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Slavery in the Book of Mormon

Gregory R. Knight

Introduction

Slavery is one of the most basic institutions of the ancient world.¹ Nearly every ancient society practiced slavery, including the Hebrews. In giving Israel laws to govern slavery, Jehovah reminded Israel that “thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee” (Deuteronomy 15:15). Because God had redeemed the Israelites from slavery, they had become slaves to God (see Leviticus 25:55). They were, therefore, to serve God, not man. Nonetheless, Jehovah provided the Israelites with a special set of slave laws that were more humane than those of other Near Eastern peoples² and that included provisions for release, redemption, and the proper treatment of slaves.³

Because the Book of Mormon records the history of a people with roots in the Old Testament, their slavery laws and practices should exhibit some similarity to biblical slavery. This paper presents a preliminary examination of slavery in the Book of Mormon, gathering evidence that the Nephites may have had extensive knowledge of biblical slavery laws.⁴ After discussing the possible sources of this knowledge, this paper examines specific passages that suggest that Book of Mormon societies were familiar with biblical slavery laws.

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Possible Sources of Nephite Knowledge of Slavery

The Nephites could have learned about biblical slave laws and practices through two important sources: oral or written traditions tracing back to Lehi, and the plates of brass.

Oral or Written Traditions. The original party that left Jerusalem for the promised land carried a wealth of firsthand knowledge about the Jews. Lehi, “having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days” (1 Nephi 1:4), would have been familiar with Jewish culture and society. He was also an experienced and successful merchant⁵ and undoubtedly had extensive knowledge of contemporary economic practices, including slavery.⁶

Slavery had become so prevalent during the time that Lehi was in Jerusalem that King Zedekiah covenanted with the Jews to “proclaim liberty” to the people of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34:8) and ordered them to release their Hebrew slaves, pursuant to the law of release. The people obeyed, entering into a covenant in the temple (see Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12).⁷ However, shortly thereafter, the people of Jerusalem again subjected their own people to slavery. Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi (see 1 Nephi 7:14), rebuked Zedekiah and the Jews for breaking their covenant (see Jeremiah 34:8–17).

Slave issues and laws were at the forefront of contemporary political discussion around the time that Lehi and his family dwelt in Jerusalem. Their firsthand knowledge of biblical slavery could have been transmitted to later Nephite generations through oral traditions and written accounts.⁸

The Plates of Brass. A second important source of Nephite knowledge about biblical slavery was the brass plates. When Lehi’s group left Jerusalem around 600 B.C., they took with them a set of brass plates that contained, among other things, a “record of the Jews” (1 Nephi 5:12). As the Nephites studied the Jewish history, stories that illustrated the biblical slave laws in practice,⁹ such as that of Elisha and the widow’s oil,¹⁰ might have been available to them.

The brass plates also contained “the prophecies of the holy prophets” (1 Nephi 5:13). Several of the Old Testament prophets discussed slavery. For example, the writings of Amos might have been on the record Lehi’s group took with them. About 150 years before Lehi’s departure, Amos expressly chastised those who sold their impoverished debtors into slavery: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; *because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes*” (Amos 2:6, emphasis added; compare Amos 8:6).¹¹ Isaiah was also aware of the practice of debt-slavery and used it allegorically to demonstrate that Jehovah would never sell the Israelites into bondage. Speaking as a debtor to his children, the Lord inquires, “Which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves” (Isaiah 50:1).¹² Through their reading of these teachings, the Nephites would have been able to learn about slavery laws and practices.¹³

The Nephites’ most significant source on biblical slavery—the “five books of Moses”—was also included on the plates of brass (1 Nephi 5:11). These “five books” may not have contained the slavery laws in the exact form that we have them today;¹⁴ however, that the plates contained them in some form is demonstrated by the following passages.

Examples of Slavery in the Book of Mormon

In the early years of Nephite history, slavery was probably not practiced. In a society consisting of fewer than thirty individuals who were all members of a family unit, slavery would have been impractical and unnecessary.¹⁵ However, as the population grew—most likely through contact with indigenous peoples—and the economy expanded (see 2 Nephi 5:15–17; Jacob 1:16; 2:12–13), slavery would gradually have become an accepted institution in Nephite society.¹⁶ This section discusses several passages that illustrate Nephite knowledge of the biblical slavery laws.

Jacob's Address to the Nephites at the Temple. Jacob was consecrated by Nephi to be the high priest in the land (see Jacob 1:18). As such, he was responsible to teach the people the word of God (see Jacob 1:19; 2:2), which would have included the law of Moses. Some time after Nephi's death, Jacob delivers a forceful message at the temple. On this occasion, clearly a holy day involving a covenant renewal ceremony, the people have "come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God" (Jacob 2:8). Jacob uses the opportunity to review certain laws of God that the Nephites were violating. Unfortunately, we only have part of Jacob's sermon (see Jacob 3:12), and that part contains no express reference to slavery. Jacob may have omitted from his record what he thought to be less significant aspects of his discourse. Nonetheless, even the edited version of Jacob's sermon contains possible allusions to the practice of slavery, suggesting that the Nephites possessed the biblical slavery laws.

The Rich "Persecuting" the Poor. In the first half of his sermon, Jacob chastises those wealthy Nephites who were using their financial strength to "persecute" their poorer brethren (see Jacob 2:13). Exactly what Jacob means by *persecute* is unclear. His use of the word seems consistent with other instances in which *persecute* is used to describe the way the rich treated the poor (see 2 Nephi 9:30; 28:13). However, the term also has other possible meanings, for example, religious persecution (see Mosiah 26:38; 27:2–3; Alma 1:19–23). The word also appears later in a slavery context. When Alma and his people become subjugated to the Lamanites and are placed under Amulon's control, Mosiah 24:8 states that Amulon "began to persecute" Alma's people. The next verse defines "persecutes" by explaining that Amulon "exercised authority over them, and put tasks upon them, and put taskmasters over them" (Mosiah 24:9). Based on this use of *persecute* to describe enslavement, we cannot rule out that Jacob's broad indictment of the rich for "persecuting" the poor was meant possibly to chastise the rich

for enslaving the poor or to chastise masters who were abusing their slaves.

Further support for these possibilities comes from an understanding of the biblical slavery laws. Poverty was one of the main ways an Israelite could become enslaved.¹⁷ When a destitute individual was no longer able to maintain himself, he could give himself into slavery, either to another Hebrew or to a foreigner (see Leviticus 25:39, 47).¹⁸ Similarly, an Israelite could become a slave through debt. If “a debtor [was] unable to pay his debts [he could give] himself in bondage to his creditor.”¹⁹ Debt-slavery was practiced “especially in difficult times and during famine, or at times when the wealthy classes and nobility proved stronger than the central authority, which was consequently unable to defend the liberty of impoverished persons.”²⁰

The economic conditions at this time in Nephite history were perfect for the development of slavery. A great disparity had developed between the wealthy and the lower classes (see Jacob 2:12–13). Debt- and poverty-slavery would have been natural consequences of this gap. Furthermore, tension may have existed between Jacob and the political leaders at this relatively early period of Nephite history.²¹ Whether the king or the priests wielded the final power in interpreting the law of Moses was apparently still the subject of debate. The wealthy could have enslaved their debtors without much interference from the central authority.²² Perhaps because the king was not championing the cause of the poor, Jacob felt compelled to do so.

Proper Treatment of Poor “Brethren.” Having identified the problem of the rich persecuting the poor, Jacob asks an important question. “And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing?” (Jacob 2:14). He provides an emphatic answer: “Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you, and if ye persist in these things his judgments must speedily come unto you” (Jacob 2:14). Based on Jacob’s

subsequent instructions, it appears that many had misconstrued the biblical slavery laws and were using these laws to justify their poor treatment of slaves.

Jacob's counsel on how a master should treat his slaves reflects the biblical slavery laws. He begins with the general rule, "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves" (Jacob 2:17). Under the biblical slave codes, Israelite masters were told, "Thou shalt not rule over [Hebrew slaves] with rigour" (Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53). An Israelite slave was to be treated as a laborer (see Leviticus 25:39–40) and a member of the family,²³ rather than as a slave. The Hebrew term for slave, *'ebed*, derives from the verb meaning "to work," *'abad*. A Hebrew slave was, in theory, only a worker or a servant.²⁴

Rabbinic literature sheds additional light on the relationship between Jewish master and slave. Jewish commentators interpreted the phrase "and if thy brother . . . be sold unto thee" (Deuteronomy 15:12, emphasis added) to support the rule that a Hebrew slave was to be treated with brotherly love.²⁵ Similarly, the passage "he shall be with thee" in Leviticus 25:40 was interpreted to mean that the slave was to be

like thee [the master] in food, like thee in drink, like thee in decent clothing; you are not to be eating white bread while he eats black bread . . . , you are not to drink vintage wine while he drinks unmaturred, you are not to sleep on flock while he sleeps on straw.²⁶

Jacob's succinct instruction to his people captures these exegeses. The Nephite masters were to treat their slaves as they treated themselves.

Jacob also counsels the people to "be familiar with all and free with your substance, that [your brethren] may be rich like unto you" (Jacob 2:17). These instructions are reminiscent of other biblical rules that applied to master/slave relationships. At the release of the Hebrew slave in the seventh year, the master was to generously provide the ex-slave with food and capital:

And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. (Deuteronomy 15:13–14)

By following this law, the masters would be helping their freed slaves to establish themselves financially. Ex-slaves would not be forced back into slavery by poverty but could have the opportunity to become rich like their former masters.

Jacob promises the Nephites that if they “listen unto the word of [God’s] commands,” (Jacob 2:16) and “[obtain] a hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19), they will obtain riches (see Jacob 2:19). He seems to be echoing the words of Moses that if Israel would follow the biblical slave laws, “the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest” (Deuteronomy 15:18).

The Law of Redemption. Jacob concludes the first portion of his sermon by giving counsel on the use of riches and exhorting the people to “liberate the captive” (Jacob 2:19); this seems to be a reference to the biblical law of redemption. Leviticus 25 provides that “if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner . . . he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him” (Leviticus 25:47–48). If a Hebrew was not redeemed immediately by one of his relatives, his slavery did not terminate until the Jubilee Year, potentially a forty-nine-year wait.²⁷ Obviously, failure to follow the law of redemption could bring substantial hardships upon a family.

Jacob was probably familiar with the law of redemption. He instructs those Nephites who wanted wealth to use their riches “to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to *liberate the captive*, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:19, emphasis added). It is unlikely that Jacob is instructing his people to liberate criminals from

prison or that the “captives” talked about in this passage are in bondage in a spiritual sense. More likely, the temporal context of the verse suggests that Jacob is instructing his people to follow the redemption laws and secure the release of fellow Nephites who have become enslaved.

If Jacob’s counsel to “liberate the captive” is referring to slavery, then that counsel raises interesting issues concerning the scope of the Nephite law of redemption. The law stated in Leviticus only discusses redemption when the master is a foreigner. Although during Israel’s tribal years redemption was probably allowed between the tribes, “redemption in later periods was limited to slaves sold to non-Hebrew masters.”²⁸ Did the Nephites similarly limit redemption to those situations involving a foreign master and a Nephite slave?²⁹ Would the Lamanites have qualified as “foreigners” or were they more like an Israelite tribe? The Book of Mormon does not provide enough information to answer these questions.

When taken as a whole, Jacob’s instructions to the Nephites seem to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the biblical slave provisions. The parallels between Jacob’s discourse and the slavery laws are difficult to explain away as mere coincidence. Jacob skillfully weaves into his sermon allusions to debt-slavery, the biblical rules outlining the proper way to treat Hebrew slaves, and the laws of release and redemption. Even though Jacob’s sermon did not have slavery as its primary focus, at least part of Jacob’s intent seems to be to rebuke those who were not properly following these laws.³⁰

Benjamin and the Rejection of Slavery. The Book of Mormon indicates that several centuries later, mainstream Nephite society had rejected the practice of slavery. During what appears to be a gathering of the Nephites at the Feast of Tabernacles, King Benjamin delivered a formal covenant renewal discourse and crowned his son Mosiah as the next king.³¹ He began with an impressive summary of his reign and a review of some important aspects of his laws:

I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you; Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, *nor that ye should make slaves one of another*, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you. (Mosiah 2:12–13, emphasis added)

Benjamin's point is clear. He lists slavery as a sinful and abominable practice equivalent to the other forms of wickedness mentioned in the same passage. Further, by equating slavery with several of the prohibitions found in the Ten Commandments, Benjamin clearly sees this prohibition as more than just a secular law enacted by him or his father Mosiah (Mosiah 2:31); rather, it is a commandment of God. Likely, Benjamin's negative view of slavery was influenced by the words of the prophets Amos,³² Isaiah,³³ and perhaps Jeremiah.³⁴

Although Benjamin's law code prohibited slavery, he uses slave imagery in his sermon at the temple. He was probably familiar with Leviticus 25:55, which stated, "For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." Benjamin used the idea that his people were servants, or slaves, to God to deliver a powerful message:

I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and

do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:20–21)

Benjamin's people may not have practiced slavery, but they certainly would have understood his metaphor. God is the merciful and gracious master, and humans are debtor slaves unable to pay back what they owe. By using the term *unprofitable*, Benjamin's reference to debt-slavery is unequivocal. When a creditor enslaved his debtor, it became the debtor's duty to work off his indebtedness. He was to render to his creditor his every energy (see Mosiah 2:34) in becoming profitable. A profitable slave was not only one who could work enough to cover the master's expenses in providing the slave with food, clothing, and other necessities, but also one who could turn a profit and ideally pay off his indebtedness before the year of release or the Jubilee. Benjamin used this image to teach that no matter how hard we, as slaves, work to pay back our debt to God, we will always owe him (see Mosiah 2:23–24). While Benjamin forbade slavery as an institution, he found the principle useful in delivering one of the most powerful theological messages in all scripture.

Alma and the War Slave Provisions. As a priest of King Noah (see Mosiah 17:1–2), Alma was intimately familiar with the law of Moses (see Mosiah 12:28). Even though his training in the law had given him a distorted understanding of the law's overall purpose (see Mosiah 12:29–32), there is no reason to doubt his thorough knowledge of the law's minute details.

In particular, his actions in surrendering to the Lamanites display a great understanding of the laws in Deuteronomy dealing with slaves captured in war. God had instructed the ancient Israelites,

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the

people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. (Deuteronomy 20:10–12)

When Alma discovers that a Lamanite army is roaming about the borders of the land, his initial response is to gather the people into the city (Mosiah 23:26). He apparently realized that his small group³⁵ would never survive a siege by the Lamanite army, nor would they be successful in open combat. Alma decides to make peace with the army instead, a fairly risky proposition because he could not have assumed that the Lamanites would know about the Mosaic law concerning prisoners of war. The text is carefully worded: “Alma and his brethren *went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands*” (Mosiah 23:29, emphasis added). Alma wanted to make sure that the Lamanites understood their peaceful intentions. His people did more than “open unto” the Lamanites; they actually left the city of Helam and surrendered to the Lamanite army.

Two important factors secured their safety. First, the Lamanite army was not overly interested in Alma’s small group. They were more interested in locating the land of Nephi (see Mosiah 23:36). Second, Amulon and the other fugitive high priests of King Noah had joined this band of Lamanites, a point that the writer of the account made sure readers would understand (see Mosiah 23:30–35). These priests, also thoroughly trained in the law of Moses, were probably fully aware of the significance of Alma’s actions.

When Amulon is given authority over the people of Alma by the Lamanite king, he seems to follow exactly the procedure laid out in Deuteronomy 20, treating Alma’s people as the Mosaic law provided, as “tributaries” and forced laborers (Deuteronomy 20:10–12). The Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 20:11 of the King James version for “tributaries,” *ms*, literally means forced labor, task, or tribute. Note how

the Book of Mormon consciously preserves this meaning: “[Amulon] exercised authority over them, and *put tasks upon them*, and *put taskmasters over them*” (Mosiah 24:9, emphasis added).

The small details of this incident faithfully reflect the slavery law found in Deuteronomy 20. Both Alma and Amulon were well versed in the Mosaic law and followed the correct procedure. Alma and his people, knowing that resistance meant sure destruction, chose to surrender to the Lamanites and become their “tributaries.” Amulon, though acting partly out of anger and hatred toward Alma, treated these “tributaries” as the biblical slave laws allowed. This incident represents convincing proof that the Nephites had knowledge of the biblical slavery laws as set forth in Deuteronomy.

Conclusion

While only a preliminary study, and therefore necessarily tentative, this paper has discussed several examples that suggest the Nephites possessed the biblical slave laws. Jacob’s temple sermon contains multiple allusions to these laws. He skillfully incorporated slavery concepts into his message to ensure Nephite compliance with these laws. Benjamin’s temple sermon also contains slavery images. Although slavery was outlawed under Benjamin’s code, he found the concept helpful in teaching his people about their relationship with God. Finally, Alma’s conduct in surrendering to the Lamanites and Amulon’s treatment of Alma’s people after their surrender demonstrate that these two trained priests had extensive knowledge of the slavery laws in Deuteronomy. Our appreciation of the Book of Mormon as an ancient record is enhanced through an understanding that references to slavery in the Book of Mormon are consistent with the biblical slave laws.

Notes

1. For a general study, see Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (1949; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1978).

2. Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah, and Winona Lake Mich.: Brigham Young University Press and Eisenbrauns, 2001), 114.

3. Some of the laws given to the Israelites had Near Eastern parallels. For example, the Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1850 B.C.) also contained a release provision: "If an obligation came due against a seignior and he sold (the services of) his wife, his son, or his daughter, or he has been bound over to service, they shall work (in) the house of their purchaser or obligee for three years, *with their freedom reestablished in the fourth year.*" Codex Hammurabi 117, emphasis added. Compare Exodus 21:2; Deuteronomy 15:12.

4. The Book of Mormon contains many passages dealing with slavery. Although an extensive and scholarly treatment of slavery in the Book of Mormon is needed, I have not attempted an exhaustive study. This paper will not examine Lamanite or Jaredite slave practices. I am also forced to omit many other passages that I would like to discuss.

5. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 34–42.

6. Given that slavery was a well-established practice, Lehi may even have owned slaves himself to labor on his large countryside estate. See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 35.

7. We do not know the exact year of Zedekiah's instruction. Lehi's ministry began in the first year of Zedekiah's reign (1 Nephi 1:4), and shortly after, Lehi's group departed for the promised land. Eleven years later, Zedekiah's reign ended with the destruction of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52:1; compare 2 Nephi 1:4). Even if Lehi was gone by the time of the release of the slaves, Zedekiah's actions demonstrate that slavery was, nevertheless, well established during this time.

8. We know that Lehi kept a detailed record of his history and life (see 1 Nephi 6:1–3). Nephi, however, was not overly impressed with the way the Jews had organized their society. He may have

considered slavery a work of darkness and an abomination and refused to pass on his knowledge of this practice (2 Nephi 25:2).

9. Lehi may have been familiar with other references to debt-slavery in the Old Testament. For example, the author of Proverbs wrote, "The rich ruleth over the poor, and *the borrower is servant to the lender*" (Proverbs 22:7, emphasis added).

10. The story illustrates the practice of debt-slavery: "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: *and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen*" (2 Kings 4:1, emphasis added). Elisha miraculously transforms the widow's only asset, a pot of oil, into many gallons, which the widow then used to satisfy the obligation.

11. Note how Amos juxtaposes the foreclosing creditor against the "righteous" and the "poor." The obvious suggestion is that the creditors are greedy and iniquitous. Amos wanted these wicked Israelites to know that they were engaged in serious transgression that would bring upon them the retribution of God.

12. The tone of the question implies that Isaiah, too, thought the practice was less than honorable. Because God would never think of selling his "debtors" into slavery, the passage intimates that the Israelites should similarly refrain from such practices. Compare the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:23–35.

13. Unlike the passage from Amos, we have clear evidence that the Nephites were intimately familiar with the writings of Isaiah; over a quarter of the book is directly quoted in the Book of Mormon. In fact, Jacob quotes the above passage at the temple (2 Nephi 7:1), possibly at Nephi's coronation ceremony.

14. The biblical slavery laws are mainly found in three places: Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 25, and Exodus 21.

15. For two important studies on the number of individuals in Lehi's group, see John L. Sorenson, "The Composition of Lehi's Family," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:174–96; and John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (fall 1992): 1–8.

16. Sorenson argues persuasively that Lehi's party probably encountered native populations in the promised land who assimilated

with the early Nephites and Lamanites. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land," 3-4.

17. Menachem Elon, ed., *The Principles of Jewish Law* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 231.

18. "Peasant smallholders, impoverished after years of drought and other misfortunes, who had already disposed of their lands and vineyards, were no longer able to think of anything other than offering their sons and daughters, and their own persons, for sale." E. E. Urbach, *The Laws Regarding Slavery* (New York: Arno, 1979), 12. Such conditions were present in the years following the Babylonian captivity.

Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. . . . Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards. (Nehemiah 5:3-5)

During such adverse economic conditions, many "were only too glad to sell themselves as slaves." Urbach, *Laws Regarding Slavery*, 12.

19. Elon, *Principles of Jewish Law*, 231. See also 2 Kings 4:1; Isaiah 50:1; Amos 2:6; 8:6; Nehemiah 5:5.

20. Urbach, *Laws Regarding Slavery*, 4.

21. Jacob was outspoken in his sharp criticism of the men who had succeeded Nephi as leaders in the city of Nephi (see Jacob 1:15-2:35).

22. In fact, the "central authority," or reigning Nephite king, might also have been engaged in the practice of slavery. The text states that under the second Nephite king, many people began to indulge in polygamy (see Jacob 1:15). One of the main ways for obtaining concubines was through slavery. Under biblical law, a man had the right to sell his daughter into slavery (see Exodus 21:7): "A Hebrew daughter sold by her father as a servant was acquired on the implied condition that she could be retained as a concubine by her master or by a member of his family." Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 116. If the king was taking his wives and concubines in this manner, he likely would have sanctioned the practice of slavery among his people.

23. Elon, *Principles of Jewish Law*, 231; see Genesis 24:2; Leviticus 22:11.

24. Elon, *Principles of Jewish Law*, 231.

25. Urbach, *Laws Regarding Slavery*, 26.

26. *Ibid.*

27. "If a Hebrew slave has been sold to an alien, he must be redeemed at once by a relative, failing which his servitude terminates with the Jubilee Year." Elon, *Principles of Jewish Law*, 232. Every fifty years, all slaves were to be freed under the Jubilee laws (see Leviticus 25:40–41, 54). See, generally, Raymond Westbrook, "Jubilee Laws," in *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 37–57.

28. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 117.

29. It is now well widely accepted that when Lehi's group arrived in the promised land, they found other peoples living there. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land." See also notes 15 and 16.

30. Other passages in Jacob's discourse are worthy of close examination. His discussion of polygamy contains an implied rebuke of the people for engaging in the practice of selling daughters into slavery to act as concubines. See note 22, above. Unfortunately, I will have to leave an exhaustive investigation of these possible references to slavery for another time.

31. See, generally, Stephen D. Ricks, "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Books and FARMS, 1991), 209–19.

32. See note 11, above.

33. See note 12, above.

34. See the discussion on possible sources of Nephite knowledge of slavery laws, above.

35. Mosiah 18:35 states that Alma's group was comprised of about 450 people when they fled into the wilderness. Even under the most favorable circumstances, they could not have numbered more than 1,000 people at this time.