that we might be able to find evidence in his psalm that he did so. In a 1981 essay in *BYU Studies*, Sondrup noticed some general similarities between Psalms 51 and 84 and the psalm of Nephi.<sup>29</sup> Nickerson, in his 1997 essay in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, identified possible influence from Psalms 6:6–7; 18:2, 6–7, 16, and 48; 25:1, 27:9, and 51:16–17 on Nephi's psalm. Like Sondrup, Nickerson, and others, we too feel that Nephi was clearly influenced by biblical psalms during the creation of his psalm. Our study of 2 Nephi 4:16–35 and the book of Psalms has caused us to consider that while many psalms may have affected and influenced Nephi, he appears to be most directly influenced by Psalms 25–31 based on an amazing concentration of shared feelings and phrases. In the text that follows, we will take phrases from Nephi's psalm and compare them with passages and phrases from Psalms 25–31 that may have influenced Nephi's writing.<sup>30</sup>

- ✦ One of the literary elements that makes Nephi's psalm appear so personal is his use of the phrase "my heart," which appears nine times (verses 16–17, 19, 26–28, 30, 32). Psalms 25–31 mention "my heart" six times (Psalms 25:17; 26:2; 27:3; 8; and 28:7). That phrase is used many times in other psalms, but Psalms 25–31 is the only place in the Psalter where four consecutive psalms use it.<sup>31</sup> Nephi also uses the phrase "my soul" five times (verses 15, 27, 28 [twice], 31); the phrase "my soul" is used frequently throughout the Psalter, including six times in Psalms 25–31 (Psalms 25:1; 25:20; 26:9; 30:3; 31:7, 9).
- ✦ Nephi speaks of the "great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works" (2 Nephi 4:17). Psalm 31:19 similarly states, "Oh how great is thy goodness . . . which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee." The only other place in the Psalms where the Lord's "great goodness" is mentioned is in Psalm 145:7. Also, in Psalm 26:7, the Psalmist cites the Lord's "wondrous works."
- ✦ Nephi despairs about his sins, saying "my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities" and "my heart groaneth because of my sins" (2 Nephi 4:17–19). These verses from Psalms sound similar in tone:

Psalm 25:11: "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great."

Psalm 25:7: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions."

Psalm 25:17–18: "The troubles of my heart are enlarged. . . . Look upon mine affliction and my pain."

Psalm 31:9–10: "I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief. . . . For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity."

- Nephi cites God as "my support" (2 Nephi 4:20). Several verses in Psalms 27, 28, 29, and 31 speak of the Lord as a source of strength and support:

Psalm 27:1: "The Lord is the strength of my life."

Psalm 28:7: "The Lord is my strength and my shield."

Psalm 28:8: "The Lord . . . is the saving strength of his anointed."

Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength unto his people."

Psalm 30:1–2: "I will extol thee, O Lord; for thou hast lifted me up. . . . Thou hast healed me."

Psalm 31:4: "Thou art my strength."

- Nephi declares that the Lord "hath heard my cry" (2 Nephi 4:23) and says, "I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea I will cry unto thee, my God" (2 Nephi 4:35). In commenting on Psalm 28, Schaefer observed that the use of the phrase "hath heard the voice of my supplications" probably meant that "either God has already intervened or the psalmist is so certain of his eventual intervention that he or she regards it as an already accomplished fact."<sup>32</sup> These verses from Psalms sound similar to Nephi's psalm:

Psalm 28:6: "He hath heard the voice of my supplications."

Psalm 30:2: “O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.”

Psalm 30:8: “I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication.”

Psalm 31:22: “Thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.”

- ✦ Nephi speaks of God visiting men “in so much mercy” (2 Nephi 4:26). In his April 2005 conference address, Elder David A. Bednar cited “tender mercies” in 1 Nephi 1:20.<sup>33</sup> Other references to “tender mercies” can be found in 1 Nephi 8:8, in Ether 6:12, and in ten places in Psalms. Psalm 25:6, for example, states, “Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses; for they have been ever of old.” Nephi’s effort to remember how the Lord had supported, blessed, and bestowed mercies upon him in 2 Nephi 4:20–26 invokes the same thought found in Psalm 26:3: “For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.”
- ✦ Nephi speaks of “mine afflictions” (2 Nephi 4:20, 29). Psalm 25 uses a similar phrase twice: “I am desolate and afflicted” (verse 16) and “Look upon mine affliction and my pain” (verse 18). In 2 Nephi 4:20, Nephi writes, “My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions,” which seems to echo the sentiment in Psalm 31:7—“Thou has known my soul in adversities.”
- ✦ Nephi speaks of “mine enemies” and prays for God’s help in dealing with them (2 Nephi 4:22, 27, 29–33). He asks, “Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies?” (2 Nephi 4:31) and, “Wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies?” (2 Nephi 4:33), and implores God to “hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy” (2 Nephi 4:33). In 2 Nephi 4:29, Nephi additionally counsels himself to “not anger again because of mine enemies.” Dealing with enemies is a common theme in Psalms. Here are similar references found in Psalms 25–31:



Psalm 25:2: “Let not mine enemies triumph over me.”

Psalm 25:19: “Consider mine enemies; for they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred.”

Psalm 27:2: “Mine enemies . . . stumbled and fell.”

Psalm 27:11–12: “Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies.”

Psalm 31:15: “Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies.”

- Nephi says, “Rejoice, O my heart” (2 Nephi 4:28). He also says, “My soul will rejoice in thee, my God” (2 Nephi 4:30). Psalms 27, 28, and 31 contain several similar references:

Psalm 27:14: “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart.”

Psalm 28:7: “My heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth.”

Psalm 31:7: “I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy.”

Psalm 31:24: “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.”

- Nephi prays for strength and deliverance in 2 Nephi 4:28–34. (While the word “strength” is not used by Nephi, he is clearly praying for strength to overcome sin and his enemies.) Similar prayers are found in Psalms 25 and 30–31:

Psalm 25:20: “O keep my soul, and deliver me.”

Psalm 30:10: “Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper.”

Psalm 31:1: “Deliver me in thy righteousness.”

Psalm 31:15: “Deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.”

- Nephi cries in his heart, “O Lord, I will praise thee forever” (2 Nephi 4:30). Similar expressions of praise and thanksgiving are found throughout the Psalter; here are examples from Psalms 26–28 and 30:

Psalm 26:7: “That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.”

Psalm 27:6: “I will sing praises unto the Lord.”

Psalm 28:7: “With my song will I praise him.”

Psalm 30:12: “O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever.”

- Nephi speaks of “my God, and the rock of my salvation” (2 Nephi 4:30). He also speaks of God as “the rock of my righteousness” and “my rock” (2 Nephi 4:35), phrasing that is almost taken directly from Psalms.

Psalm 27:1: “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

Psalm 27:9: “O God of my salvation.”

Psalm 28:1: “O Lord my rock.”

Psalm 31:2–3: “Be thou my strong rock. . . . Thou art my rock.”

- Nephi prays to God: “O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul?” (2 Nephi 4:31). In like manner, the Psalmist pled:

Psalm 25:20: “O keep my soul, and deliver me”

Psalm 26:11: “Redeem me, and be merciful to me.”

Psalm 30:10: “Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper.”

Psalm 31:1–2: “Deliver me in thy righteousness. . . . Deliver me speedily.”

Psalm 31:16: “Save me for thy mercies’ sake.”

- Nephi then prays, “O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me” (2 Nephi 4:32); in Psalm 27:9 the Psalmist likewise requests that the Lord “hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: . . . leave me not, neither forsake me.” Both verses ask the Lord not to reject the person writing the psalm but to allow the Lord’s presence or influence to abide with him.
- Nephi prays that he “may walk in the path of the low valley” and “be strict in the plain road” with the Lord making “my path straight before me” (2 Nephi 4:32–33).<sup>34</sup> The words “even” and “plain” found in the verses below are translated from the Hebrew noun *mîyshôwr*, which means a “level country” or “plain” and also denotes “uprightness.”<sup>35</sup> Commenting on Nephi’s request to “walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road,” Hugh Nibley wrote that “this prayer of Nephi, the desert traveler, sounds like stilted English until we take it in a literal sense. . . . In *our* civilization, the broadest roads are the safest; in the desert, they are the most confusing and dangerous.”<sup>36</sup> Nephi’s plea is similar to these verses from Psalms 25–31:

Psalm 25:4: “Shew me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths.”

Psalm 26:12: “My foot standeth in an even place.”

Psalm 27:11: “Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path.”

- Nephi asks the Lord, “Encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness” (2 Nephi 4:33). Nephi’s desire to be surrounded and protected sounds similar to the request of the Psalmist that “in the time of trouble he [the Lord] shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me” (Psalm 27:5). The word “pavilion” is translated from the Hebrew noun *cok*, which is a “booth” or “covert”;

the word “tabernacle” (*’ôhel*) commonly refers to a “nomad’s tent,” but specifically, and here more to the point, the portable tabernacle temple of Moses and the children of Israel.<sup>37</sup> (Several other scriptures in the book of Psalms describe the Lord’s righteousness—“thy righteousness”—as having power to bless us. See Psalms 71:2; 89:16; 119:40.)

- Nephi prays, “O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape” (2 Nephi 4:33). Psalms 25 and 31 use very similar wording:

Psalm 25:17–20: “O bring thou me out of my distresses. . . . O keep my soul, and deliver me.”

Psalm 31:4: “Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me.”

Psalm 31:15: “Deliver me.”

- Nephi prays that God would clear any “stumbling block” from his path and hedge up the ways of his enemies (2 Nephi 4:33). In Psalm 27:2, the Psalmist speaks of how his enemies “stumbled” and fell. In the preceding verse, Psalm 27:1, the Psalmist wrote, “Whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?” Thus, the context suggests that the Psalmist recognized that it was the Lord who caused his enemies to stumble.
- Nephi says, “O Lord, I have trusted in thee and I will trust in thee forever” (2 Nephi 4:34) and “I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support” (2 Nephi 4:19–20). The concept of trust in God is mentioned numerous times in Psalms 25–31:

Psalm 25:2: “O my God, I trust in thee.”

Psalm 25:20: “I put my trust in thee.”

Psalm 26:1: “I have trusted also in the Lord.”

Psalm 28:7: “My heart trusted in him.”

Psalm 31:1: “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.”

Psalm 31:14: “But I trusted in thee, O Lord.”

And there may be other influences from Psalms 25–31 on the psalm of Nephi that are yet to be discovered. This essay has relied primarily on the King James Version of the Bible; comparing the psalm of Nephi against other translations of Psalms, for example, may yield additional insights into the possible influences on Nephi.

To be clear, we are not claiming that Psalms 25–31 were the sole inspiration for Nephi as he wrote his inspiring psalm. References to enemies, for example, one of the most common subjects in Psalms, can be found in 56 of the 150 psalms. In 2 Nephi 4:32 Nephi states that “my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite”; a “broken heart” and a “contrite spirit” are mentioned twice in Psalms (34 and 51), but not within Psalms 25–31. Nephi’s prayer to be encircled by the “robe of [the Lord’s] righteousness” in 2 Nephi 4:33 seems likely to have been inspired by Isaiah 61:10, which speaks of the Lord covering a man with the “robe of righteousness.” As Latter-day Saint scholar Noel B. Reynolds has noted, there may also be influences on the psalm of Nephi from scriptures that were present on the brass plates but that are not found in our current Old Testament canon. Reynolds suggests, for example, that Zenos’s prayer quoted in Alma 3–11, “appears to have provided some of the inspiration for the so-called ‘Psalm of Nephi.’”<sup>38</sup>

While we cannot tell what specifically influenced Nephi as he wrote, it appears quite possible that he composed his psalm after reading and pondering what we identify today as Psalms 25–31. Support for this hypothesis is found in the abundance of parallel expressions and sentiments found in both Nephi’s psalm and Psalms 25–31, as outlined in this essay. Nephi knew the scriptures well enough to be influenced by them as he wrote for future generations. Nearly all of the major themes of Nephi’s psalm can be found in Psalms 25–31 (under 5 percent of the entire book), and we are suggesting that those seven psalms appear to have influenced Nephi as he composed his psalm. In his psalm, Nephi integrated seamlessly the scriptures he loved with his own life experience, providing evidence that Nephi was a man who had searched the scriptures diligently and pondered them deeply, as he himself declared at the beginning of his psalm (2 Nephi 4:15). We believe that only a man who knew and loved the word of God intimately—who truly delighted in the

scriptures—could merge his life experiences with the messages of the psalms in such a personal and powerful way.

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## Notes

1. R. Scott Burton, “The Hymnal of Ancient Israel (Psalms, Part 1),” in *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 4: *1 Kings to Malachi*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 413–14.

2. Bible Dictionary, “Quotations.” It is worth noting that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain more copies of Psalms than any other book in the Bible. See Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 505.

3. Burton, “Hymnal of Ancient Israel,” 407–8.

4. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955), 1:264–68. After providing commentary on many aspects of 2 Nephi 4:16–35, Reynolds and Sjodahl reformat those verses in a more poetical form and title it “A Song of Lamentation by Nephi, the Son of Lehi.” Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 1:269–71.

5. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 140. Taking exception to calling this a psalm, Nibley commented, “Some have called this a psalm, but strictly speaking a psalm is a ritual hymn connected with the rites of the Temple.”

6. Sidney B. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1947), 110–11. As Rust notes, Sidney B. Sperry identified “the following literary types [within the Book of Mormon]: allegory, didactic exposition, editorial reflection or commentary, epistle, exhortation, genealogy, gospel, historical narrative, hortatory discourse, lamentation, memoir, oratory, patriarchal admonition, patriarchal blessing, prayer, prophecy of doom, prophetic dialogue, prophetic discourse, prophetic narrative, prophetic prediction, psalm, religious teaching, revelation, sermon, song of praise, symbolic prophecy, and war epistle. Additional types are aphorism, apocalyptic writing, judgment, and farewell speech.” Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 253–54.

7. Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 1: *First and Second Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 217.

8. During his work on the “New Translation,” as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was initially called, Joseph Smith made numerous changes to the book of Psalms. As R. Scott Burton noted, “Around two hundred verses in some fifty different psalms saw revision at the hands of Joseph Smith.” “Hymnal of Ancient Israel,” 408. A close comparison of the King James Version and Joseph Smith Translation of Psalms 25–31 shows that most of the changes made “to the Psalter are of various types and of varying significance. Some, for example, are as mundane as changing ‘hath’ to ‘has,’ ‘an’ to ‘a,’ ‘mine’ to ‘my,’ ‘shew’ to ‘show,’ ‘that’ to ‘who,’ ‘as’ to ‘like,’ ‘thine’ to ‘thy,’ etc.” “Hymnal of Ancient Israel,” 409.

9. Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 126–27. Ludlow notes that the “phrase ‘psalm of David’ could also be translated as ‘psalm to David’ (that is, dedicated to David), ‘psalm about David’ (written about an event in his life), or even ‘psalm like David’ (in the style or pattern of David’s psalms)” (127).

10. Konrad Schaefer, “Psalms,” in *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), xxi.

11. See Schaefer, “Psalms,” xx; Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 19; and Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1: 1–50*, Anchor Bible 16 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), xxx–xxxii.

12. Schaefer, “Psalms,” 62. Psalm 25 is also a Hebrew alphabet acrostic (the first words of each line begin with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet). See Dahood, *Psalms 1*, 155.

13. Schaefer, “Psalms,” xxiii. As Schaefer notes, “More often the brusque transition from complaint to assurance has no apparent cause. . . . Psalm 31 is a fine example” (xxiii).

14. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University, 2010), 52.

15. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 52.

16. We are uncertain in what order the psalms appeared on the brass plates, but it is probable that Psalms 25–31 appeared contiguously as they do in the Masoretic Psalter. Peter W. Flint, director of the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute at Trinity Western University in British Columbia, has noted that “the [Dead Sea] Psalms scrolls bear witness to an early collection of psalms whose arrangement was virtually stabilized well before the second century B.C.E.” “Psalms and Psalters in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2006), 243. Out of thirty-six Psalm scrolls found at Qumran, Psalms 1–89 appear in the familiar Masoretic order in all but seven. Esther Chazon, “Hymns and Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1:264. There is some indication that the prophet Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi, was familiar with the book of Psalms. For example, in Lamentations, Jeremiah refers to Jerusalem using the words “perfection of beauty” and “joy of the whole earth.” In Psalm 48: 1–2, the city of God, mount Zion, is called the “joy of the whole earth” and, in Psalm 50:2, Zion is called “the perfection of beauty.” Also compare Jeremiah 15:16–17 with Psalm 1:1–2 and Jeremiah 17:8 with Psalm 1:3.

17. Richard Dilworth Rust, “Poetry in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorensen and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 100–103.

18. John W. Welch, “A Steady Stream of Significant Recognitions” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Jack W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 332.

19. Some psalms (43, 49, 52, 53, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, and 82) do not include the name “Lord.”

20. Welch, “Steady Stream,” 332.

21. Sandra Packard and Dennis Packard, *Feasting upon the Word* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 92–107.

22. Steven P. Sondrup, “The Psalm of Nephi: A Lyric Reading,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (1981): 1–16.

23. Sperry, *Our Book of Mormon*, 111.

24. Steven Barton, “The Psalm of Nephi and Biblical Poetry,” <http://home.comcast.net/~openskyvisions/PsalmsOfNephiEssay.html>.

25. Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). Gunkel’s original work is entitled *Die Psalmen: Handkommentar zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926).

26. Sondrup, “Psalm of Nephi,” 358, quoted in Matthew Nickerson, “Nephi’s Psalm: 2 Nephi 4:16–35 in the Light of Form-Critical Analysis,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 41.

27. Nickerson, “Nephi’s Psalm,” 41.

28. Burton, “Hymnal of Ancient Israel,” 408.

29. Sondrup, “Psalm of Nephi,” 11.

30. We recognize that we are comparing the King James English translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to the English translation of the Book of Mormon. Thus we would not always expect parallelism in exact wording; we are looking for parallelism of concepts. We acknowledge that some connections are stronger than others and are not claiming that Nephi deliberately relied on a concept in Psalms for each concept in his psalm. However, we believe the large number of parallel concepts supports the idea that Nephi was familiar with these particular psalms, Psalms 25–31. We also acknowledge that psalms outside Psalms 25–31 include parallel concepts too, but, based on our study, the connections to Psalms 25–31 are particularly numerous and compelling and warrant special focus.

31. In addition to four instances in Psalms 25–31 (appearing in 57 percent of those psalms), the phrase “my heart” is found in twenty-seven (19 percent) of the remaining psalms.

32. Schaefer, “Psalms,” 70.

33. David A. Bednar, in Conference Report, April 2005, 104–8.

34. See John W. Welch and Daniel McKinlay, “Getting Things Strai[gh]t” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; and Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 260–62. The authors note that “going back to the 1829 manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, one finds that the word *strait* appears over twenty times in the Printer’s Manuscript” (including 2 Nephi 4:33). The *strait* path may be thought of as narrow, straight, or smooth or level. Welch and McKinlay cite both Psalms 26:12 and 2 Nephi 4:32.

35. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), “mīyshōwr.”

36. Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 219; italics in original.

37. Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, “cok,” “ōhel.”

38. In Reynold’s view, “Nephi appears to have applied the sentiments and language of [Zenos’s] prayer to his own trying circumstances, finding in Zenos’s words a source of encouragement and faith in the face of hostility and affliction. Nephi ends his psalm



with a prayer of approximately the same length and in a style similar to Zenos's prayer text. In their respective texts, Zenos uses the invocation 'O God' or 'O Lord' five times; Nephi six. Nephi begins his psalm by recognizing the Lord's great goodness in showing him 'his great and marvelous works' (2 Nephi 4:17) in answer to Nephi's prayer (see 1 Nephi 11). . . . Zenos ends by emphasizing that because the Lord did hear him in his afflictions, he will continue to cry to him 'in all mine afflictions' (Alma 33:11); furthermore, Zenos asserts generally that God is 'merciful unto [his] children when they cry unto [him]' (Alma 33:8); Nephi knows that 'God will give liberally to him that asketh' (2 Nephi 4:35)." Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephite Uses and Interpretations of Zenos," in *Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 34. As it is unknown when the prophet Zenos lived and wrote, it seems entirely possible that Zenos could also have been influenced by Psalms—further confusing the relationship between an original influence and the results of that influence.