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**A Lengthening Shadow
Is Quality of Thought Deteriorating
in LDS Scholarly Discourse Regarding
Prophets and Revelation?
Part Two**

Duane Boyce

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**A LENGTHENING SHADOW
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IN LDS SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE REGARDING
PROPHETS AND REVELATION?**

PART TWO

Duane Boyce

Abstract: Many mistakes that occur in scholarly endeavors are understandable. The truth is often difficult to discover, and this makes errors inevitable and expected. And of course, some mistakes are so insignificant that to complain of them would be mere pedantry. But this is not true of all errors. Some are both obvious and of such significance to their topics that they are egregious. There is reason to be concerned that this is occurring to some degree on the topic of prophets and the Lord's revelations to them. Erroneous claims and arguments are not difficult to find, including some published under the auspices of reputable and mainstream entities. Is it possible that such errors are becoming common, and commonly accepted, in LDS scholarly discourse? Part One considered multiple examples, primarily from Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason, that begin to suggest a positive answer to this question. This installment, Part Two, considers examples from Grant Hardy that also suggest an affirmative answer.

As discussed in Part One, the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether there is a general (and growing) deterioration of thought on the topic of prophets and revelation in LDS scholarly discourse. In other words, one wonders whether errors on this topic are becoming common, and commonly accepted, in the rhetoric of LDS scholars.

Part One focused on the matter of modern prophets and modern revelation, based primarily on works by Terryl Givens and Patrick

Mason. This Part will focus on the ancient prophet Nephi, as treated by Grant Hardy.

As mentioned in Part One, because of this article's length, many readers will prefer to go directly to the topics that interest them most and navigate their own paths through the material. Since some readers will want only a headline view of the content, periodic summaries and conclusions also appear along the way, including a general conclusion at the end of Part Three.

Here are the various sections that appear over the three Parts:

Part One

Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason: "In All Patience and Faith"

Patrick Mason: The Lord's Guidance to the Church

Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason: The Priesthood-Temple
Restriction

Conclusion to Part One

Part Two (all sections are based on Grant Hardy's work)

Grant Hardy: Introduction

Nephi as Exclusionary and Condemning in Attitude

Nephi's Failure to Eat of the Fruit of the Tree

Nephi's Misleading Narrative Regarding Laman and Lemuel

"Another Side" to the Story Regarding Laman and Lemuel

Nephi's Omission of Lehi as a Witness of the Lord

"Irony" in Nephi's Committing the First Act of Killing in the Book
of Mormon

One Methodological Note

Conclusion to Part Two

Part Three

Terryl Givens: Abraham, Moses, and Jonah

Brief Additional Illustrations

General Conclusion: A Lengthening Shadow

Grant Hardy: Introduction

In understanding how LDS scholars sometimes discuss prophets and revelation, it is important to consider both modern and ancient examples. We have already considered some modern instances in Part One. Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon*¹ gives us a look

at significant ancient prophets, specifically from the Book of Mormon: Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni. Hardy's approach is novel and welcome, but it is not free of numerous and important errors. At some level I think these are easy to overlook because of the uniqueness of Hardy's approach: enamored of its originality, we can find ourselves taking Hardy's word for what the Book of Mormon text says and thinking his conclusions are not only original but accurate.

Unfortunately, following this course too often proves to be a mistake. This is apparent in Hardy's discussion of Nephi, for example — the Book of Mormon figure to whom I will restrict my attention in the interest of brevity. Although there are many smaller issues in Hardy's text that deserve attention,² I will address only a few of the more substantive matters. These are various assertions about Nephi's nature and character that turn out to be unjustified and thus unfair — either because they are highly tenuous, implausible, or explicitly false. I will consider a sample of such contentions.

Nephi

To get a feel for Hardy's approach, it is useful to summarize assorted assertions he makes regarding Nephi.

Early on Hardy tells us that Nephi "is anxious that we perceive him" in certain ways, including as "spiritually superior to his brothers" (20).³ Indeed, "from the beginning," Nephi "structures the narrative in such a way as to prevent readers from sympathizing with his older brothers" (33) and, we are told, he actually has a "vested interest in revealing their moral shortcomings" (39). We also learn that Nephi takes measures in his writing to "gain the sympathy of readers and alienate them from his brothers" (41) and that "the only development he allows them is negative" (41).

Hardy finds expressions of Nephi's "vested interest" in a number of places. For example, Nephi refers, without warrant, to the murderous nature of Laman and Lemuel well before any evidence of such a tendency actually appears in the record (35). Indeed, Hardy points out that Nephi himself "ironically" commits the first killing in the Book of Mormon (35). Nephi also shows unusual eagerness to explain his brothers' unrighteousness: following Lehi's exhortation to Laman and Lemuel on one occasion, Hardy tells us that Nephi "hardly takes a breath" before giving us a sense of their rebellious character (34). Nephi also "plays with the chronology" in recounting the events of his deliverance from

being bound on the ship in order to paint Laman and Lemuel in an unfavorable light (41).

In addition, Hardy asserts that the defense Laman and Lemuel offered for the people of Jerusalem was understandable in view of various scriptural interpretations dominant at the time (38–39), and it is likely Laman and Lemuel were simply orthodox, conservative Jews who were not unreasonably resistant to Lehi’s claims to divine guidance (36–39). Their view of God’s protection of Jerusalem, for example, was “defensible, conservative, and held by the majority of the religious establishment of the time” (39). And, even though Nephi refers to his brothers as would-be murderers, they actually appear to be “rather halfhearted” about the matter (39–40). We also learn that Laman and Lemuel were attuned to the needs of their wives, whereas Nephi apparently was not (46), and also that Nephi was “blind to gender issues” (83).

We also learn from Hardy that Nephi uses various rhetorical tools to lend extra weight to his credibility (36, 43–44), prevent us from making independent assessments of his declarations (36), and make sure readers do not question Lehi’s perspective on his vision (37). Nephi also finesses the narrative in order to prevent charges against his credibility “to sink into the minds of readers” (50), “deflects” readers’ attention from what he has omitted from the record (52) and obscures other matters by changing the subject, “hoping we won’t notice” (20). We also see a “narrative gap” and Nephi’s “attempt to disguise it” (22; also, 17, 20), and we learn that Nephi includes a commendation from Lehi because Nephi is “not content” to let his readers assess his declaration independently (36).

Hardy states other matters with similar confidence. He tells us what words Lehi did not speak that Nephi was hoping to hear (17), what Nephi “must have savored as poetic justice” (35), what “would have been impossible” for Nephi in light of his cultural background (49), what Nephi “is reminded of” (although Nephi never actually mentions it) (54), and what would have “strained” the relationship between Lehi and Nephi (55). He also informs us that Nephi, at the time of his writing, has “not fully assimilated” the equality-based, expansive theological perspective God has revealed to him (83), that he is “forced to admit” that righteousness is more important than tribal affiliation (83), and that Nephi uses various scriptural interpretations “to assuage deep personal frustrations” (84).

Moreover, although Nephi is anxious for readers to perceive him as “in harmony with his father at all times” (20), there is evidence the two did not always “see eye to eye” (50). This is indicated by the lack of a

recorded blessing to Nephi from Lehi (50), Nephi's failure (in talking about Isaiah) to mention Lehi as a witness of Christ (50), Lehi's naming of a new son "Joseph" (50), and Nephi's omission of Lehi's reaction when he and his brothers returned from Jerusalem with the plates of brass (17–19, 50). Additionally, Hardy tells us that whereas Lehi desires to partake of the fruit once he sees the tree in his vision, Nephi does not. Nephi opts instead for knowledge *about* the tree — a decision whose effects haunt him throughout his life (84–86). Moreover, whereas Lehi takes an inviting and inclusive approach toward his vision — tasting of the fruit and beckoning his family to taste of it as well — Nephi is focused instead on justice and condemnation. He primarily wants to protect the tree from the unworthy (52–54).

Four Immediate Observations

This is not all that Hardy says about Nephi, but this summary gives a decent overall picture of Hardy's tenor. Four observations suggest themselves immediately. First, almost all of these items question the accuracy of Nephi's account at certain points and/or certain aspects of his motives and character.

Second, Hardy periodically states matters with a degree of confidence that in the end cannot be justified. Here and there he acknowledges that his reading is speculative (e.g., 49), and he often speaks with appropriate tentativeness, but in numerous places he speaks with a confidence that belies any caveats about speculation. As we will see, once they are examined, multiple assertions by Hardy are unjustified — because they are either false or at a minimum completely tenuous.

Third, this set of claims, taken as a whole, creates a far more negative picture of Nephi than the way readers are accustomed to thinking about him. Indeed, this feature of the commentary is common enough that one is surprised to encounter Hardy raising this caution in the course of his discussion: "It might be tempting to dismiss Nephi as a biased, self-aggrandizing character, but that would be a mistake" (44). This is puzzling because, if Nephi seems to readers biased and self-aggrandizing, it is only because that is how Hardy's own choice of language periodically characterizes him. Indeed, Hardy's caution reveals that he knows this: if he hadn't written as he does from the outset — and if he hadn't realized it — he would not have felt the need to issue the caution. Ironically, it would seem that Hardy first creates an impression for readers and then tells them they are mistaken if they have that impression. An option

would have been to use language that didn't require retraction in the first place.⁴

Fourth, and most important, most if not all the assertions listed above regarding Nephi could be contested on various grounds and shown to be faulty — whether because they are based on slender intellectual threads or because they are simply false. For simplicity's sake I will restrict myself to six examples. They are Hardy's claims regarding: (1) the exclusionary and condemning attitude Nephi takes toward his vision and how this differs from Lehi's; (2) Nephi's failure to eat of the fruit of the tree and what this reveals about him; (3) two ways Nephi is misleading in his narrative treatment of Laman and Lemuel; (4) the possible sincerity and mere mistakenness of Laman and Lemuel in their resistance to Lehi and Nephi; (5) Nephi's omission of Lehi as one of the witnesses of the Lord; and (6) the irony of Nephi's referring to Laman and Lemuel's murderous character although he himself actually commits the first killing in the book.

In addition, I will make a brief comment about one methodological matter in Hardy's approach.

Nephi as Exclusionary and Condemning in Attitude

To begin, consider one conclusion Hardy reaches in discussing the vision of the tree, the great and spacious building, and so forth, shared by Lehi and Nephi. Hardy reports that whereas Lehi takes an inviting and inclusive approach in regard to this experience — beckoning his family to the tree, for instance — Nephi is more justice-oriented and condemning. Hardy tells us, for example, that “Lehi speaks [of the vision] as a concerned father, Nephi as a condemning brother (and a younger one at that)” (54). Specifically, Hardy says, Lehi is concerned about how the great and spacious building “might entice people away from the tree,” whereas Nephi's concern is the exact opposite: the elements he sees behave “sternly” against the wicked (53), and Nephi “worries that the tree might attract people from the building who are not worthy to eat of its fruit” (54). Overall, the picture Hardy paints is one of Lehi's simply wanting the best for people, whereas Nephi primarily wants to make sure the tree is protected from the unworthy.

Hardy is thus making twin charges. One is that Nephi's attitude is condemning and exclusionary in nature, and the other is that his attitude is different specifically from Lehi's.

These are significant assertions — particularly the first. It is useful to consider Hardy’s evidence for these claims in three major categories: (1) Nephi’s use of the expression “tree of life” to refer to the tree, whereas Lehi does not; (2) Nephi’s discussion of the fire related to the tree as well as his use of terms like “hell,” “awful gulf,” and “justice,” whereas Lehi does not; and (3) Nephi’s description of God as rejecting the wicked, rather than (as with Lehi) of the wicked as rejecting God. As we examine each of these matters, we will discover that Hardy’s evidence is not the support he thinks it is. Indeed, in the end his twin claims about Nephi both prove to be unsustainable.

Nephi’s Expression: “Tree of Life”

For Hardy, one evidence that Nephi and Lehi adopt different attitudes toward their vision is found in the different ways they refer to the tree itself. Hardy notices that Nephi refers to the tree he sees as the “tree of life,” whereas Lehi never refers to it this way. This indicates to Hardy that Nephi is reminded of the famous tree in the Garden of Eden called the tree of life. Indeed, Hardy states the matter confidently, telling us unequivocally that Nephi *is* reminded of this tree (54). The association with the tree in the Garden is significant for Hardy because he believes it is one evidence that Nephi thinks primarily in terms of *protecting* his tree. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden was, according to Hardy, “kept off-limits from the unrighteous by a ‘flaming sword which turned every way’” (see Genesis 2:9; 3:22–24) (54). Since Nephi calls his tree the “tree of life” and since the original “tree of life” was protected from “the unrighteous,” this is one indication to Hardy that Nephi is thinking of his tree in the same exclusionary, protective terms.

However, although this clue about Nephi’s tree-of-life language is interesting, Hardy overlooks three major elements of the record that significantly weaken it as evidence for his claim.

Internal Reasons for Nephi’s Expression

The first difficulty is the presence of multiple elements *internal* to Nephi’s vision that would explain his expression “tree of life.” Note, to begin, the presence of what Nephi specifically calls “living waters” in the vision he and Lehi saw — living waters that he explicitly equates with Lehi’s tree. Indeed, Nephi says the rod of iron led “to the fountain of living waters, or,” he adds, “to the tree of life” (1 Nephi 11:25). He also tells us that both the tree *and* the living waters represent “the love of

God” (1 Nephi 11:21–22, 25). For Nephi the tree and the living waters are equivalent symbols.⁵

Note also that Nephi’s vision included seeing all that John the Revelator later saw (1 Nephi 14:19–30) — and John also saw a “tree of life” associated with living waters (Revelation 22:1–17). It was a tree that represented spiritual abundance and glory, including in the celestial city of God. Since (1) Nephi actually *saw* this tree, (2) it was specifically represented as a “tree of life,” (3) it was associated with living waters, and (4) its spiritual meaning was similar to the tree in Lehi’s dream, it is easy to imagine Nephi’s drawing a connection between the two images and using the same expression for Lehi’s tree. This tree image — one Nephi had actually seen and that he had observed in the same vision in which he saw Lehi’s tree — would seem a more natural source for Nephi’s expression “tree of life” than a tree in the Garden of Eden that Nephi had only read about.

In addition, Nephi is also shown Lehi’s tree specifically in relation to the Savior’s birth through Mary, his mortal mother (1 Nephi 11:9–23). This depiction of the Savior’s entrance into life is actually dominant in Nephi’s vision: the account of the infant Jesus — borne in the arms of his angelic, earthly mother — is bathed in holiness, and the connection between the tree and Jesus, and between Jesus and Mary, is made explicit.⁶ The idea of life — indeed, of *divine* life — permeates the account.

These elements of the record make it easy to imagine Nephi’s referring to the tree he sees as the “tree of life,” independent of the tree in the Garden of Eden. Nephi explicitly saw what John saw of a “tree of life” — a tree that represented spiritual abundance and glory and that was associated with living waters. Moreover, even what he saw of Lehi’s tree served as a forceful and holy symbol of the bestowal of life.

Elements of the record also indicate why Lehi would *not* necessarily think of the tree in these terms and thus why he would not necessarily use the term “tree of life” to describe it. For one thing, we have no indication that Lehi saw John’s vision as Nephi did, and thus we have no reason to think Lehi saw the “tree of life” that Nephi and John saw. In addition, Lehi apparently failed even to notice the living waters that were intimately connected to the tree in his vision: he makes no mention of them, either in recounting his vision or anytime thereafter. Nephi explicitly tells us in one place that, due to Lehi’s mind being “swallowed up in other things,” he overlooked an element of the vision he had seen (1 Nephi 15:26–27), and the same seems to be true of this feature of Lehi’s experience as well. In addition, Lehi evidently did not even see the tree’s relationship to

the Savior and his birth. This life-drenched symbolism was presented to Nephi in an explicit and forceful way, but Lehi apparently was not shown it at all.⁷ It is not surprising, then, that — in contrast to Nephi — Lehi nowhere refers to the tree as the tree of life; multiple elements of the text actually suggest he *wouldn't* refer to it that way.

Therefore, that Nephi refers to the tree as the *tree of life* and that Lehi doesn't is by itself decidedly weak evidence for Hardy's twin claims. Features of Nephi's own experience are sufficient to account for his language, independent of the tree in Genesis, and features of Lehi's own experience are sufficient to account for his difference from Nephi.⁸

Dissimilarities between the Lehi/Nephi Tree and the Genesis "Tree of Life"

The second major difficulty with Hardy's view that Nephi is thinking of the tree in the Garden of Eden is that it differs from the tree he and Lehi see in significant ways. A "strait and narrow path" and a "rod of iron" are central elements in the vision they saw (1 Nephi 8:20–21, 24; 11:25), and the whole intent of these elements was to help people reach this tree and partake of its fruit (see especially 1 Nephi 8:21–28, 30; 11:9, 21–23, 25). But none of this is true of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. In that story there is no path, no rod of iron, and no imperative that people are supposed to find their way to the tree. Indeed, the tree is specifically *protected* from approach. (More on this momentarily.) These are not minor differences and in fact constitute what seem to be essential distinctions between the two trees.

There are additional differences as well. For instance, Hardy emphasizes (53–54) that the fire Nephi speaks of in his vision specifically represents the separation of "the wicked" from the righteous and that this separation is explicitly identified as due to "justice" (1 Nephi 15:27–30). But neither of these features matches very well the story in Genesis. For example, whatever their transgression, the Genesis account does not characterize Adam and Eve as "wicked." The Lord remarks that "the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Genesis 3:22), and he casts Adam out of the Garden and also guards the tree of life with a flaming sword so that Adam cannot partake of the fruit "lest he ... eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). But there is no mention that God is imposing "justice" in preventing Adam from eating of the tree. All the Lord says is that he does not want Adam to live forever; he does not indicate this is a matter of justice or that it is due to wickedness.⁹

Nephi's Failure to Mention the Genesis Tree of Life

The third major difficulty with Hardy's contention that Nephi thinks of Lehi's tree in terms of the tree in the Garden of Eden is this: when, after Nephi sees Mary and the infant Son of God in vision, Nephi's angelic guide asks him if he knows the meaning of the tree, Nephi answers decisively in the affirmative — but he says nothing about the tree in Genesis in his explanation. Nor does the angel make any reference of this sort in his response to Nephi's explanation (1 Nephi 11:12–23). Although this would be a natural place for one or the other to make this connection if it were significant, neither of them draws such a parallel.¹⁰

Summary

Hardy places too much emphasis on Nephi's expression, *tree of life*, as evidence that Nephi is reminded of the tree in the Garden of Eden whereas Lehi is not. Nephi's own experience can very comfortably explain why this expression would occur to him, independent of any specific reference to this tree in Genesis. Moreover, there are at least five important differences between the tree Lehi and Nephi see and the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, including the very intent of the two trees. And when Nephi and his angelic guide explicitly discuss the meaning of Lehi's tree, neither refers to the tree in the Garden of Eden. All these features of the text seriously weaken Hardy's contention regarding Nephi's language in referring to the tree.¹¹

Nephi's Justice-Oriented "Flaming Fire"

Nephi's expression "tree of life" (and its contrast with Lehi's language) is not all of Hardy's evidence for his claim of connection between Eden's tree of life and the tree of life in Lehi's dream. A second is the presence of fire and a sword in both Nephi's account of his vision and in the Garden of Eden (53–54). Nephi specifically mentions a "flaming fire" in speaking of Lehi's vision to Laman and Lemuel, and he explains that it represents the justice of God — a justice that divides the righteous from the wicked as well as from the tree itself (1 Nephi 15:30–36). And in his earlier report of the vision, he identifies what divides the wicked as "the sword of the justice of the Eternal God" (1 Nephi 12:18).¹² Both fire and a sword are thus features of the vision. This, of course, resembles the Genesis account. In that episode Adam and Eve were specifically prevented from approaching the tree because it was guarded by a "flaming sword" (Genesis 2:9; 3:22–24) — a sword that, in Hardy's words, kept the tree "off-limits to the unrighteous" (54). In putting the matter this way,

Hardy indicates that this flaming sword resembles what Nephi saw: a “flaming fire” that represented the justice of God and that similarly separated *his* tree from the wicked (1 Nephi 15:30–36). The two accounts seem alike — which suggests, again, that Nephi is drawing a connection between them.

But what seems to matter most to Hardy is that Nephi associates this fiery element with terms such as “awful gulf,” “hell,” “filthiness,” and “the devil” in talking to Laman and Lemuel about the vision (1 Nephi 15:26–36). Lehi, in contrast, says nothing about such unpleasant matters in describing his experience, omitting mention of a fire and a sword altogether. All this is evidence to Hardy that Nephi is primarily concerned with justice and with condemnation of the wicked and that in this he is significantly different from Lehi.

This line of thinking has a certain surface appeal, but four features of the text combine to render it untenable.

Differences between the Fiery Elements

The first feature that creates a difficulty is the dissimilarity that exists between the two fiery elements. Whereas the fire and sword Nephi sees specifically represent the justice of God — and explicitly separate the wicked from the righteous and from God — this is not true of the fiery sword in the Garden of Eden. The Genesis account does not frame Adam and Eve as wicked, and its fiery element does not represent the justice of God: it is a flaming sword that merely prevents Adam and Eve from partaking of the tree and living forever.

That both accounts have fiery elements, therefore, is only weak evidence that the fire Nephi sees puts him in mind of the tree in the Garden of Eden.

The next three features of the text, however, are far more significant. In speaking with Laman and Lemuel, Nephi associates such concepts as an “awful gulf,” “hell,” “justice,” “the devil,” and so forth with these fiery elements. Hardy contends that Nephi’s doing so indicates his condemning and exclusionary attitude and also indicates his difference from Lehi, who, as mentioned, never describes his vision in these terms.

But these claims collapse when confronted with the following additional features of the text.

Explicating *Lehi’s* Vision

Note, for example, that Nephi confines everything he tells Laman and Lemuel to what occurred in *Lehi’s* vision. Indeed, Nephi explicitly

identifies this “flaming fire,” which represents “the justice of God,” as something shown to Lehi: “And I said unto them that *our father* also saw the justice of God ... and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire,” etc. (1 Nephi 15:30). Laman and Lemuel are asking Nephi for an interpretation of *Lehi’s* dream, and that is what Nephi is giving them.

The Interpretation Given by an Angel

Note, also, that Nephi was given his understanding of Lehi’s vision by an angel. This angel was beside Nephi throughout the bulk of his manifestation (1 Nephi 11: 14–36), and Nephi declares of him that “I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, *and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me*” (1 Nephi 14:29), a matter Nephi explicitly mentions to Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 15:29).¹³

These two features of the text are significant. They demonstrate that Nephi is an intermediary in these verses: he is simply passing along an *angel’s* interpretation of *Lehi’s* dream. Neither the images nor their interpretations are the products of Nephi’s own mind, and thus it is baseless to conclude from them anything about Nephi’s particular attitude. Lehi’s vision — and an angel’s interpretation of it — do not provide grounds for drawing conclusions about *Nephi*.

Responding to Laman and Lemuel’s Questions

Finally, note that Nephi speaks about an “awful gulf,” “hell,” and so forth only in response to Laman and Lemuel’s questions (1 Nephi 15:26–36). Nephi does not aggressively foist a sermon upon his brothers against their wills; everything they hear on these topics is in response to what they asked him. It is hard to see Nephi as exclusionary and condemning when he reveals these matters only because he is being *asked* for explanations. Moreover, Laman and Lemuel’s asking provides additional evidence that Nephi’s attitude is no different from Lehi’s. After all, if Laman and Lemuel had presented their questions to Lehi, he would have given them the same answers Nephi gave them¹⁴ — in which case *Lehi* is the one who would appear to Hardy as exclusionary and condemning. That Nephi, rather than Lehi, is the one who explains Lehi’s vision to Laman and Lemuel is pure happenstance. No meaning about Nephi can be attached to it.

A Failed Rescue Attempt

Hardy explicitly acknowledges one of these features — namely, that Nephi is explicating the vision according to the interpretation given him by an angel. Unfortunately, he simultaneously minimizes and even seems to forget what he has acknowledged. He says, for example, that Nephi is not “exactly” improvising in his explanations and emphasizes that, after all, Nephi’s explication “is the first time the brothers have heard their father’s dream portrayed with words such as *hell*, *gulf*, and *justice*” (53). These comments, however, do not help Hardy’s argument. The first of these claims is completely unsubstantiated and implausible, and the second is a red herring.

In the first case, Hardy’s remark that Nephi is not “exactly” improvising (53) entails that he is at least somewhat improvising. But Hardy offers no evidence for this, and it is hard to see how he could, since Nephi explicitly reports that his understanding was due to the teachings of an angel. Hardy’s is a charge without support and, so it would seem, without merit.

Second, Hardy’s observation that Laman and Lemuel are hearing about Lehi’s dream in “stern” terms of “hell” and “justice” for the first time — from Nephi — is completely beside the point. Laman and Lemuel hear these concepts for the first time from Nephi only because it is the first time they are asking questions — and they happen to be asking them of Nephi rather than of Lehi. Such a circumstance reflects nothing about Nephi’s attitude. It is actually irrelevant to it and thus adds no support to Hardy’s claims.¹⁵

What we see in the record, then, is that Nephi is an intermediary, passing along an angel’s explanation of Lehi’s dream because Laman and Lemuel are asking him questions about it. Mention of a fiery element (along with “hell,” “justice,” and so forth) does nothing to indicate a condemning and exclusionary attitude in Nephi. Nor does it suggest that Nephi’s attitude contrasts in any way with Lehi’s. The passage is not even *about* Nephi’s attitude (at best, it is about the angel’s). Moreover the only reason Laman and Lemuel hear of these matters for the first time from Nephi is simply because Nephi is the first one they ask — a coincidence that also signifies nothing about Nephi’s attitude. In all these ways Hardy’s contentions about Nephi fail.

But this is not all. Note, as I said earlier, that if Laman and Lemuel had asked their questions of Lehi rather than of Nephi, *Lehi* is the one who would appear to Hardy as exclusionary and condemning. But this would also be mistaken, of course. After all, Lehi was *given* his vision,

and if he received an interpretation of it, that would *also* be given to him. Lehi is thus no more responsible for the elements of the vision — and of their meanings — than is Nephi.

Ultimately, if Hardy wants to call all of this exclusionary and condemning, according to the text he will have to look beyond (and above) Lehi and Nephi for the responsible party.

Nephi's Illusory "Rejection" of the Wicked

A third evidence for Hardy that Nephi adopts an exclusionary and condemning tone is this declaration by Nephi regarding justice and hell: "Wherefore, the wicked are rejected from the righteous, and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits" (1 Nephi 15:36) (54).

In Lehi's "gentle account," as Hardy puts it, people are invited to partake of the fruit freely and simply need to overcome some hindrances in order to do so (53–54). In contrast, in this statement of Nephi's, we learn that "the wicked are *rejected* from the righteous, and also from that tree of life" (1 Nephi 15:36) (54). It is in this context that Hardy remarks: "For Lehi, the wicked tragically refuse what is freely offered by God; Nephi reverses this and has God refuse the wicked" (54).

Unfortunately for Hardy's argument, for two central reasons, all of this is mistaken.

Nephi's Sources and Laman and Lemuel's Questions

The first is a matter we have just seen: Nephi is merely reporting what occurred in *Lehi's* dream and he is teaching concepts actually delivered to him by an angel explaining the meaning of what Lehi saw. Neither the images nor their explanations come from Nephi himself. It is also relevant that, in this passage, Nephi is explicitly addressing questions asked by Laman and Lemuel. It is not part of a lecture Nephi was imposing on his brothers as a way of condemning them; everything they hear is in direct answer to their own questions. All these matters paint a different picture of Nephi than the one Hardy presents to us.

***Rejected* — The Wrong Word**

The second reason Hardy's line of thinking fails is related to his reliance on the word *rejected* in Nephi's statement — i.e., "the wicked are *rejected* from the righteous, and also from that tree of life" (1 Nephi 15:36). It is the appearance of this word that leads Hardy to claim that Nephi is going out of his way to emphasize God's condemnation and judgment. Whereas

Lehi sees the wicked as refusing God, Nephi “reverses this,” according to Hardy and instead “has God refuse [‘reject’] the wicked” (54).

This argument evaporates, however, as Royal Skousen’s work on the Book of Mormon text indicates that the word *rejected* in this passage should actually be *separated*.¹⁶ This means the passage in point of fact reads: “The wicked are *separated* from the righteous.” Understood this way, the passage turns out to be a problem for Hardy, since it straightforwardly undermines his characterization of Nephi. Instead of sounding condemning and stern in this passage — as Hardy says of him — Nephi actually sounds much like Hardy thinks *Lehi* sounds. The wicked are merely “separated” from the righteous, not *rejected* from them.

Reliance on the word *rejected* in this part of Hardy’s argument, then, is an error. The truth about the language in this verse, far from serving as evidence for Hardy’s view about Nephi’s condemning and justice-oriented tone, actually serves as compelling evidence against it.

Additional Error. There is an additional layer to this error. After all, Hardy is familiar with Skousen’s textual change from “rejected” to “separated.” It is something he acknowledges in an endnote.¹⁷ What he does not do, however, is allow this alteration to affect his argument. This is surprising. Throughout his volume Hardy refers to Skousen’s textual changes and in each instance he accepts Skousen’s modification. In this case, however, while acknowledging in an endnote Nephi’s use of the word *separated* rather than *rejected*, Hardy proceeds in the text with his characterization of Nephi as if this correction didn’t exist — or at least as if it didn’t matter.

It does matter, though. Hardy’s characterization of Nephi as exclusionary and condemning depends in no small measure on the appearance of the word *rejected* in this particular passage. When Hardy discovers this is the wrong word, one would therefore expect him to identify this passage as a counterexample to his thesis about Nephi and address it in some way. What we do not expect is what Hardy actually does: ignore the disabling effect this correction has on his argument altogether.

It is also worth noting, however, that even if this error in transmission weren’t the case — even if Nephi *had* used the word *rejected* — this would still provide no support for Hardy’s thesis of a stern and condemning attitude in Nephi. Even in that case, the account would still be the depiction of a report of Lehi’s vision and of what an angel told Nephi the elements of the vision meant — and only in response to direct questions

from Laman and Lemuel in the first place. It would still be fallacious, therefore, to attribute the tone to Nephi himself.

In short, Hardy's reliance on the word *rejected* fails in two ways: it is the wrong English word to begin with and, even if it weren't, the concept still wouldn't be attributable to *Nephi*. In every respect Nephi's purported attitude of "rejecting" the wicked is illusory.

Three Final Matters

Hardy thus relies on completely inadequate evidence to claim that Nephi (in contrast to Lehi) is eager to protect the tree from the wrong people — i.e., that Nephi "worries that the tree might attract people from the building who are not worthy to eat of its fruit" (54). In addition, however, Hardy also fails to address other elements of the text that comprise counterevidence to this claim.

One of these is the textual evidence that Nephi *wanted* Laman and Lemuel to succeed. We see instances of Nephi's praying for Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:18), exhorting them to keep the commandments (1 Nephi 7:21; 15:25; 16:4; 17:15), rejoicing when they humble themselves and repent (1 Nephi 16:5), experiencing anguish for them (1 Nephi 17:47), and accepting and forgiving them for their mistreatment (1 Nephi 7:20–21; 17:55). Lehi also reports that Nephi's sole motivation toward Laman and Lemuel was their "own eternal welfare" (2 Nephi 1:25). This, of course, is consistent with Nephi's own report of his intent in making the record, namely, that he "may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved" (1 Nephi 6:4). These features of the text are not consistent with the claim that Nephi's fundamental concern was to protect the tree from the unworthy rather than lead people to it, and it would therefore seem incumbent on Hardy to address them.¹⁸

Hardy also seems to overlook Lehi's own tone elsewhere in the text. As mentioned earlier,¹⁹ Lehi foretells the fate of Jerusalem in stark and condemning terms (1 Nephi 1:13), and Laman and Lemuel later complain about his "judging" attitude in doing so (1 Nephi 17:22). Moreover, Lehi also speaks in strong and graphic terms to Laman and Lemuel themselves. Early in the record, for instance, Lehi spoke to them with such power that "their frames did shake before him" and "he did confound them, and they durst not utter against him" (1 Nephi 2:14).²⁰ And later, after speaking to them of the harrowing future he had seen regarding the promised land, Lehi says to Laman and Lemuel:

O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. (2 Nephi 1:13)

In this one dense expression Lehi packs in references to “the sleep of hell,” “awful chains,” “carried away,” “captive,” “the eternal gulf,” and “misery and woe” — all specifically in reference to Laman and Lemuel. Moreover, over the course of several verses, Lehi also speaks to Laman and Lemuel of the “hardness of [their] hearts,” “the fulness of God’s wrath,” the prospect of being “cut off and destroyed forever,” “a cursing,” “the captivity of the devil,” “a sore cursing,” “chains,” “the displeasure of a just God,” “destruction,” and “the eternal destruction of both soul and body” (2 Nephi 1:17–22).

These expressions are not gentle beckonings to Laman and Lemuel to partake of the fruit of the tree. They are not tender invitations to ponder their conduct and improve. They are a frank presentation of the consequences of wickedness and a call to Laman and Lemuel to cease their rebellion against God. Based on the general way Hardy paints Lehi in the context of his dream (and his complete omission of Lehi’s language in verses 17–22), we would be hard-pressed to expect such expressions or conduct from Lehi; we would imagine such talk to come only from Nephi. Yet there it is — and in spades. The expressions (1) are stronger and more graphic than anything Nephi says to Laman and Lemuel, (2) are (unlike Nephi’s words) explicitly about Laman and Lemuel *personally*, and (3) in saying them, Lehi (unlike Nephi) is not merely repeating the words of an angel: they are Lehi’s *own* words.

Finally, it is relevant to Hardy’s claim of a difference between Lehi and Nephi that Lehi explicitly defends Nephi’s conduct toward Laman and Lemuel. He tells Laman and Lemuel they were wrong to “have accused him,” that Nephi sought their “own eternal welfare,” that “his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God which was in him,” that what they called anger was simply “the truth,” and that Nephi’s utterances were not his own but were due to “the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it” (2 Nephi 1:25–27). Hardy’s claim that the text shows a fundamental difference in attitude between Lehi and Nephi is difficult to sustain when we see Lehi explicitly defend Nephi in this way.²¹

All three of these elements belie Hardy’s claim about what the text reveals of Nephi, namely, that he primarily wanted to protect the tree

from the unworthy and that he was different from Lehi in attitude and tone. Unfortunately, Hardy fails to consider them all.

Summary

We have considered three items of evidence for Hardy's twin claims that Nephi is exclusionary and condemning in attitude and that in having this attitude, he differs from Lehi. The first is that Nephi uses the expression *tree of life* whereas Lehi does not; the second is that Nephi talks of fire, a sword, justice, and so forth (and in a way reminiscent of the Garden of Eden account) — whereas Lehi does not. And the third is that Lehi speaks of the unrighteous rejecting God, whereas Nephi speaks of God rejecting the unrighteous.

Unfortunately, this collection of evidence turns out to rest on a combination of tenuous scriptural comparisons, a mistaken attribution of justice-oriented concepts to Nephi, a failure to address evidence, and textual oversights. All we are left with, it would appear, is the single thread of a surface resemblance between Nephi's discussion of Lehi's vision and the tree in the Garden of Eden. It turns out that this thread is completely tenuous at best, and the other items of evidence all fail completely.

One upshot is this: It is hard to see any justification for combining Lehi's vision with an angel's interpretation of it and transforming that combination into an expression of attitude in *Nephi*. And this means it is hard to see any justification for saying, as Hardy does, that Nephi does not want everyone to reach the tree — that he “worries” the tree might “attract” unworthy people from the great and spacious building (54). From the fact that Lehi's dream — and an angel's interpretation of it — indicate that the unworthy aren't *at* the tree, it hardly follows that Nephi doesn't *want* them to find their way to it. Indeed, as we have seen, Nephi explicitly states that his *only* intention is to help people reach the tree, i.e., to help them come unto God and be saved (1 Nephi 6:4). To see the matter otherwise is to transform two facts that are completely irrelevant to Nephi's attitude into an unflattering and false portrayal of him.

Nephi's Failure to Eat of the Fruit of the Tree

In addition to his contention that Lehi and Nephi have different attitudes regarding their vision (and specifically that Nephi is exclusionary and condemning), Hardy also believes they have different responses to the tree itself. Whereas Lehi is eager to taste of the fruit of the tree when he

sees it — and is equally eager to invite his family to partake of it — Nephi prefers to gain knowledge about the tree rather than to actually taste of its fruit and experience the exquisite sweetness and joy it represents (1 Nephi 8:10–12; 11:23). “At a key moment,” we are told, Nephi “opted for knowledge” rather than opting for the experience of actually tasting the fruit (84).

Lehi thus experiences sweetness, whereas Nephi declines the opportunity in order to gain knowledge, and, as a result, he “is wiser but not happier” (86). According to Hardy, Nephi is “wiser but not happier” because he learns in his vision of the eventual destruction of the civilization that will descend from him (e.g., 1 Nephi 12:19; 15:5). This is a knowledge that burdens him to the end. “For the rest of his life, and through the entirety of his literary labors,” Hardy reports, “Nephi works through the implications of that choice” (86). Such enduring sorrow is a consequence of Nephi’s own “particular propensities,” however, since, according to Hardy, Nephi’s own disposition led him to seek this knowledge in the first place rather than to actually taste of the fruit as Lehi did. Moreover, Nephi’s opting for knowledge at this key moment also seems to explain why the Spirit of the Lord departs from Nephi at this juncture in his vision and is replaced by an angel. Hardy sees this switch as a “literary puzzle” that seems best explained by Nephi’s choosing to seek knowledge instead of actually tasting of the fruit of the tree (84–86).

At first glance these observations might seem like revealing insights into Nephi, including how he differs from Lehi. But they are insights only to the degree they are accurate, and they actually do not pass this test. All of them rest on mistakes.

The Structural Difference between Lehi’s and Nephi’s Visions

The first mistake lies in drawing a straightforward comparison between Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions — as if they were structurally identical — when they actually seem structurally disparate. Note that Lehi is an actual participant in his vision, experiencing the whole event from the “inside”: he personally walks for hours, suffers through a dark and dreary waste, comes to a tree, eats of its fruit, beckons his family, and so forth (1 Nephi 8:2–35). But Nephi’s experience is fundamentally different: from the beginning his manifestation is a vision *about* Lehi’s vision — what might be called a “meta-vision.” Divine messengers explicitly instruct Nephi, show him events, and engage him in conversation about what

he is seeing (1 Nephi 11). Nephi walks nowhere, encounters no dark and dreary waste, comes to no tree, and interacts with no one he is observing — all because he himself is not a participant in the events he sees. His perspective is entirely from the “outside” and thus he *cannot* interact with its elements.

Because these visions are structurally different in this way, at a fundamental level they are incommensurable, as are Lehi’s and Nephi’s perspectives within them. Father and son do not behave the same for the simple reason that they *can’t* behave the same. Drawing a straightforward contrast between the two makes the category error of confusing observers with participants. It is like comparing the on-stage behavior of an actor with the behavior of a theatergoer merely watching from the audience. No one thinks they should behave the same: they actually shouldn’t. Indeed, they *can’t*.

It also follows from these structural differences that Hardy is mistaken to draw conclusions about Nephi’s “opting.” Since eating of the fruit is not even a possibility in Nephi’s vision, his failure to do so cannot be an expression of preference. This would be like saying a theatergoer’s failure to walk on-stage expresses a preference. Actually, it expresses nothing more than what it means to be “at” a play rather than to be “in” one.

Nephi’s Obvious Tasting of the Fruit

The second fundamental mistake lies in Hardy’s overlooking other features of the record — features that indicate Nephi did not choose knowledge over spiritual experience.

One of these is the very nature of Nephi’s life. After all, the tree is *symbolic*. It represents what people can experience of God’s love — and the spiritual intimacy they can achieve with him — in this life.²² But by the time of his vision Nephi was already enjoying exactly what the tree represents to a remarkable degree: the experience of love and intimacy with the Lord and of being alive in him. Nephi is actually experiencing in his life what the tree only represents. This is evident in Nephi’s earlier report of the spiritual manifestations he shared with Sam (1 Nephi 2:16–17), and of the Lord’s first-person declarations to him regarding both Nephi’s divinely approved status and various central matters relating to the future (1 Nephi 2:18–24). In addition, the Lord also gave specific instructions to Nephi in his episode with Laban (1 Nephi 4:6–18).

All of these are significant manifestations of the Spirit and far exceed the kind of spiritual experiences enjoyed by typical Latter-day Saints today who are devoted and who can easily be said to be eating of the fruit of Lehi's tree. Nephi is experiencing in his life *exactly* what the tree symbolizes. Indeed, the fact that Nephi could experience the vision he received in 1 Nephi 11–14 is itself proof of his intimacy with the Lord.²³ Thus, any implication that Nephi somehow chose knowledge over spiritual intimacy overlooks the closeness Nephi obviously enjoyed with the Lord and that qualified him to receive dramatic, divine knowledge in the first place. Nephi's entire life is a demonstration of what it means to taste the fruit of the tree.

In addition, in Lehi's dream — where Nephi is represented as an actual participant and therefore *can* partake of the fruit of the tree — he does partake of it (1 Nephi 8:14–16).²⁴ What we see in Nephi's life, therefore, is confirmed by what the Lord presents to Lehi in his vision: that Nephi unquestionably chooses to taste the fruit of the tree.

Hardy thus overlooks important features of the text — first, that Nephi's vision was structurally different from Lehi's and didn't even permit tasting of the fruit; second, that Nephi's *whole life* exemplifies tasting of the fruit; and third, that when the Lord represented Nephi as a participant in Lehi's vision, and as one who *could* partake of the fruit, Nephi did. Nephi is a perfect example of one who sought both spiritual intimacy *and* spiritual knowledge.

The Knowledge that Actually Haunted Nephi

Hardy's third fundamental mistake is specifically related to the claim that Nephi was haunted throughout his life by the knowledge he gained in his vision and that he received this knowledge because he asked for it. According to Hardy, Nephi's propensity to seek knowledge, rather than to actually taste of the tree, explains this sad dimension of his life.

However, even if we ignored the problems with this view that we have already considered, the claim would still be mistaken. Nephi did not actually ask for the knowledge that ended up haunting him throughout his life. At the beginning of his vision (1 Nephi 11:1–11), Nephi asks for an interpretation of the tree which Lehi had seen and which he now sees, but he does not ask for the additional knowledge then given him about the eventual destruction of Nephite civilization (1 Nephi 12). Nor does he ask for all he learns thereafter (1 Nephi 13–14). An angel simply presents all this to Nephi, unbidden. It would seem to be a mistake, then, to attribute Nephi's lasting sorrow to his “particular propensities.” None

of what Nephi learned after seeing the tree actually came as a result of his asking for the specific abundance of knowledge he received.

But there is a second point to be made. Even if we think only about the knowledge Nephi actually did ask for — namely, regarding the tree, etc. of Lehi’s vision — it is worth noticing that many have actually benefitted from the knowledge Nephi gained. The text depicts the information as highly valuable to Laman and Lemuel, for example, who quarreled with each other because they could not understand Lehi’s teachings generally (1 Nephi 15:2–7) and who were highly curious about the meaning of Lehi’s vision of the tree, which Nephi was able to explain to them (1 Nephi 15:21–16:5). Following his explanation and following his exhortation to them to keep the commandments of God, Laman and Lemuel “did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hopes of them” (1 Nephi 16:5).²⁵

A Literary Pattern

Fourth, it also seems a mistake to attach significance to the replacement of the Spirit of the Lord by an angel in Nephi’s experience. Hardy considers this shift a “literary puzzle” (85), and he thinks Nephi’s propensity to seek knowledge rather than to actually enjoy the fruit of the tree is the likely explanation.

Although we have addressed this claim on other grounds, even if it were accurate it would still be irrelevant to this shift in divine messengers. This shift, after all, is no more unusual than what Nephi recorded of Lehi’s own experience. Lehi starts out in his vision with “a man” guiding him — but who then disappears from the vision altogether, without any explanation (1 Nephi 8:5–35). Hardy does not find *this* peculiar and in fact does not even mention it.

Moreover, Nephi’s experience is considerably less unusual than John the Revelator’s experience during the vision he received. Over the course of John’s vision, multiple divine figures addressed him and gave him instructions. These included the Lord, one of the twenty-four elders John saw surrounding the throne of God, each of the four beasts he had also seen surrounding God’s throne, and at least two separate angels (and perhaps three) — including one angel who alternated between speaking as the Lord and speaking as himself.²⁶

It would thus seem entirely customary for visions to include unusual elements and even to involve a change in divine messengers. Against this background, what Nephi experiences seems less a literary puzzle than a

literary pattern.²⁷ Indeed, we would actually find it puzzling if Nephi had *not* experienced surprises similar to John's

Summary

Hardy does not appear to be justified in claiming that Nephi chooses knowledge over spiritual experience and that this propensity not only results in a sadness that haunts him throughout his life but also seems to explain a literary puzzle in his vision. This view overlooks the apparent structural differences between Lehi's and Nephi's visions, the reality of Nephi's clear tasting of the fruit of the tree in his life, the depiction of Nephi as tasting of the fruit of the tree in Lehi's version of the vision, the fact that Nephi does not ask for the knowledge that actually ends up saddening him, and the fact that Nephi's change in divine messengers is no more significant than the change Lehi himself experienced — and much less significant than the changes experienced by John the Revelator.

Nephi's Misleading Narrative Regarding Laman and Lemuel

Hardy makes multiple claims about the relationship between Nephi and his brothers, Laman and Lemuel. I will consider two examples that lend themselves to relatively brief treatment.

“Playing” with Chronology

In one place, Hardy argues that Nephi wants to present Laman and Lemuel as only worsening in their spiritual condition over time and never improving. “The only development [Nephi] allows them,” he says, “is negative” (41). As evidence, Hardy notes that (1) early in his record Nephi reports that pleas of family members helped soften Laman and Lemuel's hearts toward him during one of their acts of aggression (1 Nephi 7:19–20), and that (2) in a later incident Nephi actually “plays with the chronology” in order to make sure we see that family beseeching had *no* effect on Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 18:9–22) (41). As recounted by Hardy, this latter is the famous incident (in 1 Nephi 18) in which Nephi reports that:

1. Laman and Lemuel bound him while on the sea (v. 11).
2. A great storm arose (vv. 13–14).
3. The brothers' sense of self-preservation led them to untie Nephi (v. 15).

4. Lehi had earlier asked them to relent; Sariah was distraught, as were their two youngest brothers; Nephi's wife and children had also begged — all to no avail (vv. 17–20).
5. Laman and Lemuel panicked in the storm and untied Nephi (v. 20).

Hardy reports that even though the family's pleas (event 4) happened before Laman and Lemuel freed Nephi (event 3), Nephi tells us this out of sequence because he does not want to risk Laman and Lemuel's getting even partial credit for responding to family members' appeals (rather than merely being concerned about their own lives). He tells us that "Nephi, as the narrator, wants to disrupt any sense that the appeals of family members were even a partial cause of his brothers' change of heart" (41). Nephi does this because he only "allows" Laman and Lemuel to develop negatively, and that is why he "plays with the chronology," mentioning their involvement in a way that distorts the actual sequence of events. In other words, Nephi is being manipulative in how he tells the story.

All of this is different from a *prima facie* reading of this account, of course. The natural default way to read it is to see Nephi as simply giving us a basic report of events (1–3) and then deciding to elaborate upon them in order to emphasize the degree of Laman and Lemuel's recalcitrance and the threat they had posed to Lehi's party (4–5). We see nothing suspicious, and indeed it seems consistent with Nephi's practice elsewhere of describing the character of Laman and Lemuel's behavior (see, for just a sample, 1 Nephi 2:8–13; 3:28; 7:6–22).

This, however, is not sufficient for Hardy, who sees Nephi as manipulating the chronology of the story in order to show that Laman and Lemuel only "develop negatively." There are two problems with this claim, however. The first is that Hardy's *only* evidence for this principle about Nephi's approach to Laman and Lemuel is Nephi's supposed manipulation of chronology in this single story. He offers no other evidence for it. But this is surprising. To be even minimally plausible, a general proposition about what Nephi will "only" allow requires demonstrating multiple positive examples of the claim, combined with an absence of any contrary examples — none of which Hardy attempts to supply.²⁸

More importantly, Hardy provides no reason to believe that Nephi is doing anything other than what the default reading would say he is doing. He asserts that Nephi is manipulating the chronology, but he actually offers no argument for it. Indeed, the only clue in Hardy's

text for why he thinks Nephi is manipulating the sequence of events is actually Hardy's other claim: namely, that Nephi only allows Laman and Lemuel to develop negatively. Because Hardy supplies no other evidence, to all appearances *that* explains why we should see Nephi's narrative as manipulative.

If true, however, this amounts to obvious circularity. *We know that Nephi allows Laman and Lemuel to develop only negatively because we see a story in which he manipulates the chronology to do so, and the reason we know he is manipulating the chronology to do so is because, after all, he allows Laman and Lemuel to develop only negatively.* The way Hardy presents the material, the principle seems to rely solely on the story and the story solely on the principle. It is thus difficult to see how Hardy's claim about Nephi is anything other than vacuous: an instance of intellectual self-validation.

Laman and Lemuel as “Halfhearted” Assassins

Hardy also tells us that Laman and Lemuel appear to be orthodox and observant Jews and that for the most part Nephi's descriptions of their conduct are not serious — regarding their rebellion on the ship, for example, “the worst he can come up with is ‘rudeness’” (39). Hardy acknowledges that Nephi describes Laman and Lemuel as would-be murderers several times but remarks that actually “they seem to be rather halfhearted assassins” (39). He adds:

Although there are two of them, both living side by side with Nephi for years on end, they never kill him or even wound him, despite numerous opportunities and provocations. Rather than actually stoning or stabbing him, they threaten him (1 Nephi 16:37; 2 Nephi 5:1–4) or they tie him up (1 Nephi 7:16, 18:11) — actions that could be interpreted as attempts to quiet him or teach him a lesson (much like their beating of him at 1 Nephi 3:28), unsavory behavior that nevertheless left Nephi healthy enough to immediately return to Jerusalem and contend decisively with Laban. (39)

I will share seven observations.

First, it is surprising to see Hardy refer to Nephi's being tied up in the wilderness (in 1 Nephi 7:16) and to suggest that this could have been intended to “quiet” Nephi or to “teach him a lesson.” That description omits consideration of what Nephi explicitly tells us, namely, that Laman and Lemuel bound him specifically in order to “leave me in the

wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts,” all in order to “take away my life.” Hardy thus proposes conclusions about Laman and Lemuel’s motives in this episode (e.g., that they may have wanted to quiet Nephi or teach him a lesson) that materially affect our view of them and of Nephi, and yet he does this without mentioning what the text *already* tells us about their motives — information that paints the opposite picture of these three brothers. If Hardy wants to say that we can’t trust Nephi’s reports about Laman and Lemuel’s motives, very well — but then it would seem that he owes us an argument for why this is the case. What he cannot do is what he actually does: omit the explicit commentary of the text altogether and supply his own commentary in its stead.²⁹

Second, although Nephi uses the term “rudeness” to describe the conduct of Laman and Lemuel on the ship, this description applies only to their early behavior. Subsequently, they bound Nephi — disrupting the operation of the Liahona — and refused to release him despite their fears during a severe storm and despite the pleadings of multiple family members (a matter discussed above). “Harshness” is the term Nephi employs to describe behavior of this sort (v. 11) — an apt adjective, and one that Hardy overlooks.

Third (and related to the second point), if Laman and Lemuel’s conduct was no more than rude, it is hard to understand why multiple family members would have to plead with Laman and Lemuel to release Nephi after they bound him. It is also hard to understand why those family members wouldn’t just release Nephi themselves. Simple rudeness is hardly sufficient to dissuade parents from taking action when their children are in peril. Lehi could have released Nephi himself — or asked Sam or even Zoram to do so — unless Lehi felt that Laman and Lemuel’s threats (v. 17) were serious enough to prevent him from doing so. Others on the ship must also have considered the threats serious enough that it affected their own actions, not only in relation to Laman and Lemuel but also in relation to Nephi.³⁰ Hardy’s emphasis on the term “rudeness” obscures all of this.

Fourth, the claim that Laman and Lemuel do not actually present serious threats to Nephi (since they never actually wound or kill him) seems inconsistent with the five occasions on which they at least attempted to kill Nephi (1 Nephi 7:17–18, 19; 16:37; 17:48; 2 Nephi 5:1–4, 19).³¹ The idea that Laman and Lemuel were fundamentally benign is inconsistent with how the text depicts these incidents. Indeed, by the same standard we probably would have to consider the multitudes of Jerusalem to have been halfhearted in seeking Lehi’s life. We don’t know how long Lehi

labored to preach, but however long or short it was, the multitudes failed to either wound or kill him — and yet, seemingly inconsistent with this, the text tells us of their intent multiple times, including once by the Lord himself (1 Nephi 1:20; 2:1, 13; 7:14). And, of course, from the fact that it took the wicked of Jerusalem (who were also, appropriate to their time, orthodox and observant Jews) three years to finally crucify the Lord, it hardly follows that they were halfhearted about the matter.

Fifth, the idea that Laman and Lemuel did not present serious threats appears to be inconsistent with the explicit report of the Lord's interventions in four of these cases.³² In two of the incidents the Lord demonstrated miraculous power to spare Nephi (1 Nephi 7:16–18; 17:48); in one of them the Lord spoke directly to Laman and Lemuel, chastening them “exceedingly” by his own voice (1 Nephi 16:39); and in another the Lord directly warned Nephi to flee in order to spare his life from the threat posed by Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 5:1–4, 19). These interventions by the Lord do not appear consistent with the idea that Laman and Lemuel actually presented no real danger to Nephi.

Sixth, the idea that Laman and Lemuel were not a genuine threat seems inconsistent with the way they begged for forgiveness and repented following their incidents of aggression.³³ This occurred each time, until Nephi and his followers departed after reaching the promised land [1 Nephi 7:20 (which covers two incidents of aggression); 16:39; and 17:55]. It is hard to see why Laman and Lemuel would repent so earnestly if they felt only halfhearted in their conduct.

In light of all these factors, it seems completely mistaken to think of Laman and Lemuel as “halfhearted” in their aggression toward Nephi. The only possibility remaining to justify such a description (and this is the final point) would be the infrequency of Laman and Lemuel's most serious aggression — five times over eight-plus years of living together (“years on end,” as Hardy notes) (39). But what standard would one have to have in mind in order to consider five attempts on another's life — over any stretch of time — “halfhearted”? It is true that Laman and Lemuel do not suffer by comparison to serial murderers, of course, and if something like that is the standard we are assuming, then the frequency of the brothers' attempts on Nephi's life genuinely *is* insignificant, and Hardy's characterization therefore might make sense: Laman and Lemuel do look good compared to serial killers (and to wanton murderers generally, for that matter).

However, it is generally not useful to measure conduct against the *lowest* measure we can think of — or even anything close to it. Following

that course, practically anyone's evil conduct can be made to appear tepid. It would seem that a more appropriate standard of comparison would be the conduct of families generally: How many family members try to kill their siblings *at all*? It happens, including in the scriptural record, but it can hardly be considered common. Even in extreme cases most would choose leaving over taking a life — an option Laman and Lemuel explicitly considered (e.g., 1 Nephi 7:6–15; 16:35–36). But if we have in mind a standard something like that — i.e., “how family members typically treat each other, even in times of stress” (a measure that seems suitable enough) — it is hard to see how “halfhearted” could possibly be an apt description of Laman and Lemuel's aggression toward Nephi. On a measure like that, their multiple threats to Nephi were far out of the norm since most men don't try to kill their brothers even once.

An appeal to infrequency, then, doesn't seem successful. However, even if, despite these considerations, we still felt comfortable in considering five incidents over eight-plus years to be insignificant, we would still face a problem. After all, as we have seen above, the attempts on Nephi's life do seem to be serious. But this means that each time in the text that Laman and Lemuel tried to slay Nephi, they ... well, *tried*, and it isn't intuitive that “halfhearted” is the best term to describe genuine attempts of this sort, regardless of their frequency.

In the end, although this is the way Hardy chooses to describe them, it is difficult to see how the text supports “halfhearted” as an apt description of Laman and Lemuel's aggression toward Nephi.

“Another Side” to the Story Regarding Laman and Lemuel

In general, Hardy believes there is “another side” to the story than the one Nephi tells about Laman and Lemuel (44). In addition to what we have already seen, Hardy substantiates this in part by referring to how Laman and Lemuel's descendants understood the events of the wilderness journey — an understanding that describes Laman and Lemuel as repeated victims of Nephi's mistreatment (44). Moreover, Hardy suggests that although Laman and Lemuel might have been mistaken in their views regarding the fate of Jerusalem and the legitimacy of Lehi's calling, they weren't necessarily insincere: they were adopting a reasonable position in defending the people of Jerusalem and they were also likely nothing more than orthodox, conservative Jews whose resistance to Lehi's religious innovations were understandable (36–39).

Moreover, their impulse to resist and even slay Nephi can be accounted for by attentiveness to the Deuteronomic tradition that false prophets require death (39–40).

In making claims of this sort, however, it would seem to be relevant, first, to note that the Lord himself speaks of Laman and Lemuel’s conduct in terms of “rebellion” and not of mere mistakenness (1 Nephi 2:21–23), and Lehi does the same, at much greater length (2 Nephi 1:13, 17–29). Expressions of Lehi’s such as “the hardness of your hearts,” “rebellion,” “the sleep of hell,” “awful chains,” “gulf of misery and woe,” and the pending “destruction of both soul and body” are not the expressions one typically uses to address innocent-but-sincere mistakenness. Hardy does not address it, but an important feature of the record is the agreement between Lehi and the Lord that Laman and Lemuel’s conduct was more than mistaken — it was rebellious.

Second, in considering whether Laman and Lemuel were mistaken-but-sincere, it is relevant that an angel appeared to them on one occasion (1 Nephi 3:28–31) and that the Lord spoke to them by his own voice on another (1 Nephi 16:39). One would expect people who were sincere to respond with humility and obedience to such divine experiences. It would seem only natural that manifestations of this sort would overwhelm whatever misconceptions in belief and loyalty such people might have had prior to these experiences and that they would happily modify their beliefs and re-direct their loyalties in response to them. That’s what Saul did, to name one. But not Laman and Lemuel. Their behavior did not remotely change following these firsthand experiences with the Divine. This suggests they were not actually sincere — that their conduct was not really motivated by concerns with doctrine or orthodoxy but simply reflected the rebelliousness of which Nephi, Lehi, and the Lord all found reason to speak.

Third, although the Book of Mormon recounts on numerous occasions the hatred the Lamanites held for Nephi and his descendants,³⁴ the motivation for this resentment is never associated with Laman and Lemuel’s sincere devotion to religious orthodoxy or to the violation they felt by the presence of a false prophet in their midst. Hardy speculates about these motivations, but they never appear in the record — even in the complaints handed down through the generations. Instead, what we see are explicit complaints from later Lamanites about Nephi’s “robbery” of the plates of brass at the time he separated from Laman and Lemuel upon arriving in the promised land (Mosiah 10:16; Alma 20:13) as well as his similar “robbery” of family authority that “rightly belonged” to

Laman and Lemuel (Alma 54:17). Indeed, this perceived usurpation of authority is one of the reasons Laman and Lemuel sought to kill Nephi (2 Nephi 5:3), and is central to the multiple “wrongs” that descendants of Laman and Lemuel attributed to Nephi’s treatment of his brothers (Mosiah 10: 12–16, which is cited by Hardy).

Such complaints regarding robbery of the plates and of family authority would explain the generational hatred of the Lamanites for the Nephites and are plausibly the content of the “wicked tradition” reported multiple times to have been held by the Lamanites.³⁵ But there is no similarly clear report of resentment based on the religious heterodoxy of Lehi or of the false-prophet status of Nephi (*or* Lehi). Thus, while it is clear that Laman and Lemuel passed down the charge that Nephi mistreated them in more than one way, it is difficult to find evidence that their complaint included these latter claims — even though inclusion of this sort is what Hardy’s view would predict. This absence does not prove Hardy incorrect, of course, but it does demonstrate lack of evidence in a dimension of the record that, if Hardy *were* correct, would be a natural place to find it.

Fourth, it is also relevant that two significant Lamanite figures in the record repudiate the Lamanite tradition of Nephi’s mistreatment of Laman and Lemuel. One is Lamoni’s father, king of the Lamanites, who not only cites the tradition (Alma 20:10, 13) but also later proclaims safety for the Nephite missionaries precisely in order that the gospel can be preached and that “his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers” (Alma 23:3). The other is Samuel the Lamanite, who attributes the Lamanites’ evil in his day specifically to “the iniquity of the tradition of their fathers” (Helaman 15:4).³⁶ Hardy thinks Laman and Lemuel might have had a legitimate point of view in complaining about Nephi (there is “another side” to the story), but it is not something that either Lamoni’s father or Samuel believed. In addition to these two, of course, the record tells us of numerous other Lamanites who also rejected the tradition following their conversion (Helaman 5:49–51). These are features of the record that, it would seem, Hardy should acknowledge and address in proposing his own view.³⁷

It is true, of course, that all these elements of the record are due to Nephi’s authorship and that one might attribute hidden motives to him that would (1) explain these features and (2) leave Laman and Lemuel still in possession of a legitimate and defensible point of view in their anger toward Nephi, including his and Lehi’s religious non-orthodoxy. Unfortunately, Hardy omits consideration of any of these features of the

record and thus does not suggest how such an argument might proceed. Nevertheless, that is what would seem to be required in making the claim he makes.

Nephi's Omission of Lehi as a Witness of the Lord

As another example of Hardy's approach, consider his interest in the relationship between Lehi and Nephi. In the context of hypothesizing that relations could have been strained between them (they did not "see eye to eye"), Hardy asks why Nephi, in 2 Nephi 11, lists himself, his brother Jacob, and Isaiah as the three witnesses of Christ, "ignoring the testimony of his father" (50). Isaiah, Jacob, and Nephi had all seen the Lord (e.g., 2 Nephi 11:3) — but then so had Lehi (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:7–15) — so why did Nephi not refer to *him*?

In addressing this question, it is useful to note the context of Nephi's listing of the witnesses of Christ. The background is this: (1) Nephi wishes his people to know the words of Isaiah since Isaiah's words can be likened "unto all men" (2 Nephi 11:8); (2) Nephi has already asked Jacob, who also likens Isaiah's words broadly (particularly to "all the house of Israel"; 2 Nephi 6:5) to teach his people specifically from the words of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6:4); (3) Jacob has done so at length, combining it with his own commentary, in the previous five chapters (2 Nephi 6–10); (4) Nephi's inclusion of numerous additional writings of Isaiah in subsequent chapters (2 Nephi 12–24); and (5) Nephi's stated interest specifically in identifying *three* witnesses to "establish [God's] word" (2 Nephi 11:3).

Now it is obvious in this context why, in identifying three witnesses, Nephi would include Isaiah: he is the prophet about whom Jacob has just expounded and whom Nephi himself is now going to quote at length. And it would seem equally apparent why Nephi would include Jacob: Jacob has just delivered a lengthy sermon *on* Isaiah. And it would also seem apparent why Nephi would find it natural to include himself: he is the one writing the book in the first place, he is the one who asked Jacob to teach on Isaiah to begin with, and he is the one who will now quote Isaiah at length and then launch his own prophesying and teaching from that platform.³⁸ This constellation of facts makes it seem only natural that, in this context — and in identifying three witnesses, specifically — the choices would be Isaiah, Jacob, and Nephi.

In addition, it might also be relevant that both Jacob and Nephi were alive at the time. Perhaps Nephi wished to indicate the reality of living witnesses of the Lord and not just dead ones. That is a powerful

principle of testimony that informs much testimony-bearing in this dispensation, from Joseph Smith forward.³⁹ It is true, of course, that if Nephi had expanded his list of witnesses to draw on additional dead prophets, it *would* have been significant if he had omitted Lehi — in which case Hardy’s wondering would be not only natural but obvious. As it is, Nephi does in fact draw only on living witnesses (in addition to Isaiah, who is being quoted), and it is not obvious who would make more logical choices than Jacob and himself.

This is an example where Hardy seems to operate from an impoverished pool of hypotheses. He thinks of one possibility to explain why Nephi would omit Lehi but seems to expend no energy thinking of other possibilities — even though the ones I have mentioned would seem to be both obvious to consider and more plausible than the single possibility Hardy proposes. It is not the only time Hardy seems to limit the possibilities in this way.⁴⁰

“Irony” in Nephi’s Committing the First Act of Killing in the Book of Mormon

As a final example, consider Hardy’s reference to Nephi’s report in one place regarding Laman and Lemuel. Nephi tells us that Laman and Lemuel “were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father” (1 Nephi 2:13). Hardy considers this early report about Laman and Lemuel’s attitudes “unwarranted” since Nephi had not yet shared any examples of their aggressive conduct, and he adds parenthetically, “Somewhat ironically, the first death in the story is when Nephi himself dispatches Laban” (35).

Even ignoring the problems with claiming that Nephi’s report was unwarranted, it would seem misleading to speak in this context of “irony.” To compare Nephi’s killing to the killing that people sought for Lehi — to consider this at all ironic — is to presuppose some sort of equivalence between the two cases. But it is hard to imagine anything actually further from the truth. The people of Jerusalem wanted to kill Lehi because, following God’s command, Lehi called them to repentance in an effort to help them avoid destruction and also told them of the coming of a Messiah. Resenting Lehi’s message, they sought to take his life. Nephi, on the other hand, did *not* want to kill Laban. He did so only after initially resisting and only after being commanded by the Lord to do so.

Thus, while it is true that killing is the issue in both cases, the actions and motivations in the two situations actually represent moral opposites, not moral similarities. There is thus no justification for speaking of “irony” and, by so doing, to subtly demean Nephi. To do so ignores obvious elements of the record and, as a consequence, obscures what actually matters most: the stark moral *difference* between Nephi and the multitudes of Jerusalem.

One Methodological Note

Any comprehensive look at Hardy’s volume must explore important aspects of his methodology, but, since I am not attempting to be comprehensive, I will briefly mention only one. It is Hardy’s remark that he is interpreting the text and its characters partly in accordance with “general assumptions of human psychology and behavior” (25). Although approaching the text this way is unavoidable in the kind of analysis Hardy pursues, there is a certain slipperiness to it. In psychology, as in at least some other disciplines, one person’s generally accepted assumption is often another person’s generally repudiated misconception. Although he never tells us, one thus wonders how many principles of psychology Hardy actually examined and how he decided which of them qualified as worthy to be “assumed.”

Be that as it may, there is a degree of uncertainty in how to apply any psychological framework, whatever it is, to individuals who qualify as prophets. The record’s depiction of Nephi’s spiritual manifestations seems significant in this regard. They include his seeing in vision events of the Savior’s birth, life, and death (1 Nephi 11:1–33), the future of Nephite, Lamanite, and Gentile peoples on the promised land (1 Nephi 12–14; 2 Nephi 26:2–22), and the numerous matters pertaining both to this earth and to celestial life seen by John the Revelator (1 Nephi 14:18–30; 2 Nephi 4:23, 25). In addition, the Lord appeared to him personally (2 Nephi 11:3); he was taken *bodily* to high mountains more than once, and he was shown things “too great for man” (2 Nephi 4:25); he entertained angels (2 Nephi 4:24); he held conversation with the Father and Son (2 Nephi 31:10–15); and he both prophesied at length and spoke the words of the Lord (2 Nephi 25–26, 28–30). And of course this is only what Nephi tells us — all of which occurred earlier than Nephi’s actual recording of the events. It would be reasonable to suppose that Nephi’s intimacy with the Lord continued and that he enjoyed additional divine manifestations over his life.

With all this in mind, one wonders what a person must be like to qualify for the kind of divine experiences Nephi enjoyed. Similarly, one wonders how such transcendent manifestations would *affect* a person who experienced them. In both these respects, at least, Nephi is significantly different from the general run of humankind: he would seem to be multiple standard deviations from the mean. And therein lies the uncertainty: how exactly do we apply psychological concepts of one sort or another to a figure like that? They certainly apply somehow or other and to one degree or another, but how do we account for the significant way in which Nephi is unique?

A very particular instance of Nephi's uniqueness is the way he would conceive his audience: he would obviously include God among his anticipated readership. The text depicts Nephi as being on intimate terms with the Lord and indeed as receiving direct instructions from him to write the very account he is writing. Nephi thus knows he is writing by direct command and he knows that God (1) knows what he is writing and (2) knows the truth about what he is writing. (This is the case whether Nephi is considered by readers to be historical *or* fictional: this is what the text presents either way.) One wonders what the odds are that Nephi would write at all stealthily under such circumstances — “deflecting attention,” “alienating” readers from his brothers, obscuring matters and “hoping readers won't notice,” “playing with the chronology,” “disguising” what he has omitted from his account, and so forth. Wouldn't such maneuvers displease God? Nephi knows that to whatever degree he might fool mortal readers, he can't fool divine ones, and thus it is hard to see why he would even try. Or, given what is evident about his character, why he would even want to. It is possible, of course, that Nephi wrote guilefully from time to time as Hardy's prose suggests, but one wonders how plausible it is given the unique character of Nephi's expected audience.

In this connection it is also worth noting that the Lord early on mentions Nephi's diligence and “lowliness of heart” (1 Nephi 2:19). This is *the Lord's* evaluation of Nephi, not Nephi's evaluation of himself, and it tells us a great deal about Nephi's character and the earnest and submissive way he would approach creation of his record. This, too, vitiates the notion that Nephi would be inclined to write in the calculating way that Hardy at times attributes to him.⁴¹ (It is true that Nephi is the one who reports this evaluation by the Lord, but this gives us no reason to think Nephi is manufacturing it. As we have just seen, Nephi knows the Lord knows the truth, and he also knows the Lord knows what he

is writing. Under such circumstances it does not seem likely that Nephi would tell a lie *about* the Lord.)

In short, Hardy interprets the text as if Nephi, as author, were pretty much indistinct from other authors and as if Nephi's audience were pretty much indistinct from other authors' audiences. But this is a mistake, and it makes a serious difference at various places in Hardy's discussion.

Conclusion to Part Two

As mentioned at the beginning, the motivation for this paper is to examine whether serious errors are occurring — and even increasing — in LDS scholarly discussions of prophets and revelation. Hardy's discussion of Nephi contributes to the answer. In all, we have considered twenty separate claims. They range from his attribution of a condemning and exclusionary attitude in Nephi and his misdescription of Nephi's binding in the wilderness, to his description of Nephi as periodically manipulative in his narrative and as at least somewhat comparable to the multitudes of Jerusalem in his conduct. These twenty claims help us answer the two-part question of this paper because each of them is faulty.

Moreover, behind these mistaken claims we have identified more than thirty errors in analysis. These range from overlooking counterevidence (the great majority of the mistakes) and actually ignoring counterevidence, to relying on circular reasoning and limiting the number of hypotheses to explain events. We have seen all this in some detail. And this is only a sample of the larger pool we could have examined and, for that matter, only regarding Nephi.

It is also relevant that the errors we have seen have been neither difficult to identify nor insignificant. It does not seem a small thing to assert that Nephi is exclusionary and condemning in attitude — for instance, that he “worries” the tree might attract those in the great and spacious building. Nor does it seem a small thing to rest such a claim on items of evidence that range from weak to false — particularly when these evidentiary defects are not difficult to discern. It seems even less of a small thing when essential evidence is exempted from consideration in reaching conclusions about the matter.

Although some are more serious than others, the same appears to be true of all the errors we have considered regarding Nephi: they are both significant and easy to identify. I could be missing something, of course, but all the mistakes seem significant enough and apparent enough that it

is hard to see how there can be justification for any of them. They result in a distorted and unfair portrayal of Nephi.

It is easy to appreciate Hardy's desire to follow literary clues in developing insights into Nephi's character and narrative — clues that lead to “more sophisticated interpretations” (32). The problem is that it is hard to see value in interpretations that in the end appear to be completely tenuous, fallaciously reached, or manifestly false — whatever the degree of “sophistication” they might possess.

It does not follow from this that there is anything inherently illegitimate in examining prophets, of course. In doing so, however, it would seem that one must at least (in the case of Nephi, for example): (1) supply the complete context of Nephi's life as depicted in the text — including the full extent of his intimacy with the Lord, his immense spiritual power, his devotion, his sacrifice, his lowliness of heart, and his contribution to God's work; (2) inform one's thinking about Nephi's character and writing by full appreciation of this overall context; and (3) make criticisms that are accurate in the first place. It would seem that Hardy appears to fall short on all three counts.

We are not yet finished, however. Part Three will address a potpourri of further examples that will help address the appearance, and scope, of errors regarding prophets/revelation in contemporary scholarly discourse.

Duane Boyce *received his academic training in psychology, philosophy, and the clinical treatment of families. He received a PhD from Brigham Young University and conducted his postdoctoral study in developmental psychology at Harvard University. He was a member of the Moral Studies Group at BYU and served on the faculty there. He is a founding partner of the Arbinger Institute, a worldwide management consulting and educational firm, and is the author or coauthor of five books. He has published academic essays on scriptural topics in BYU Studies, The FARMS Review, Religious Educator, Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture, and the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture. He is author of the recent book, Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War (Kofford, 2015). Among other callings, he has served as a bishop and a stake president.*

Endnotes

1. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
2. A quick example is Hardy's charge that Nephi's treatment of Laman and Lemuel is thin — that he makes them predictable, flat, and two-dimensional in their unrighteousness and rebelliousness (32–33). A charge of this sort would seem to presuppose that Nephi is trying to produce a comprehensive and detailed account of his family when that is not remotely the kind of history he is trying to create. Nephi is writing what might be called a “headline” history, recounting, in retrospect, historical details secondarily in the course of highlighting important matters about God's work and eternal purposes. It does not purport to be a novel or even a family history. It is a short history of one part of God's work — a history that includes mortals and how they relate specifically *to that work*. This is why *no* characters in Nephi's record are fully-drawn from a literary or biographical standpoint, including Lehi, Sariah, and Nephi himself. Because it is a story written largely in headlines, *everyone* is “flat.” No doubt Laman and Lemuel were more complex than the way Nephi presents them, but, reduced to producing mere headlines, it is difficult to see how it is Nephi's fault that their headlines are what they are. Presumably, if Laman and Lemuel had embraced God's purposes rather than resisting them, *that's* the thin view Nephi would have provided of them. Hardy recognizes this, but he doesn't always write as if he does. There are numerous additional concerns, but this instance is at least suggestive of the kinds of errors that seem to me to appear frequently in Hardy's volume.
3. In this Part, all in-text citations are to pages in Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*.
4. This raises a natural question. Since Hardy *doesn't* write differently in the first place, one wonders if he actually sees Nephi in the very way he tells us we shouldn't see him — as biased and self-aggrandizing. It is true that Hardy reports multiple times that Nephi is writing to achieve a certain purpose (36, 45, 46, 55, 82, 83, 84) — most specifically, to demonstrate the Lord's tender mercies in delivering the faithful (32). He also comments that this purpose requires a certain shaping of the narrative: emphasizing some matters over others, for example. But this does not explain some

of the language Hardy actually employs in referring to Nephi. He periodically uses charged expressions (“deflecting,” “playing with the chronology,” “hoping we won’t notice,” and the like) that are exactly the language one would use to describe the actions of someone who *was* seen as biased and self-aggrandizing. This makes it difficult to think that Hardy doesn’t actually see Nephi that way — at least on the occasions when it sounds like he does — despite his caution to readers. In each case, Hardy had linguistic options that would not have created these connotations.

5. It is easy for modern readers to appreciate water as symbolic of abundant spiritual life since the image appears frequently across the scriptural record. See, for example: Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8; John 4:10; 7:37; Revelation 7:17; 21:6; D&C 10:66; 63:23; 133:29. Related images are found in Isaiah 12:3; 55:1; and 58:11.
6. Among other matters, Daniel Peterson explores the connections among the tree, the virginal mother of the Savior, and the “sacred tree” of the ancient Near East in his “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 9/2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/9/2/S00003-50be458eb2b313Peterson.pdf>. See also Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243.
7. We know (from 1 Nephi 10:2–10) that Lehi knew much about the coming of the Savior, but there is no indication that he viewed what Nephi viewed of the Savior’s birth and of its relation to the tree specifically.
8. It is reasonable to suppose that all “tree of life” images in scripture (there is also one in Revelation 2:1–7) have at least some general relation to each other, of course, and thus that there is some connection between the Genesis tree, the tree John and Nephi see related to the celestial city, and the tree Lehi and Nephi see. As will become increasingly apparent, the mistake Hardy makes is in restricting his attention to the tree in Genesis and overstating the connection between Nephi’s language and that tree in particular.
9. Of course, it is common in the Christian tradition to judge Adam severely, but this does not follow from the Genesis account itself. The traditional Christian view has been primarily due to

a reading of statements by Paul, particularly in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. The Jewish point of view, which derives from the Genesis account directly, unfiltered by Paul, is not condemning of Adam. Noel Reynolds has indicated that the brass-plates version of Genesis used by Nephi was likely closer to the version found in the Book of Moses than in Genesis itself. On this issue, however, that makes little difference, since the Book of Moses, too, speaks only of God preventing Adam from living forever, not of imposing “justice” on him for his wickedness. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Brass Plates Version of Genesis,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:136–173; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1129&index=6>.

10. I am indebted to Allen Wyatt for this observation.
11. It is worth noting that footnotes at various places where Lehi’s tree is mentioned (for example, 1 Nephi 8:10; 11:25; 15:22) include cross-references to the “tree of life” that appears in both the Genesis and Moses accounts of the Garden of Eden. This is what one would expect since footnotes help track common phrases across the scriptural record. They do not determine doctrine, however — a matter that I think is generally understood. Indeed, the “tree of life” is a good example of this very point. As mentioned earlier, reference to a “tree of life” also appears in the book of Revelation (for example, Revelation 22:1–17) — a tree that is not symbolically identical to the tree in Genesis — and yet a cross-reference to this passage in Revelation is included in a footnote to 1 Nephi 8:10 (where Lehi first mentions his tree) *along with* a cross-reference to the tree in Genesis. This is thus a good example of the principle. While study-helps assist in navigating the scriptural record, they are not at all intended to determine doctrine. Indeed, Bruce R. McConkie, one of the architects of the new edition of the scriptures, first published in 1981, explicitly disavowed the doctrinal intent of cross-references. See Mark L. McConkie, ed. *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 289–90.
12. The current edition of the Book of Mormon has “word” here, but Skousen’s work indicates it should actually be “sword.”

Royal Skousen, ed. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 32. Hardy notes this change in an endnote (Note 32) at Kindle location 6174.

13. The angel continued with Nephi throughout the remainder of his vision as well (1 Nephi 12–14).
14. Assuming that he had come to realize various matters he had overlooked (a matter we saw earlier), which the record explicitly tells us he did — and assuming that he had had the interpretation given to him as Nephi had.
15. It is also worth noting that even if Laman and Lemuel are hearing about such matters for the first time regarding Lehi’s vision, it is hardly the first time they are hearing talk about condemnation and judgment per se. For example, Lehi had earlier foretold the fate of Jerusalem in stark and condemning terms (1 Nephi 1:13) — an attitude that Laman and Lemuel later complained about (1 Nephi 17:22) — and Laman and Lemuel had also experienced an earlier rebuke from an angel, who spoke explicitly of their “iniquities” (1 Nephi 3:29). (I am indebted to Greg Smith for this observation.)
16. Royal Skousen, ed. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 44.
17. See Note 33, Kindle location 6177.
18. In one place (32) Hardy notes Nephi’s statement that his only intent is to persuade others to come unto God and be saved (1 Nephi 6:4), but he fails to consider that statement in this context. (Moreover, when Hardy does consider this comment, he transforms it from a desire by Nephi that others might be saved in the kingdom of God to a desire that others “adopt his religious beliefs” — a gloss on the text that mutates Nephi’s profound desire for others’ eternal welfare into a self-interested desire simply to get others to agree with or support him. Hardy’s description is a complete misreporting of Nephi’s motivation.)
19. See Note 15.
20. Hardy refers to this verse in one place (34), on a different subject, but he overlooks its relevance to the claims we are considering here.

21. Hardy makes passing reference to this passage in a parenthetical note on a different topic (50), but overlooks its significance for what he claims about the difference in attitude between Nephi and Lehi.
22. As Hardy himself notes (54), if the tree represented exaltation in the celestial kingdom, people could not fall away from it — although this is exactly what Lehi observed. Partaking of the fruit of the tree seems to represent, figuratively, Nephi’s later expression regarding being “alive in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:25), as well as other scriptural expressions regarding “walking in a newness of life” through the Spirit and being “one” with the Lord. See, for example: John 6:48–58; 14:20; 15:4–5; 17:20–23; Romans 6:4; 8:1, 2, 10; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 3:17; 1 John 3:24; Mosiah 5:7; 3 Nephi 19:23, 29; D&C 35:2; 50:43; Moses 6:57–68.
23. His theophany included visiting with the Spirit of the Lord, being instructed by an angel, seeing Mary (mother of the Savior), viewing the Lord’s infancy/life/ministry/death, seeing the land that the Lord promised to Lehi and his family, observing Christ’s appearance to the Nephites, watching the ultimate destruction of Nephite civilization, viewing Gentile colonization in the Americas — and, in addition to all this, sharing in the sweeping vision of events that was later experienced by John the Revelator and that occupies an entire book in the New Testament.
24. This observation is due to Greg Smith.
25. Inclusion of commentary on Lehi’s vision is also highly valuable to latter-day readers. If Nephi had received no more than a simple re-experiencing of Lehi’s vision, there would have been no reason for him to record it: doing so would have been a mere redundancy. And even if he *had* recorded it, we would still understand his vision no better than Laman and Lemuel understood Lehi’s, or than Nephi himself understood Lehi’s vision before his own meta-vision regarding it. We learn much from what Nephi tells us that we don’t learn from Lehi, and Laman and Lemuel — and all of us — are in Nephi’s debt for that increased insight.
26. In chapter 1 of the book of Revelation, John hears a voice from one identifying himself as “Alpha and Omega” and “the first and the last,” and this voice continues through chapter 4. But then in chapter 5 one of the twenty-four elders surrounding the throne of

God speaks to John (Revelation 5:5), and then in chapter 6 each of the four beasts speaks to him, *seriatim* (Revelation 6:1–7). Then, in chapter 10, John receives instruction from “the voice in heaven” (presumably this is Christ; Revelation 10:8), whereupon John then receives instruction from another angel through the last three verses of this chapter (Revelation 10:9–11), as well as through all of chapter 11. In chapter 17, a new angel addresses John (one of the seven angels he had seen previously in chapters 15 and 16) and shows him events concerning “the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters” (Revelation 17:1). In chapter 19, John is then commanded by an angel to write a specific sentence (“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb;” v. 9), but it is not obvious if this is the same angel who began instructing him in chapter 17 or another. Shortly afterward, Christ again speaks to John (Revelation 21:5–8), followed once more by one of the seven angels who addresses him and shows him several sacred events, beginning at Revelation 21:9 and continuing through all of chapter 22. Complicating the matter further, this last angel alternates between speaking as the Lord and as a representative of the Lord (see especially vv. 8–20).

27. Presumably there are various stewardship responsibilities on the other side of the veil that cannot be explained by what is visible to us on this side.
28. If he had done so, he would have to consider incidents in which the text clearly shows Laman and Lemuel to be repentant and humble well after they are repentant and humble in 1 Nephi 7. [One of these occurs following Nephi’s explanation of Lehi’s vision to Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 16:5) and another upon completion of the ship (see 1 Nephi 18:4)]. On one hand, such incidents might seem to show positive development in Laman and Lemuel and thus to contradict Hardy’s claim about what Nephi “allows.” On the other hand, Hardy seems intent to restrict his interest to the episodes in which family members beseech Laman and Lemuel and in which the brothers either do, or do not, cease their aggression as a result. But since this seems to be Hardy’s intent, the problem — as we’ve already seen — is that this restricts Hardy’s scope of analysis to a single incident — which hardly suffices to permit a generalization about what Nephi will “only” allow.

29. Hardy's approach is all the more surprising since he refers to the events in 1 Nephi 7:16 accurately in another place (42).
30. I am indebted to Allen Wyatt for this observation.
31. These are the incidents: (1) when, as we have just seen, Laman and Lemuel bound Nephi in the wilderness to be "devoured by wild beasts" (1 Nephi 7:16–18); (2) immediately after the Lord freed Nephi from this binding and they wanted to slay him again (1 Nephi 7:19); (3) during the rebellion in the aftermath of Ishmael's death — when they also intended to take *Lehi's* life (1 Nephi 16:37); (4) when they attempted to throw Nephi into the depths of the sea (1 Nephi 17:48); and (5) following the death of Lehi after the party had reached the promised land (2 Nephi 5:1–4, 19). It's worth noting, too, that Hardy overstates the case that Laman and Lemuel never wounded Nephi since in one instance they certainly caused him physical injury (1 Nephi 18:15).
32. In one of them, incident (2), Nephi was spared through the pleadings of members of Ishmael's family.
33. I am indebted to Greg Smith for this observation.
34. See, for example: Jacob 3:7; 7:24; Enos 1:14, 20; Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 10:17; Mosiah 1:14; 28:2; Alma 26:9, 3, 13; and 4 Nephi:39.
35. See, for example, Mosiah 10:12, Alma 23:3, Alma 60:32, Helaman 5:49–51, and Helaman 15:4.
36. Samuel does not cite the tradition, but the common locution "the tradition of their fathers" suggests that his meaning is consistent with other descriptions and/or reports of this sort. See, for example, the combination of passages cited in Notes 34 and 35. It is difficult to imagine a different explanation, although I am of course open to one.
37. One possibility would be to argue that this is simply the nature of any serious change. When Lamanite figures converted and transferred their loyalties, they naturally jettisoned their former narrative and embraced a new one. That's just what people do when they convert, and thus there is no significance to their change in narrative per se. But another possibility (one that is consistent with the general Book of Mormon view of conversion) is that these figures' religious conversion truly was a cleansing of the soul — a bathing in light that revealed, in retrospect, many past practices, attitudes, and beliefs to be fundamentally forced and false.

38. It may also have been part of Nephi's concern to establish his *bona fides* as the proper authority figure to succeed Lehi — a concern that Noel Reynolds finds prevalent in Nephi's writings. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies*, 27/4 (1987), 15–37; <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2465&context=byusq>. Reynolds remarks that the writings of Nephi constitute, in part, a "political tract" that was "written to document the legitimacy of Nephi's rule and religious teachings" (15) and describes it as "an account that would explain, document, and justify his ascent to leadership. For Nephi's people, his writings long served both as an extremely sophisticated political tract — something of a founding constitution for the Nephite people — and as an elaborate and compelling witness of Jesus Christ" (37). Hardy mentions Reynolds in another context (32), but Reynolds' point would seem just as relevant here.
39. See, for example, the subsection "Prophets and Apostles on Revelation" in Part One.
40. For example, Hardy seems to do this when he discusses how Nephi uses Sariah at the time the brothers return from Jerusalem with the plates (17–22). Hardy thinks Nephi uses his mother to disguise the fact that he doesn't report Lehi's greeting words. But it is at this point in the record that Sariah is seen to embrace Lehi's actions and to become an additional witness (to Lehi and Nephi) of the Lord's commands and of his role in their affairs. That Nephi wishes to introduce Sariah as an additional witness would seem to be at least as plausible as Hardy's claim that Nephi uses her as a smokescreen. Yet Hardy does not consider this possibility — or any other possible interpretations, for that matter.
41. I am indebted to Greg Smith for this point.

