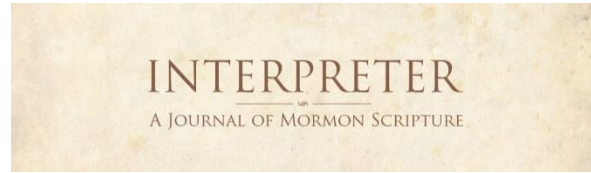




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## To "See and Hear"

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To “See and Hear”

Kevin L. Tolley

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# TO “SEE AND HEAR”

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Kevin L. Tolley

The world of the Nephite nation was born out of the world of seventh century BC Jerusalem. The traditions and tragedies of the nation of Judah set the stage for what would happen over the next ten centuries of Book of Mormon history. In his opening statements, Nephi tells of an explosion of divinely commissioned ministers preaching in the holy city. He declares that Jerusalem was a place of “many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they they must repent” (1 Nephi 1:4).<sup>1</sup> Nephi alludes to the prophetic service of Jeremiah (c. BC 626-587), Zephaniah (c. BC 640-609, Obadiah (c. BC 587), Nahum,<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk,<sup>3</sup> Urijah,<sup>4</sup> and possibly many others.<sup>5</sup> This disproportionate number of prophets in the city was accompanied by an increasing wave of imitators.<sup>6</sup> Amidst this apparent competition between valid and invalid prophetic representatives, Jeremiah sets a standard of who can be trusted in this visionary arena. As Stephen Smoot has written, “The Book of Mormon exhibits, in many respects, an intimate familiarity with ancient Israelite religious concepts. One such example is the Book of Mormon’s portrayal of the divine council. Following a lucid biblical pattern, the Book of Mormon

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1 Compare the description found in 2 Chron. 36:15-16, where God sends many “messengers” during the time of King Zedekiah, but the people “mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets.”

2 Nahum (c. BC 612).

3 Habakkuk (c. BC 626-605)

4 Although the previous prophets have Biblical books named after them, Uriah does not, but is mentioned in Jeremiah 26:20-23.

5 These prophets undoubtedly influenced others, such as Ezekiel and Daniel, who were in Babylonian captivity during the time of Lehi’s flight into the wilderness. 2 Kings 22:14 also mentions “Huldah the prophetess.” In conjunction with the dedication of the St. George Temple, Elder Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal his feelings that the Huldah was an authentic Prophetess: “May they influence the daughters of Zion to deeds of virtue, Holiness, Righteousness and truth. May thy Blessings of Sarah, Huldah, Hannah, Anna, & Mary the Ancient Prophetess and Holy women rest upon them.” See *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1985), 7:309.

6 Compare Jeremiah 6:13-15; 14:14-16; 23:9-40; 27:15 (9-17); 28:12 (1-17); Lam. 2:14.

provides a depiction of the divine council and several examples of those who were introduced into the heavenly assembly and made partakers in divine secrets.”<sup>7</sup> It is this rich heritage of prophetic representatives of deity that so richly influenced Book of Mormon authors. Of these many prophets who were actively preaching in Jerusalem, Jeremiah stands out in Nephi’s writings (1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14). Jeremiah continues to be an influence on Nephite culture throughout their history (Helaman 8:20; cf. 3 Nephi 19:4). It will be Jeremiah’s writings that will influence the Nephite perspective on “Call Narratives” and views of the “Divine Council” throughout the Book of Mormon.

Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem of the message of false prophets when he declared:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:16-17)

Jeremiah will give a clear-cut criterion for a true prophet sent by the Lord when he says, “For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? Who hath marked his word, and heard *it*?” (Jeremiah 23:18). Hence, a prophet is specifically identified as one who “hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard [God’s] word” (Jeremiah 23:18). Although this English rendering captures the main concept, it lacks many of the nuances of the Hebrew text. In Jeremiah 23:18, “perceived” is the King James translation for the Hebrew verb *ra’ah*, which means, in its most basic sense, “to see.”<sup>8</sup> Essentially, to be a true messenger one must “see and hear” what has taken place in the “counsel of the LORD.” The latter is another phrase that has deeper meaning than what the English rendering would suggest. The Hebrew term points to “the assembly of Yahweh” or a “council of the holy ones,”<sup>9</sup> as opposed to “advice” from the LORD, as the KJV proposes.

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7 Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua: A Student Journal for the Study of the Ancient World* 12/2 (Fall 2013): 2.

8 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 1:1157.

9 Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1:745. The same word is used in various places in the Old Testament,

According to Jeremiah, the validity of a prophetic call is contingent upon the experience of standing in the assembly of Jehovah as a witness of one who “saw and heard.”<sup>10</sup> It was “the privilege of the truly inspired prophet to stand in its midst and hear the word of Yahweh.”<sup>11</sup> From this point the “the prophet was called to proclaim the will of the deity which issued from the assembly.”<sup>12</sup> This experience with the divine council is considered the “dominant rubric for authority” for the prophet.<sup>13</sup> This was a means of “vindication and legitimization of the prophet in his office.”<sup>14</sup> It is clear that “the experience made a man a prophet.”<sup>15</sup>

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including Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret [Heb: *Sod*, or “Council of Yahweh”] unto his servants the prophets.” Joseph Fielding McConkie suggests, “What Amos is telling us is that the Lord does not act independently of the heavenly council where all prophets are instructed and ordained.” (Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Premortal Existence Foreordinations and Heavenly Councils,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986], 186.)

10 See David E. Bokovoy, “The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon: Still Losing the Battle” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 8–9.

11 Russell as quoted by Blake Thomas Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: a Form-Critical Analysis,” *BYU Studies* 26/4 (Fall 1986): 78.

12 E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, (Chico, Calif: Scholars Press 1980), 216.

13 Walter Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 626.

14 Klaus Baltzer, “Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet,” *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (October 1968): 568.

15 Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 33–34. Being a witness of the “divine council” is not exclusively the only criterion for being a Prophet or “Special Witness.” Obviously, one must be “called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof” (Articles of Faith 1:5). Consider the modern example of Elder Heber J. Grant. Six months after Heber J. Grant was called, sustained, and set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. His experience of one who has “seen and heard” came while on assignment to Arizona, later as President of the Church, he related the following visionary experience. “As I was riding along . . . I seemed to *see*, and I seemed to *hear*, what to me is one of the most real things in all my life, I seemed to see a *Council in Heaven*. I seemed to hear the words that were spoken. I listened to the discussion with a great deal of interest. The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles had not been able to agree on two men to fill the vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve. There had been a vacancy of one for two years, and a vacancy of two for one year, and the Conference had adjourned without the vacancies being filled.

It is obvious that without this experience with the divine council, one has not been “sent”<sup>16</sup> by Jehovah. Jeremiah declares, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel [Heb: *sod*], and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings” (Jeremiah 23:21-22). “This is the true prophet’s claim to authority. From the pronouncement of the council he receives the decree that he is to deliver. Those prophets who have not participated in the council are unable to proclaim the divine decree.”<sup>17</sup>

Once a person has legitimately witnessed the divine council and been commissioned to preach, he is obligated to “justify his exceptional status in the eyes of the majority.”<sup>18</sup> This veiled reference, “saw and heard,” becomes a credential for being a spokesman or messenger of the council of Jehovah. The implication of the phrase is that one has seen the divine council and heard the decrees thereof. A person who claims to have “seen and heard” can be identified as a legitimate representative of Jehovah without going into detail concerning the sacred nature of his experience. The concept of a prophet justifying his claim to divine authority is reduced to what he has “seen and heard.” The concept of seeing

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In this Council the Savior was present, my father [Jedediah M. Grant, a member of the First Presidency (11 March 1854 to 1 December 1856)] was there, and the Prophet Joseph Smith was there. They discussed the question that a mistake had been made in not filling those two vacancies and that in all probability it would be another six months before the Quorum would be completed, and they discussed as to whom they wanted to occupy those positions, and decided that the way to remedy the mistake that had been made in not filling these vacancies was to send a revelation. It was given to me that the Prophet Joseph Smith and my father mentioned me and requested that I be called to that position.” (President Heber J. Grant, *Conference Report*, April 1941, 5, emphasis added.) For Elder Heber J. Grant, his “see and hear” experience came after his ordination.

16 Consider that the meaning of the word Apostle has a similar meaning as the Hebrew term, *שלח*, or “to send.” “The prophet serves as more than a messenger. He is the herald and courier of the council. The Word that he is to proclaim is placed in his mouth by Yahweh (cf. Numbers 12:6-8; Deut. 18:15-18). The prophet is privy to the actions of the assembly. ... This position belongs to the prophet alone; it is not a position that can be attained by an ordinary man.” (Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, 219).

17 Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, 219.

18 Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 33-34.

and hearing the celestial realm is used by biblical and pseudepigraphal<sup>19</sup> authors.

### Jeremiah’s Criteria in Nephi’s View of His Father

In answer to Jeremiah’s question “who hath marked his word, and heard *it*?” (Jeremiah 23:18), Nephi replies to his biblical contemporary by introducing his father Lehi specifically as one who “saw and heard” (1 Nephi 1:6, 19; 9:1). The small plates of Nephi, along with the brass plates containing “many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” (1 Nephi 5:13), later became the foundation of the religious life of the Nephite nation. The use of the phrase “saw and heard” establishes future Nephite seers in the same tradition. There is no question that Lehi experienced what is referred to as a “throne-theophany.”<sup>20</sup> When Deity appears to man, the experience is referred to as a *theophany*, a Greek term meaning “appearance of god.” Joseph Smith experienced a theophany during the First Vision (Joseph Smith – History 1:16 - 17). A throne-theophany is a more specific term in that it refers to a divine manifestation of God seated on a throne. The question is not whether or not Lehi had such an experience or even the comparison between this experience and countless others, the issue is how Nephi chooses to frame the story and how these elements ultimately influence not only his own experiences but the rest of the Book of Mormon.

As Nephi abridges the writings of his father, he chooses at times to paraphrase his father’s words (1 Nephi 1:15) and at other times directly quotes his father (1 Nephi 1:8; cf. Alma 36:22, a 21-word quote).<sup>21</sup> Out of the details that Nephi chooses to include from the life and writings of Lehi, he is sure to include events that would affect his children the most, like how to identify a prophet. In rapid succession, Nephi retells

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19 See Appendix: *Possible* Examples of the Phrase “See and Hear” in Biblical or Pseudepigraphal Literature.

20 Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany,” 35-54; John W. Welch, “The Calling of a Prophet,” in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 35–54.; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, the World of the Jaredites, There Were Jeredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988) 4-13; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 46-54; John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 421-48.

21 Welch, “The Calling of Lehi,” 438.



two visions of Lehi. The first comprises only two verses (1 Nephi 1:5-6), and only a few details are given, but Nephi is sure to put Jeremiah's seal of prophetic authenticity on the experience by saying that "he [Lehi] *saw* and *heard* much; and because of the things which he *saw* and *heard* he did quake and tremble exceedingly" (1 Nephi 1:6). The phrase "saw and heard" is repeated twice.

In 1 Nephi 1:8-15, more attention is recorded of Lehi's second visionary experience. . The vision begins with "the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne" (1 Nephi 1:8). Clearly Lehi is brought before the throne of God, surrounded by the divine council. The "heavens were opened" for Ezekiel, and this also began his "visions of God" (Ezekiel 1:1). The opening of the heavens is a rare expression in the Hebrew Bible, showing up only in Ezekiel 1:1.<sup>22</sup> Although the phrase is rare in biblical writings it shows up eight times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 1:8; 11:14, 27, 30; 12:6; Helaman 5:48; 3 Nephi 17:24; 28:13), each time associated with the phrase "saw and heard."

Thus, Nephi makes an effort to ensure in the minds of the reader that his father is a commissioned prophet and has been sent forth with the message from the council that he has both "seen and heard."<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the message was not received very well by Lehi's audience. Lehi's two-part message included information concerning the people's "wickedness and their abominations"; the second part of the message was that Lehi was an authorized representative of the divine council as one who "saw and heard." Nephi points out that the heart of Lehi's message lies in what he had "both seen and heard" (1 Nephi 1:18-19). Jeremiah, speaking about false prophets, warned the people of Jerusalem when he said, "Hearken not unto *the words of the* [false] *prophets* that prophesy unto you" (Jeremiah 23:16, emphasis added). Quoting Jeremiah, Nephi gives the impression that Lehi's audience did not "believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to *the words of the prophets*"

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22 The phrase is used far more in the New Testament; see Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:21, Mark 1:10, John 1:57, Acts 7:56, Revelation 4:1, 11:19, 15:5, 19:11.

23 David Bokovoy suggests that "Lehi appears, like Isaiah, as a messenger sent to represent the assembly that had convened in order to pass judgment upon Jerusalem for a violation of God's holy covenants. Nephi's account may represent this subtle biblical motif through a reference to Lehi assuming the traditional role of council member, praising the high god of the assembly." See David E. Bokovoy, "On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah's Prophetic Call," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 37.

(1 Nephi 2:13), believing them to be false prophets. In so doing they actually “rejected *the words of the [true] prophets*” (1 Nephi 3:18).

Although Lehi was rejected by the people of Jerusalem as a true prophet, he will become the patriarchal prophet of the Book of Mormon peoples. Nephi’s account of Lehi’s early years will be the standard of prophetic calls for the rest of the Book of Mormon.<sup>24</sup>

Nephi will later attach the phrase “see and hear” to Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. Nephi relates, “all these things did my father *see*, and *hear*, and *speak*” (1 Nephi 9:1) concerning his vision of the tree of life. Nephi saw Lehi’s vision of the tree of life as establishing his father in the same role in the vision as he played among the people in Jerusalem. He was an authorized representative sent to warn others based on his prophetic relationship.

### **Nephi, As One Who “Saw and Heard”**

Jeremiah’s criterion for true messengers or prophets will be seen in the lives of future prophets and will become the standard of prophetic calls among the Nephites. Nephi uses this phrase not only to introduce the validity of his father’s commission as a prophet but also to establish himself to his future audience his own call to the ministry.<sup>25</sup>

Nephi introduces and concludes his first major visionary experience with this same phrase coined by Jeremiah. Nephi begins his four chapter vision (1 Nephi 11-14) with a desire to “see, and hear” (1 Nephi 10:17) the things his father had experienced. At the conclusion of Nephi’s vision, he says that he is forbidden to “write the remainder of the things which I *saw* and *heard*” (1 Nephi 14:28).<sup>26</sup> The vision will be concluded by another, “the apostle of the Lamb” named John (1 Nephi 14:27). John will later, Revelation 4:1-4, continue where Nephi left off, following his own throne-theophany surrounded by a divine council. Nephi’s vision is therefore sandwiched between two throne theophanies: the vision of his father in 1 Nephi 1:8 and a future vision of John.

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<sup>24</sup> Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” 16.

<sup>25</sup> David Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking The Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 2-4, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Some heavenly information is intended to be kept secret; – cf. 2 Corinthians 12:4; 3 Nephi 17:16-17; 28:13-16; Ether 3:21-4:7; Moses 4:32; 4 Ezra 14:6, 45-47.

Although Nephi explains what he had “heard” (1 Nephi 14:27), the real emphasis is on what he “saw.”<sup>27</sup> An angelic guide accompanies him through much of what he would “see and hear.” The angelic guide continually asks Nephi to “look” and then questions him concerning what he has seen (1 Nephi 11:14; 13:2), allowing him to report on what he understands. Compare this with the prophetic call of Jeremiah as found in the first chapter of his book.<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah’s call is followed by a visionary experience that parallels Nephi’s. Jerusalem’s future destruction is laid out in an exchange between the “word of the LORD” and Jeremiah, where he is asked, “what seest thou?” in a vision that depicts Jerusalem’s future. The reply is given by Jeremiah, followed by the Lord saying, “Thou hast well seen” (Jeremiah 1:11-12). The pattern is repeated when “the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou?” Jeremiah recites back what he has seen (Jeremiah 1:13). When writing his history, Nephi continues to connect his prophetic experience with that of Jeremiah.<sup>29</sup>

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27 In describing his experience with the angelic guide, Nephi uses the word “saw” over 30 times and “look” or “looked” over 20 times. Compare the chiasmic inclusion:

(1 Nephi 11:1a) *I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord*

(1 Nephi 11:2b) *the Spirit said unto me*

(1 Nephi 11:3c) *I desire to behold the things which my father saw*

(1 Nephi 11:5d) *Thou knowest I believe* [introduction to the divine council]. See David Bokovoy, “‘Thou Knowest That I Believe’: Invoking The Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11” (*Interpreter, A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, Volume 1 Issue 1 2012, pp. 2-4, 11).

(1 Nephi 14:28d) *I saw and heard* [expression of being in the divine Council]

(1 Nephi 14:29c) *I saw the things which my father saw*

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

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

Adapted from Neal Rappleye, “‘The Things Which my Father Saw’: The Chiasmic Inclusion of 1 Nephi 11–14” online at <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2015/05/the-things-which-my-father-saw-chiasmic.html>

28 Jeremiah 1:6, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and ... I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

29 This interrogative exchange between the Divine and the Prophet during a vision of the future is not limited to this singular example, consider the following:

The timing of Nephi’s declaration is significant; as Stephen Smoot points out, Nephi “established his own credibility as his father’s prophetic successor” amidst the tension that arose “between Nephi and his elder brothers over matters relating to the interpretation and meaning of their father’s vision.”<sup>30</sup> Nephi not only solidifies his own prophetic status as one who “saw and heard,” standing shoulder to shoulder with his father and Jeremiah, he sets the standard for the prophetic members of his posterity.

### The Tradition Continues

Jacob, the younger brother of Nephi, carries on this tradition. He finds himself in a similar conflict, as Jeremiah had decades before. Jacob has to defend his own prophetic call against the Anti-Christ Sherem. He withstands his critic by declaring that he has “heard and seen” (Jacob 7:12, reversing the word order) and declaring that he is a prophet. Although the particulars are not mentioned, this veiled statement might point back to a previous experience Jacob had with the Savior and the divine council when Jacob had become a witness of the Savior in that Council and was sent forth to declare his word, as others had previously done.

Nephi had previously compared his own experience with that of Isaiah when he said that Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:2), thus possibly connecting Isaiah’s experience, outlined in Isaiah 6, with his own. Nephi feels so strongly that his posterity have access to Isaiah’s experience with the divine council that he makes sure it is included in the small plates (2 Nephi 16). Nephi then connects Jacob’s experience with what Nephi and Isaiah had experienced when he writes, “my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him” (2 Nephi 11:3). All three prophets have had a “see and hear” experience (1 Nephi 14:28; Isaiah 6:9; Jacob 7:12).

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Jeremiah 34:3-4: “Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil.”

Zechariah 4:2, 5 – “And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick. ... Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.” Compare this to 1 Nephi 1:16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” 16.

### Alma Follows the Pattern

Jeremiah's influence on the formation of the Book of Mormon extends far beyond the small plates. Jeremiah's criterion of an authentic prophetic call will extend further than those of Lehi and his two apostolic sons, Nephi and Jacob. Another Book of Mormon prophet follows the lead of these foundational Nephite leaders whose writings are found on the small plates. Mormon's abridgment of the call of Alma the younger to the ministry is clearly influenced by Nephi's writings.<sup>31</sup>

Alma's call is outlined in the abridgment by Mormon in Mosiah 27 and in Alma's own words in Alma 36. Piecing together these two accounts, one can clearly see the thumbprints of Jeremiah, Lehi, and Nephi. In Mormon's abridged account we learn that Alma has seen an angel who has "descended as it were in a great cloud" (Mosiah 27:11). Unconscious, Alma is carried back to his father (Mosiah 27:19), not unlike Lehi's initial experience (1 Nephi 1:5). In his brief description of his visionary journey, Alma hears "the Lord" (Mosiah 27:25) and is snatched from "everlasting burning" and the "darkest abyss" (Mosiah 27:28-29). After Alma's lifeless body is returned to his father, Alma the Elder "caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God." The purpose of the prayers was twofold: (1) that God "would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak, and also that his limbs might receive their strength," and (2) "that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God" (Mosiah 27:22).

The answer to both prayers is realized as Alma the Younger awakens and begins "publishing to all the people the things which [he] had *heard* and *seen*" (Mosiah 27:32). Apparently the people began to "see and know" the "glory of God" based on what Alma had "heard and seen." Greater detail on what Alma had "heard and seen" is found in Alma's rendition of the story in Alma 36. Alma recounts the story of his conversion to his son Helaman in Alma 36. In other ancient writings

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31 After centuries of likely integration and convergence with cultures of ancient America, Mark Alan Wright suggests that Alma might have had Mesoamerican influence. See Mark Alan Wright, "According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding: The Cultural Context of Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 51-65; Mark Alan Wright and Brant Gardner, "The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 25-55.

prophets are commissioned to specifically recite to their “sons”<sup>32</sup> what they have learned during their time with the heavenly council. Given the similarities to Lehi’s story, Alma 36 might be better referred to as the description of Alma’s prophetic call. The account is directed to Alma’s eldest son Helaman who will follow in the prophetic footsteps of his father.<sup>33</sup>

Alma begins his discourse with the phrase “give ear” (Alma 36:1), a phrase used primarily by those whose writings are found on the small plates, namely Lehi (2 Nephi 4:3), Nephi (2 Nephi 28:30), Jacob (2 Nephi 9:40), and Isaiah (2 Nephi 8:4; 18:9; 25:4).<sup>34</sup> Alma uses what Lehi “saw and heard” (1 Nephi 1:6, 19) to help illustrate what he had “heard and seen” (Mosiah 27:32). Alma did not merely spend his time being unconscious in the abyss; he explains, “methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising

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32 Enoch sees God’s throne (2 Enoch 9:4; 14:19; 28:8), and the panoramic vision of the world’s history and judgments ) and is commissioned to teach what he has experienced (19:1-29:3). He is later told, “instruct your sons and all the members of your household” in the experience and later declares “*hear*, ye men of old time, and *see*” (37:2 emphasis added).

In the Testament of Levi, Levi is told to “*listen*, therefore concerning the heavens which have been *shown* you” (3:1 emphasis added), in other words to “hear and see.” Then he is instructed to “give understanding to your sons concerning this” (4:5-6); then immediately after, “the “gates of heaven were opened” and he “saw the holy temple, and the most high sitting on a throne of glory” (5:1-2).”

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Abraham is shown God’s throne (chapter 18). He is told, “*hear*, Abraham. This which thou *seest*” (25:9 *emphasis added*). Then he is asked to go to his posterity or “inheritance” with what he has seen, heard, and known (29:21).

33 After the apparent transfiguration of Alma (Alma 45:18-19), Helaman is shown as the next prophet, following in the same footsteps as Lehi and Nephi. Helaman is commissioned to go “forth among the people to declare the word” (Alma 45:20, compare 1 Nephi 1:18; 1 Nephi 15:1-2), and his message is also rejected (Alma 46:1, compare 1 Nephi 1:19; 15:9-10), and like Lehi and Nephi before him, his life is put in danger (Alma 46:2, compare 1 Nephi 1:20; 5:2).

34 It is notable that all these authors use the phrase “see and hear” in their writings. Samuel the Lamanite is the only other Book of Mormon prophet who uses the term “give ear” (Helaman 12:5). It is also notable that he uses the term to introduce the “counsels” of the “Lord thy God”; this may refer to the same “counsel” ( kJV Jeremiah 23:18) that Jeremiah refers to (see previous note). Alma also uses another phrase unique to the small plates, “both soul and body” (Alma 36:15), previously used only by Lehi (2 Nephi 1:22) and Isaiah 2 Nephi 20:18; Alma does use the phrase again in (Alma 40:21).



their God” (Alma 36:22). This is a strong parallel with what Isaiah and others experienced in Isaiah 6, although there is a stark contrast to Isaiah’s throne-theophany: while Alma exclaims, “my soul did long to be there” (Alma 36:22), Isaiah exclaims, “Wo is unto me! ... for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

Thus Alma explains to Helaman, the man who will replace him in his prophetic office, that he has fit the pattern of earlier prophets, namely Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

### **Mormon Testifies**

The prophetic heritage outlined by Nephi and Lehi lives on through Mormon, the great compiler of Nephite history. Mormon finally places himself in the same prophetic class as father Lehi as he witnesses to his people as one who “saw and heard” (Mormon 3:16). Just as Lehi’s words to the people of Jerusalem were rejected, so also was Mormon’s prophetic message of what he “saw and heard.”

### **Three Hundred “See and Hear”**

Though not formally called to the prophetic office, others occasionally “saw and heard” and therefore became witnesses to the Divine. The concept, which weaves throughout various stories in the Book of Mormon, is not limited to individuals; the experience can be applied to a group. Moses declared, “would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29). Although this experience does not entitle all to hold all titles held by the president of the church, it does make the group unique witnesses of the reality of heavenly interventions in the affairs of men.

Mormon describes three hundred individuals who “saw and heard” the “heavens open and angels come down out of heaven” (Helaman 5:48-49, emphasis added), evidence that the divine council intervenes directly in the affairs of men. The vision of the three hundred includes an encircling flame they were “filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory,” “the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven,” a voice was heard, the heavens opened, and ministering angels attended (Helaman 5:43-48). Once the experience with the divine council was complete, they went out “declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen” (Helaman 5:50). Like Lehi (1 Nephi 1:18), Nephi (1 Nephi 15:1), Jacob (Jacob 7:12), and Alma (Mosiah 27:32) earlier, the 300 went out to declare certain aspects of what they had “seen and heard.”

## Two Thousand Five Hundred “See and Hear”

Later, during the Savior’s ministry, 2,500 souls witness a unique interaction between the Father and the Son. Mormon writes, “The eye hath never *seen*, neither hath the ear *heard*, before, so great and marvelous things as we *saw* and *heard* Jesus speak unto the Father; And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both *saw* and *heard* Jesus speak” (3 Nephi 17:16-17). The experience included the heavens being opened, angels ministering (a possible reference to the divine council), and being “encircled about with fire” (3 Nephi 17:24). At the conclusion, Mormon repeats that the “the multitude did *see* and *hear* and bear record; and ... did *see* and *hear*, every man for himself” (3 Nephi 17:25). Later Mormon writes, that “many of them *saw* and *heard* unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:18). The elements that have been mentioned, i.e., an interaction between the Father and Son that could be witnessed, angels, circles of flames,<sup>35</sup> etc. — all are elements attributed to a vision of the divine council,<sup>36</sup> elements of the divine council are present.

Although details are excluded, the twelve disciples will be introduced and commissioned in a fashion similar to Lehi’s centuries before. Mormon records, “The heavens were opened, and they were caught up into heaven, and *saw* and *heard* unspeakable things. And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that they could utter the things which they *saw* and *heard*” (3 Nephi 28:13-14). Here the twelve disciples are personally introduced in the council by the Savior himself. Although information here is brief, we can conclude from the other examples some of the things which the twelve “saw and heard.” After seeing the “things of God” (3 Nephi 28:15) they were now commissioned to go forth and preach (3 Nephi 28:17-18).

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35 One element of these types of visions is the concentric circles that surround deity. Consider Lehi vision of “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels” (1 Nephi 1:8); Isaiah sees seraphim around God (Isaiah 6:2); John sees the throne of God with “a rainbow round about the throne,” and “round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats” (Revelation 4:3-4); Abraham sees God standing in the “midst” of the “noble and great ones” (Abraham 3:22-23) (Essentially, Abraham is surrounded on all sides; as mentioned before, the 300 in Helaman 5:44 witness a circle of fire, just as did these 2,500.

36 John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 80-81.



## Conclusion

Because of the influence of Jeremiah's writings on Nephi, the term "saw and heard" takes on a specially implied meaning throughout the Book of Mormon. Nephi uses this phrase not only to introduce the validity of his father's commission as a prophet, he also uses the same phrase to establish himself to his future audience as a mark of his own call to the ministry. The phrase "saw and heard" establishes future Nephite seers in the same tradition.<sup>37</sup> Although the experience does not replace the need to be called and set apart, it does describe a divine commission and entitles the individual to carry the title of "witness." The phrase "see and hear" would in turn become a critical description that points to the sacred experience of being introduced into the presence of the Divine. Because of the abridged nature of the Book of Mormon and the sacred nature of the experience, the idiom "see and hear" was used to describe the commission of a Nephite Prophet in the Council of Heaven.

## Appendix

### **Possible Examples of the Phrase "See and Hear" in Biblical or Pseudepigraphal Literature**

Jeremiah's articulation of the veiled phrase "saw and heard" becomes a standard of credibility as an authorized messenger of the council of Jehovah. This verbal license possibly influences other inspired writers. The following are a few examples from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Pseudepigrapha. Some show stronger connections than others:

#### **Hebrew Bible**

**Numbers 24:4, 15–16.** The Prophet Balaam (although Elder Bruce R. McConkie refers to him as "the mad prophet," *New Era*, Apr. 1972,

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<sup>37</sup> This idea might have influenced the Prophet Joseph Smith's writings of his own visionary experiences and how he penned the description of others. Joseph describes his own experience with the heavenly council as follows: "For we *saw* him, even on the right hand of God; and we *heard* the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father" (D&C 76:23). As a young man, he says that he was "astonishment at what I had both *seen* and *heard*" during his initial visit with the angel Moroni (JS-H 1:46). David Whitmer is told in a revelation directed to him that he will become a "witness of the things of which [he] shall both *hear* and *see*" (D&C 14:8).

7) receives a visionary experience in which he “*saw* the vision of the Almighty” and “*heard* the words of God” (Numbers 24:4,15-16, emphasis added). Although the description of the vision is brief, it has a strong parallel to what Lehi “saw and heard” (1 Nephi 1:8). Balaam sees a “Star out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17) whereas Lehi sees “One descending out of the midst of heaven” whose “luster was above that of the sun at noon-day,” who in turn was followed by “twelve others, ... following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars” (1 Nephi 1:9-10). Balaam also sees the destruction of the wicked, namely “the corners of Moab” and “all the children of Sheth” (Numbers 24:17), while Lehi sees “concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:13). I mention this because of the parallels between Balaam and Lehi

**Isaiah 6.** In the call narrative of Isaiah, the vision concludes with a commission to preach to “this people, Hear ... and see,” then in parallelistic form concludes with “they *see* with their eyes, and *hear* with their ears” (Isaiah 6:9-10). The inhabitants of Jerusalem would not see and hear Isaiah’s message, as Isaiah saw and heard the heavenly council. Undoubtedly Isaiah would have lamented as Moses did: “would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29). Stephen D. Ricks has called attention to the parallels between the thronetheophany of Lehi and that of Isaiah. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Heavenly visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 171–90. David Bokovoy makes additional parallels between Isaiah and Lehi.<sup>38</sup> See the chart below.

**Ezekiel 1:28.** During his throne theophany, Ezekiel declares, “And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.” As in Balaam’s experience, there are strong similarities between Ezekiel’s visionary experience and Lehi’s. (1) a historical introduction (1 Nephi 1:4, Ezekiel 11:3); (2) a divine confrontation (1 Nephi 1:6; Ezekiel 14:3); (3) a throne theophany (1 Nephi 1:8; Ezekiel 1:26-28); (4) a heavenly book (1 Nephi 1:11-12; Ezek 2:8-10); (5) a *Qedussa* or angelic songs of praise (1 Nephi 1:14; Ezek 3:12); (6) a commission of the prophet (1 Nephi 1:18-21; Ezekiel 2:2-3); (7) a rejection by his people (1 Nephi 1:19-20; Ezekiel 3:8-9); and (8) reassurance and a promise of deliverance (1 Nephi 1:20; Ezek 3:8).<sup>39</sup> See the chart below.

38 Bokovoy, “On Christ and Covenants,” 29–49.

39 Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany,” 73.

## New Testament

The following have possible connections between the phrase “see and hear” and commission narratives:

**Matthew 13:15–16** (Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). The concept of speaking in layered meanings or parables was introduced to the disciples in conjunction with teaching the mysteries (Matthew 13:11). As an example, Jesus quotes in part the call narrative of Isaiah 6 (Matthew 13:13). The concept of “see and hear” has a layered meaning, as do the parables. In a private tone to his disciples, the Savior complimented them with a phrase that would sit well among the beatitudes: “But blessed *art* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:15–16). This is not merely a compliment for understanding difficult doctrine, but an allusion to an ascension text found in Isaiah 6 where Isaiah is brought into the presence of God, becomes a witness of the divine council, actively participates in his council, and is commissioned to preach. Compare similar statements concerning eyes being opened to introduce visionary experiences of the Divine, D&C 76:12, 19; D&C 110:1; D&C 136:32; D&C 138:11, 29.

**Luke 2:20.** After seeing “the heavenly host praising God” (Luke 2:13) and finding the Christ-child (Luke 2:16), “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they they they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20). Although this is a reverse of the more common “see and hear,” it is an obvious allusion to an experience with the divine council. One of the roles of the divine council is “praise God,” an element in many ascensions texts, including Isaiah 6:3; Ezekiel 6:12; 1 Nephi 1:14; 1 Enoch 39:6, 10, 12; 2 Enoch 21:1; Apocalypse of Abraham 17:3–21. This might be an allusion Luke makes that the Christ child is the one mentioned as sitting upon his throne in previous texts. Although the connection may be weak, it is included in the chart below by reason of comparison.

**Luke 7:22.** The disciples of John the Baptist visit the Savior and his disciples — an implied representation of the divine realm — and are commissioned by Jesus to return and report to John what they had “*seen* and *heard*” (Luke 7:22).

**Luke 10:24.** After commissioning the “seventy” (Luke 10:17), Jesus said to his disciples, “For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to *see* those things which ye *see*, and have not *seen them*; and to *hear* those things which ye *hear*, and have not *heard them*” (Luke 10:24). The allusion is to previous prophets and Kings who desired a true

prophetic commission. Anciently, kings held the three hats of prophet, priest and king, but through apostasy, the triple-title was lost. There were some who tried to regain the ancient titles (ex. Uzziah going into the temple, 2 Chronicles 27:2; Isaiah 6:1).

**John 3:32.** Margaret Barker suggests that Jesus himself experienced a commissioning vision and that “Jesus spoke of what he had *seen* and *heard* in heaven (John 3:32), but people did not believe in his *maturion*, his testimony. This testimony, defined in Revelation 1:2 as “all that he saw,” is preserved in the Book of Revelation.”<sup>40</sup> JST John 3:32 clarifies this verse and states that “few men receive his testimony.”

**Acts 4:20.** At trial, Peter and John testify before the Sanhedrin of their own prophetic call by declaring that “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Peter and John’s audience surely would have picked up on this subtle clue.

**1 Corinthians 2:9.** “But as it is written, Eye hath not *seen*, nor ear *heard*, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

**1 John 1:3.** John, in his general epistle, introduces himself and his fellow brethren as ones who “have *seen* and *heard*,” and those who believe their testimony might “have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”(1 John 1:3). John’s announcement as one who has “seen and heard” is verified by his grand revelation in the Book of Revelation.

**Revelation 22:8.** John, like others before him who had “seen and heard,” sees the heavens opened (Revelation 4:1), God on his throne (Revelation 4:2), people surrounding the throne, (Revelation 4:4, 5:11), Christ with others (Revelation 5:5-8), and a book containing future destruction (Revelation 5:1). Throughout the visionary experience, John is continually told to “see and hear” (Revelation 4:1, 5:11, 6:1, 3, 7); he testifies at the end of the book as being one who has “*heard* and *seen*” (Revelation 22:8). See the chart below.

## Pseudepigrapha

Among pseudepigraphal writings, there are a number of ascension texts in which a person is brought into the presence of the divine council. Many will testify of what they “saw and heard.”

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), x.

**Testament of Levi 1:16** (c. BC 180). Before describing his experience, Levi suggests that he has both seen and heard: “*Hear*, therefore, regarding the heavens which have been *shown* to thee” (1:16). See the chart below.

**Ascension of Isaiah 10:3-5**. Isaiah “heard and saw the praise [which was directed to] him, and the Lord and the angel of the Spirit *heard* everything and *saw* everything. And all the praise which was sent [up] from the six heavens was not only *heard*, but *seen*” (10:3-5). See the chart below.

**Apocalypse of Abraham 25:11**. Abraham’s angelic guide shows him a vision of future events and says, “*Hear*, Abraham. This which thou *seest*” (25:11; compare also 27:6-7; 29:9-10). See the chart below.

**1 Enoch 59:2** (c. BC 200). Enoch, in his heavenly vision, “saw the secrets of the thunder, and how when it resounds above in the heaven, the sound thereof is *heard*, and he caused me to *see* the judgments executed on the earth” (1 Enoch 59:2; compare also 37:2). Later Enoch acknowledges that God “*knowest* and *seest* and *hearest* everything” (1 Enoch 84:3). A similar triplet is found in 1 Nephi 10:17. See the chart below.

### Chart

The following chart compiles major themes of a selection of the previous references. Asterisks indicate either (1) that the element is possibly but not certainly present, or (2) it is implicit, or (3) it is minor. The skeleton is based on of John J. Collins, “The Jewish Apocalypse,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 28 and Ostler, “The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi,” 91.

Manner of Revelation		Hebrew Bible		Book of Mormon					New Test.		Pseudepigrapha			
		Isaiah 6	Ezekiel 1-4	1 Nephi 1-2	1 Nephi 11-14	Alma 36	Helaman 5	3 Nephi 17	3 Nephi 28	Luke 2	Revelation 4-22	Testament of Levi	Apoc. of Abraham	Ascension of Isaiah
1.1.1	Visions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1.1.2	Epiphanies	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
1.1.3	Theophanies	X	X	X		X					X	X	X	X
1.2	Dialogue Questioning	X	X	X	X		X*	X	X			X	X	X*
1.3	Otherworldly Journey								X		X	X	X	X
1.4	Heavenly Book(s)		X	X							X	X		X
2	Otherworldly Mediator / Divine Encounter	X	X	X	X	X	X		X*	X	X	X	X	X
3	Reaction of Reception	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Ascension			X	X*				X			X	X	X
5	Cosmogony / Primordial Events												X	
6	Recollection of Past / Prophecy of Future	X	X	X	X	X				X	X		X	X
7	Persecution / Eschatological Upheaval	X	X	X	X	X					X	X	X	X

8	Judgment / Destruction	x	x	x	x	x*				x		x	x	x	x	x
9	Cosmic Transformation			x*		x				x			x	x		x
10	Otherworldly Regions / beings	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11	Commission / Instructions	x	x	x*	x	x	x	x	x	x*	x	x	x	x	x	x
12	Rejection	x	x	x		x						x				
13	Narrative Conclusion		x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x			x	x
Add.	Phrase: "See & Hear"	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Add.	Circle Motif			x		x	x	x	x		x			x		x
Add.	Fire	x*	x	x			x	x			x	x	x			x
Add.	Confidentiality / Secrecy			x*	x		x	x	x		x			x	x	x

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