



Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship

Volume 35

Article 9

1-1-2020

Chapter 5: Mormon Writing

Brant Gardner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/interpreter>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gardner, Brant (2020) "Chapter 5: Mormon Writing," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*: Vol. 35, Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/interpreter/vol35/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Chapter 5: Mormon Writing

When Moroni described what his father had written, he called it “an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi” (Title Page). Mormon himself similarly referred to what he had written: “after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi...” (Words of Mormon 1:3). Nevertheless, Mormon doesn’t appear to use the term in the way we might expect.¹⁰¹ A modern reader expects that an abridgment makes a shorter but faithful version of a longer text. This is not what Mormon did. When Mormon wrote his eponymous book within his larger work, he said that “I write a small abridgment, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen” (Mormon 5:9). Mormon was writing his eponymous book in real time and not interacting with the plates of Nephi as a source. He didn’t need to, as he was the one who had both experienced and written that history. For Mormon, an abridgement was anything shorter than what the full account might have been. The numerous times we hear that Mormon cannot write but the hundredth part of Nephi history confirms his idea that he was abridging by giving a less voluminous account.¹⁰²

101. I understand Joseph Smith as the source of the English vocabulary of the Book of Mormon. What we are seeing with the word abridgement is a definition that Joseph used and which did not accurately convey the type of record Mormon created. I used Mormon as the writer here for simplicity. Arguments about the nature of the translation process are beyond the scope of my interests in this book, although my personal views undoubtedly color my perception. For an elucidation of my position, see Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

102. Mormon declares he cannot write the hundredth part: Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 3 Nephi 26:6. The phrase also occurs in Jacob 3:13 and Ether 15:33. Although not using the same phrase, 1 Nephi 14:28 expresses the same idea: “I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.” Cheryl Brown, “I Speak Somewhat Concerning That Which I Have Written,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 56:

Although the Book of Mormon was certainly a shorter record than the whole set of large plates, it was not a synopsis of what had been recorded on those plates. Perhaps we have no adequate word for what Mormon did, although David B. Honey reports a suggested phrase:

[T]he historical paradigm initially selected by the Book of Mormon authors to follow, [is] a paradigm or approach to the use of history that is as honorable as and more ancient than the question-asking and puzzle-solving disciplines of modern scientific historiography but one with a different aim and methodology. This paradigm is that of “exemplar historiography.”

The purpose of this paradigm is to advocate a particular point or to teach a lesson. “The function of this type of history,” according to Traian Stoianovich, “is to select the relevant example (*paradeigma, exemplum*), in the didactic sense of being illustrative of what the society, through the historian, desires to inculcate and what it wants to warn against.”¹⁰³

Viewing the Book of Mormon as an exemplar historiography comes close to the essence of what Mormon saw as his task. Mormon had the entire Nephite archive available to him, and although he used the large plates of Nephi as the core structure of his account, Mormon both selected and molded accounts from several sources to serve his didactic purposes.

Grant Hardy described this aspect of Mormon’s writing:

Generally Mormon is a practitioner of narrative theology; that is, he relies on stories to convince readers of the power of God, the consequences of sin, the reality of prophecy, and so forth. He certainly has a hand in fashioning his narratives for didactic and aesthetic purposes, but he cannot distort the history too much since the cogency of his argument depends on the accuracy of his facts: we should believe certain things because they are demonstrated by actual events of the past.¹⁰⁴

To appreciate how the Book of Mormon was compiled as the Lord directed the prophet-writers, we must first appreciate the fact that not everything available to the writers was included in the book. Again and again the reader is reminded of the immense amount of material the prophets had to work from and the small amount of space they had to work with.

103. David B. Honey, “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 100–101.

104. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 119.

Mormon's Admonition to His Future Audience

Because the lesson Mormon desired to teach his future readers is embedded in exemplar history, his readers are required to extract his message from the stories he included. Nevertheless, Mormon was not so subtle as to bury that intent too deeply. At times, he points out the moral lessons with “thus we see” statements, where Mormon makes certain that the exemplar is made obvious:

And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell. (Alma 30:60)

And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will. (Alma 42:7)

Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one. (Alma 46:8)

And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. (Alma 50:19–20)

And thus we see that the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him.

And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts.

And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words. (Helaman 6:34–36)

More examples exist. Mormon intended to teach that our own actions lead to either the promise or the curse, and he included multiple exemplars of both consequences and underscored them with his own conclusion — in case we missed what he saw as obvious.

Mormon's Interaction with His Text

Mormon was not content to simply record history. Mormon's history was written for a future audience, and Mormon shaped his message by the way he wrote, at times directly inserting himself into his recounting of history.

Narrator-voice and Author-voice

Mormon is the main narrator in the books he edited. Although he includes some texts from other writers where they were the narrators (such as Alma₂'s personal record), Mormon is responsible for the majority of the linking narrative in the events covered in the books from Mosiah to 4 Nephi. When writing his linking narrative, Mormon writes in the past. Even when quoting from sources that are written in the present tense (such as Alma₂'s sermons), Mormon describes the surrounding events in the past tense. I call this type of writing *narrator-voice*. That is, the narrator is writing about the past, and the descriptive writing is about the past.

Mormon also shifts out of narrator-voice and includes text that is more responsive to his task of writing to a future audience than about a past history. I call this *author-voice* because these occasions give us a glimpse of Mormon as he was writing. In these instances, the text speaks to a future audience, typically with Mormon discussing his intents and methods of writing.

The simplest of these author-voice insertions comes when Mormon highlights the moral he wants his readers to extract from the historical episode he has included. These were discussed in the section examining "Mormon's Admonition to his Future Audience." Sometimes, his insertion is not to highlight the lesson to be learned, but to foreshadow the lesson to come:

For behold, *I will show unto you* that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea, even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob. (Mosiah 23:23)

And the multitude heard not the words which he spake, therefore they did not bear record; but the disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost. And *I will show unto you* hereafter that this record is true. (3 Nephi 18:37)

Mormon not only addresses his future audience, but emphasizes that the whole of his text has an intentional outline allowing him to know what will be written.

A unique instance of an author-voice insertion comes in Mormon's editing of the story of Ammon and king Lamoni. The queen had summoned Ammon to the side of the king, who was in a spiritual sleep. The spirit overcame both the queen and Ammon, and as Ammon lay helpless on the floor, others arrived:

Now, one of them, whose brother had been slain with the sword of Ammon, being exceedingly angry with Ammon, drew his sword and went forth that he might let it fall upon Ammon, to slay him; and as he lifted the sword to smite him, behold, he fell dead.

Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith — therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord. (Alma 19:22–23)

In verse 23, Mormon steps out of narrator-voice to explain the miracle that saved Ammon's life. Mormon had not described this assurance to Mosiah when it must have been given, but simply references it.

A special case of Mormon's authorial insertion comes when he not only inserts himself, but designates himself with a double identification: "I, Mormon." We first encounter the declaration "I, Mormon" in Words of Mormon, verses 1, 9, and 11.¹⁰⁵ The immediate declaration inherent in "I, Mormon" is that he has stepped out of narrator-voice and into author-voice. This is wholly understandable for Words of Mormon because the first half of the chapter explains why he added the small plates to his own record.

The phrase "I, Mormon" appears in a particular context, a context that includes a number of concepts that are expressed in the section where he adds "I, Mormon," but not necessarily in a fixed order. That context is Mormon's meta-discussion of his writing process. In Words of Mormon, he speaks of finding the small plates and desiring to preserve them. None of this information is in narrative-time. In fact, it is quite clearly interruptive of the narrative flow in its current location.

A second factor that is repeated in the "I, Mormon" statements is a declaration that he cannot write a "hundredth part" of the history.

105. They would not have been the first time he wrote them, only the first time we see them due to the placement of Words of Mormon. See the section "Words of Mormon," Chapter 6.

Thus, Words of Mormon 1:5 states: “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people.”

The next “I, Mormon” phrase is found in 3 Nephi 26: 12, where it occurs in each of the two sentences in that verse. In this case, “I, Mormon” statements come at the conclusion of the author-voice insertion. The insertion begins at 3 Nephi 26: 6 with:

And now there *cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part* of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people; But behold the plates of Nephi do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people.

And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. (3 Nephi 26:6–8)

These verses are part of the inserted information wherein Mormon declares himself (3 Nephi 26:12). His self-declaration comes at the end of the insertion in which he notes that he cannot write the hundredth part and also mentions the physical plates of Nephi from which he is taking his record.

In 3 Nephi 5:8 Mormon notes that “this book cannot contain even a hundredth part of what was done among so many people in the space of twenty and five years.” Verses 10 and 11 specifically discuss the plate records. Importantly, 3 Nephi 5:12 says “and behold, I am called Mormon.” That isn’t precisely an “I, Mormon” statement, but is clearly the intent. In 4 Nephi, the “I, Mormon” phrase occurs in 1:23. Mormon discusses the plates in 4 Nephi 1:19–21 (but this occurrence lacks the declaration that he cannot write the hundredth part).

I should note that this changes when we read Mormon’s eponymous book. The “I, Mormon” statements in that book are autobiographical; they represent the author of the narrative. In that book there is no distinction between author and narrator.

Because this unique set of ideas recurs frequently, it appears to tell us just a little about Mormon’s mindset as he wrote. He clearly understood when he left narrator-voice and wrote in author-voice. For the times when he decided that he needed to discuss his writing process, he typically made sure that we understood who it was who created the Book of Mormon. For modern readers whose entire first half of our Book of Mormon has been replaced with text that Mormon didn’t write, it is perhaps a fitting reminder that his was the mortal mind behind all the

text we have, even to the inclusion of the small plates that became the replacement for Mormon's text when it was lost.

Inserting Information for a Future Audience

As discussed in the section "Mormon's Outline," Mormon had an outline and followed it. Most of the text involves either Mormon's narrative retelling of Nephite history or copied material from other sources. There are times when Mormon inserts information which was not present in the text he was working with. This inserted information takes two general forms. One occurs when the inserted text is part of Mormon's intended message and is typically a moralizing statement to make certain that his audience understands the reason Mormon has chosen a particular story (or perhaps told it in a certain way).

The second is seen when Mormon inserts material that he believes is important, but which interrupts the copied text or otherwise signals a break in the text and is discussed in the next section on "Mormon's Use of Repetitive Resumption."

The latter half of the book of Alma is filled with war. Mormon essentially tells his future readers why this emphasis on these particular battles were important to Mormon's thesis:

And in these prosperous circumstances were the people of Nephi in the commencement of the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land.

And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations,

which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges. (Alma 50:17–23)

Mormon is not narrating Nephite history in these verses, he is using it to demonstrate the fulfillment of Lehi's promise for the land. He specifically invokes Lehi and then emphasizes the contrast between the prosperity of the Nephites and the conditions that "brought upon them their wars and their destructions." While many readers of Captain Moroni's exploits in Alma see in them a glorification of that military chief captain, Mormon saw him restoring proper Nephite obedience before the Lord, having removed the contrary elements. Thus, "there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni." Mormon was correct that many readers might miss this message, so he made it explicit.

Mormon's military descriptions have a specific purpose in his envisioned project; they carry a larger message about the literal fulfillment of Lehi's promise. After a great slaughter of Nephites in Helaman, Mormon tells his audience:

Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God.

And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites —

And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten, and driven before the Lamanites, until they had lost possession of almost all their lands. (Helaman 4:11–13)

There was a promise given to Lehi that had two prongs. Nephi recorded the Lord’s promise to his father: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 1:20). At times, Mormon emphasizes the positive aspect of the promise. In this case, he emphasizes the negative side. In addition to pointing out that they invoked the curse through their rebellion, he emphasized that it was due to their own actions.

These moralistic summaries of the events Mormon wrote are part of the flow of the text. There is no real interruption of the narrative. Mormon clearly saw these statements as merely emphasizing the reason for which events had been selected and recorded in his record. When he finishes describing the intended moral, he moves directly on to the next event. Because there is no interruption, it is difficult to know whether these summaries were spontaneous or part of the intended text.

Mormon’s Use of Repetitive Resumption

There are times when Mormon understood that he had created a disruptive insertion in the text. These are defined by a technique that describes the way he returns to the originally planned text. As David Bokovoy explained: “Repetitive resumption refers to an editor’s return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption.”¹⁰⁶ It is an Old-World literary technique that is not exclusive to the Old Testament.

106. David E. Bokovoy, “Repetitive Resumption in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 27, no. 1 (2007): 2. See also David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links Between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (Tooele, UT: Heritage Distribution, 2003), 117–31. Bokovoy and Tvedtnes describe repetitive resumption and provide a number of examples. I note that I disagree with some of their examples. There is clearly repetition, but little evidence of an inserted text that is not part of the flow of the narrative. I would see these as more of a stylistic repetition than a marking of inserted text (following Abusch’s definition cited right after the earlier quotation from Bokovoy).

Tzvi Abusch not only noticed the technique in Mesopotamian incantations but used it to discern when newer sections which had been interpolated into an earlier text. His critical analysis of the text itself was borne out by the discoveries of other copies of those incantations without the inserted text.¹⁰⁷ For Abusch, there were two requirements to qualify as a repetitive resumption. The first is that there be a repetition of a phrase (the repetition itself). The second is that the material in between the repetitions not be directly related to the preceding text. In other words, in between the repeated phrases there is a text inserted which is not a natural continuation of the text up to the original phrase that is later repeated.

In Alma 8, Mormon is using Alma₂'s personal record as his source. As he begins the story of Alma₂ and Amulek in Ammonihah, he inserts some information into the text that he sees as relevant, but which was not on Alma₂'s record:

So that when he had finished his work at Melek he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; *and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.*

Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

And it came to pass that *when Alma had come to the city of Ammonihah* he began to preach the word of God unto them. (Alma 8:6–8)

The repetition of coming to the city of Ammonihah brackets the insertion of the tangentially related text about how villages and cities received their names.

In Alma 30, Mormon is still working with Alma₂'s personal record. In the story of Korihor we find repetitive resumption used twice. The first is near the beginning of the story, and the second at the end.

But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, *and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people* against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

107. I. Tzvi Abusch, "Maqlû III 1–30: Internal Analysis and Manuscript Evidence for the Revision of an Incantation," *Studia Orientalia* 106 (2009): 307.

Now there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him.

But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach: (Alma 30:6–12)

Alma₂ wrote the story of Korihor, but Mormon inserted the information about the relationship of Korihor to the law. While the insertion is tangentially related to the story, it is nevertheless an interruption that explains an issue that was not discussed in Alma₂'s text.

At the end of the story of Korihor, the inserted information is less disruptive, and can only be conclusively attributed to Mormon by the bracketing repetition of the departure information in the return sentence:

And it came to pass that the curse was not taken off of Korihor; but he was cast out, *and went about from house to house begging for his food.*

Now the knowledge of what had happened unto Korihor was immediately published throughout all the land; yea, the proclamation was sent forth by the chief judge to all the people in the land, declaring unto those who had believed in the words of Korihor that they must speedily repent, lest the same judgments would come unto them.

And it came to pass that they were all convinced of the wickedness of Korihor; therefore they were all converted again unto the Lord; and this put an end to the iniquity after the manner of Korihor.

And Korihor *did go about from house to house, begging food for his support.* (Alma 30:56–58)

It is likely that Mormon understood the aftermath of the Korihor incident from Alma₂'s record, but Mormon wanted to move his narrative quickly into the story of the Zoramites. He probably condensed material from Alma₂ to present the quick summary, and then moved back to his intended story. In this case, Mormon uses Korihor as the link to the story of the Zoramites. In the very next verse he notes:

And it came to pass that as he [Korihor] went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram — and as he went forth amongst them, behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead. (Alma 30:59)

The phrase “Korihor did go about from house to house, begging food for his support” is the essential tie that allows Korihor to “go about” into the land of the Zoramites. Mormon sets the stage for the Zoramites as villains by them having tread upon him “even until he was dead.” The phrase about going about from house to house not only indicated a return to the planned narrative, but it was a repetition that was also structurally required to move the text to the next story.

In the following example, Mormon inserts text marked by repetitive resumption.

And it came to pass when *they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, that they separated themselves and departed one from another,* trusting in the Lord that they should meet again at the close of their harvest; for they supposed that great was the work which they had undertaken.

And assuredly it was great, for they had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands.

Thus they were a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols, and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers; notwithstanding the promises of the Lord were extended unto them on the conditions of repentance.

Therefore, this was the cause for which the sons of Mosiah had undertaken the work, that perhaps they might bring them unto repentance; that perhaps they might bring them to know of the plan of redemption.

Therefore *they separated themselves one from another*, and went forth among them, every man alone, according to the word and power of God which was given unto him. (Alma 17:13–17)

Mormon at times used repetitive resumption when he was interrupting himself. In the following case, an aside was triggered by what he had just written, and the departure and return points are marked by repetitive resumption:

Therefore he took the records which were engraven on *the plates of brass, and also the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept* and preserved according to the commandments of God, after having translated and caused to be written the records which were on the plates of gold which had been found by the people of Limhi, which were delivered to him by the hand of Limhi;

And this he did because of the great anxiety of his people; for they were desirous beyond measure to know concerning those people who had been destroyed.

And now he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.

Now these things were prepared from the beginning, and were handed down from generation to generation, for the purpose of interpreting languages;

And they have been kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he should discover to every creature who should possess the land the iniquities and abominations of his people;

And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times.

Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people and they were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth, yea, and even from that time back until the creation of Adam.

Now this account did cause the people of Mosiah to mourn exceedingly, yea, they were filled with sorrow; nevertheless it gave them much knowledge, in the which they did rejoice.

And this account shall be written hereafter; for behold, it is expedient that all people should know the things which are written in this account.

[**Original end of XII.** The next verse was the beginning of a chapter in 1830, but in 1879 was shifted to become the final verse of chapter 28]

And now, as I said unto you, that after king Mosiah had done these things, *he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma*, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters, and conferred them upon him, and commanded him that he should keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem. (Mosiah 28:11–20)

The original intent was to end the chapter with the gathering of the records and sacred relics and giving them to Alma, which is repeated in the opening sentence of the original chapter XII. However, as Mormon wrote about the records, he mentioned the plates of Ether, and that triggered his insertion of information about the translation of those plates. This example can be seen both as a standard use of repetitive resumption and as an intended use of the chapter break as the interruption (which did not occur because of the spontaneous addition of the information about the translation of the plates of Ether).

Finally, there are cases of repetitive resumption that are anomalous. There are two that are clearly repetitions, but without an inserted text:

And king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth. And he also, himself, did till the earth, that thereby he might

not become burdensome to his people, that he might do according to that which his father had done in all things. *And there was no contention among all his people for the space of three years.*

[Chapter 7]

And now, it came to pass that *after king Mosiah had had continual peace for the space of three years*, he was desirous to know concerning the people who went up to dwell in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or in the city of Lehi-Nephi; for his people had heard nothing from them from the time they left the land of Zarahemla; therefore, they wearied him with their teasings. (Mosiah 6:7–7:1)

And now all the study of *Ammon and his people, and king Limhi and his people, was to deliver themselves out of the hands of the Lamanites and from bondage.*

[Chapter 22]

And now it came to pass that *Ammon and king Limhi* began to consult with the people how they *should deliver themselves out of bondage*; and even they did cause that all the people should gather themselves together; and this they did that they might have the voice of the people concerning the matter. (Mosiah 21:36–22:1)

Each of these examples fit the requirement of the repeated phrase, but they are both missing any inserted text. I suggest that the important aspect of both is that they both occur around a chapter break (both in the modern edition and in the 1830 edition, representing a chapter Mormon created). I suggest that Mormon considered the chapter break as the interruption, and possibly because there was some time between writing the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next. There is no reason for the repetition if the repeated information had occurred in the same writing session.

There are two very important examples of repetitive resumption which I have not yet discussed. They become relevant to the themes of how Mormon manipulates history and names and are included in those discussions.

Mormon Writing About War

Mormon selected the stories he told both by inclusion and exclusion. It is obvious that Mormon included information about war, but he did so unevenly. In Alma chapters 2 and 3 Mormon describes the Amlicite rebellion. He gives multiple details of the war, including a description of

how the Amlicites had voluntarily marked themselves. After finishing with the battle itself, Mormon declares:

Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them; yea, they set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads.

Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.

And again: I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also.

And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed.

And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed.

Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation. (Alma 3:13–19)

Mormon is quite explicit about the lesson that he wants his readers to learn from the story of the Amlicite rebellion. Contrast this with the battle that followed immediately after the Amlicite defeat.

Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle which was fought in the land of Zarahemla, by the Lamanites and the Amlicites, that there was another army of the Lamanites came in upon the people of Nephi, in the same place where the first army met the Amlicites.

And it came to pass that there was an army sent to drive them out of their land.

Now Alma himself being afflicted with a wound did not go up to battle at this time against the Lamanites;

But he sent up a numerous army against them; and they went up and slew many of the Lamanites, and drove the remainder of them out of the borders of their land.

And then they returned again and began to establish peace in the land, being troubled no more for a time with their enemies.

Now all these things were done, yea, all these wars and contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the reign of the judges. (Alma 3:20–25)

Mormon recorded two significant battles that resulted in “tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world” (Alma 3:26) but gives details only for the Amlicite rebellion. For Mormon, the details of war are only mentioned when they serve as exemplars of his greater purpose. If there is no new point to be made, the war is noted, but only briefly.

This difference of emphasis is even more dramatic in Mormon’s relation of the two wars that involved the people of Ammon and the land of Jershon. Soon after the people of Ammon relocated to Jershon, the Lamanites attacked. In the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges, there was a terrible battle with the Lamanites:

And now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, and a church also established in the land of Jershon, and the armies of the Nephites were set round about the land of Jershon, yea, in all the borders round about the land of Zarahemla; behold the armies of the Lamanites had followed their brethren into the wilderness.

And thus there was a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad.

Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi; nevertheless, the Lamanites were driven and scattered, and the people of Nephi returned again to their land.

And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi—

Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain.

And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer.

And thus endeth the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; (Alma 28:1–7)

A war which produced a “tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem” is not described. There are no heroes. There are no tactics. There are no battle scenes. There is only the report of the battle and its terrible aftermath. Mormon certainly includes scenes of war, but not for the sake of the description of alone. As an editor, Mormon saw that the wars merited a fuller description when there were lessons that could be drawn from that description. When Mormon details wars and battles, he isn’t seeking only to describe the scene, but to describe the behaviors of the peoples involved. The Amlicites rebelled and chose to separate themselves from God. They invoked the curse without even understanding that they had done so.

Mormon will tell of the Amalickiahite rebellion beginning in Alma 46, but the story isn’t only about Amalickiah but also Moroni — two men set as opposites and representing the two poles of the promise, both the choice of unrighteousness and the righteous response. When Mormon provides extensive descriptions of the war in which Captain Moroni was involved, his purpose was more to set Moroni as an exemplar than to examine military strategy. Helaman’s stripling warriors are in the story not because of their battle prowess, but because of the lessons to be learned about their parents, their own choices, and the protection purchased by the faithfulness of parents and sons. Mormon’s wars are not about war, but about people and their choices.

Mormon Writing About History

Mormon dealt with history, but he had no intention of being an historian.¹⁰⁸ Like many Old Testament writers, Mormon saw history as

108. In this I appear to contradict Grant Hardy’s reading of Mormon: “Perhaps the most striking difference between Nephi and Mormon is how much the latter sees himself as a historian, with a responsibility to tell the story of his civilization

the loom upon which the image of God's intent would appear as the warp and weft of time filled in the picture. Mormon was very clear about why he wrote as he concluded his work. He spoke to the Lamanites as a remnant of the house of Israel, and declared:

Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you.

For behold, *this is written for the intent that ye may believe that*; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them. (Mormon 7:8–9)

Moroni summarized his father's intent more succinctly in the Title Page: "Which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever — *And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.*" Mormon's testament of Christ was intended to support the prophesied book which we know as the Bible, which he considered the other testament of Christ.

History clearly plays its part in helping Mormon achieve his purpose, and that purpose is not pointed toward the past, but toward the future. It is a tapestry created from the events of the past, designed to illustrate the future of God's plan for the house of Israel.¹⁰⁹

Mormon used the backbone of Nephite history to frame the story he intended to tell, but he was the artist applying the clay (the stories of his people's past) to the structure.¹¹⁰ David B. Honey described Mormon's task: "The fact that the work has been edited out of various other records

comprehensively and accurately." Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 91. I suspect that our differences lie mostly in emphasis rather than actual substance.

109. Honey, "The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page," 97: "The next guideline defines just which type of events best portray the influence of the Lord: those events are most crucial for inclusion, whether from past Hebrew or contemporary Nephite history, that lead to 'the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.'"

110. Grant Hardy, "Mormon as Editor," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 25, notes that Mormon shows that "the bad things that happen are truly terrible, while the good things are wondrous indeed." However, there is mention of a third set of people in the

leads us to conclude that the redactor, Mormon, must have been guided by certain editorial principles by which he decided which records were important to copy, excerpt, or summarize and which data were judged either essential, superfluous, or unnecessary to include.”¹¹¹ Mormon’s stated purpose tells us that his selection criteria were not historical, only that they were framed by history. History provided the sequencing of events and the events themselves. However, which events were told, how they were applied to the historical framework, and in some cases, how Mormon transformed them, all combine to create the work that Mormon intended would cause us to “repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you” (Mormon 7:8).

Fitting Names into Narrative Types

One of the most important instances of repetitive resumption explains an otherwise anomalous text. In Alma 11 (latter half of VIII), Mormon provides a discussion of the weights and values among the Nephites. This explanation should not exist in a contemporary document written for a contemporary audience — what one assumes to be general knowledge need not be explicitly described. That principle highlights the anomaly of this long explanation. Using the concept of repetitive resumption, we can determine that Mormon intentionally inserted this information in a text that otherwise did not discuss it.

Alma₂ describes going to Ammonihah, finding Amulek, and then their debate with Zeezrom. The full story crosses from Alma chapter 10 to 11 in our modern editions of the Book of Mormon, but the whole story was contained in the single original chapter VIII.

Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.

[Chapter 11, not an original chapter break]

Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.

environs whose fate is not discussed. Hardy suggests that the “answer is that these people did not fit into the pattern of ‘the righteous prosper, the wicked suffer.’”

111. Honey, “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” 95.

Now if a man owed another, and he would not pay that which he did owe, he was complained of to the judge; and the judge executed authority, and sent forth officers that the man should be brought before him; and he judged the man according to the law and the evidences which were brought against him, and thus the man was compelled to pay that which he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber.

And the judge received for his wages according to his time — a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver, which is equal to a senine of gold; and this is according to the law which was given....

[Continues through verse 19]

Now, it was *for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ*, therefore, they did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness, that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them; therefore they did stir up the people against Alma and Amulek. (Alma 10:32–11:20. Formatted to emphasize the repeated phrase as opposed to the inserted, indented, material.)¹¹²

The repetition of the phrase *about getting gain* tells us when Mormon returns to the original text (which he is taking from Alma₂'s personal record). When Alma₂ wrote about this incident, his expected audience already had the cultural knowledge necessary to understand the names of the relative values. When Mormon wrote, he knew his audience would be at least distant in time, if not space.¹¹³ Therefore, Mormon inserted the definitions.

This long insertion served two purposes. The first was to aid Mormon's readers in understanding the value of the bribe being offered. The second, and the reason that it is as extended as it is, is that the names of the different values

112. Bokovoy and Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links Between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*, 123. Bokovoy and Tvedtnes cite this example without analyzing the function of the insertion.

113. It is possible that the system was similarly unfamiliar to Mormon, and was somewhere noted on the large plates. The function of the insertion, however, is to establish the way in which Mormon uses those facts rather than the description of the system itself. The completeness of the description, however, does argue that it was somewhere described on the large plates and Mormon extracted the full system rather than only those parts he would use in his narrative.

would be borrowed in Mormon's text to have a meaning beyond a simple name. Gordon C. Thomasson first noted this phenomenon. He explains:

Metonymy or *metonymic naming* involves “naming by association,” a metaphoric process of linking two concepts or persons together in such a way as to tell us more about the latter by means of what we already know about the former. For example, to call a potential scandal a “Watergate” is to suggest volumes in a single word. Similarly, if we call an individual a Judas, a Benedict Arnold, or a Quisling, rather than giving his or her proper name, we can in one word convey an immense amount of information about how we at least feel toward that person.¹¹⁴

Thomasson then specifically applies this concept to Mormon's inserted list of values:

In Alma 11 we find a seeming digression from the topic of the text in the complex discussion of Nephite weights and units of measure and equivalents. Conspicuous, now, among the names of the units of value given is that of an *ezrom* (Alma 11:6, 12). It is a quantity of silver. Immediately after the discussion of money we find the person who is called *Zeezrom*. This appears to be a compound of the word *Ze*, which we can translate “This is an” as a prefix, and the word *ezrom*. *Zeezrom* is distinguished by having offered 10.5 *ezrom* of silver to Alma and Amulek if they would deny their testimonies . . . His name would translate “this is a unit of silver.” Besides linking him with his actions, the name links him into a typological complex with those who would sell their signs and tokens for money and to Judas's selling/betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver. If this is not metonymic naming I am anxious to learn what it might be. Lest the likelihood of *Zeezrom* being a metonym be underrated, I subsequently noted that the largest Nephite weights and units of measure, the *antion* of gold (Alma 11:19), appears in later chapters of the text of Alma, first in referring to a chief ruler of Ammonihah — one Antionah (a big man in status and self-esteem, Alma 12:20) — and later to the big-money town or pride-in-wealth city of Antionum (Alma 31:3),

114. Gordon C. Thomasson, “What's in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 10.

home of the *nouveau riche* bourgeois Zoramites (note they take upon themselves the name of an ex-servant, Zoram).¹¹⁵

Mormon inserts a list of values so that we modern readers might understand something of the value of the bribe, but also that we would have the context in which to understand the intended connotations of names that Mormon used in his text. Based on our modern understandings, in Thomasson's words: "we often take names far too lightly. As a result we miss much of what a truly polysemous text (having multiple meanings or significations) such as the Book of Mormon may communicate."¹¹⁶ Mormon at times used names for his own purposes, and the name he used for an individual may or may not have been the name by which contemporaries knew the person.¹¹⁷ This inserted list of values assists us in understanding their metonymic meaning.

The concept of metonymic naming provides a context in which we see the names for values turned into names of people or places. It is a literary technique Mormon used frequently, but which is absent in the small plates. The crucial difference is that the small plates were written by the authors who lived the events they record. There is no reason to believe that they did not use their own names, or that any other name listed was anything other than the actual name of that person.

When Mormon writes, it may be safest to assume that most names are listed for some reason related to the story he was telling. That is not to suggest that all names would be metonymic. Mormon would have used his own name. Naming his son Moroni for the great Captain Moroni suggests that both of those men bear their actual names.

Mormon understood and made a point of highlighting, the divisions in Zarahemla that resulted from the uneasy merging of two different peoples with different languages, religions, and by extension, politics. The resulting conflict was certainly behind the civil war that would have been discussed in greater detail in the lost chapter or chapters of Mosiah. During the reign of Mosiah₂, the people of Limhi and the people of Alma₁ returned to Zarahemla. Mormon notes: "And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies" (Mosiah 25:4).

It is quite certain that those two bodies of people were the descendants of Nephi and the descendants of Mulek. Tensions in Zarahemla always tended to divide along those lines. This is a division that Mormon subtly

115. Ibid., 15–16.

116. Ibid., 8.

117. See the discussion of the order of the Nehors in Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:41–43.

underscores using names. The Hebrew root of the name Mulek would have been *mlk*, with the meaning of “king.” As Mormon creates names, he uses names with a *mlk* root to designate that the bearer was part of the anti-Nephite and pro-king (meaning a Mulekite king) faction in Zarahemla.

In Alma 46 we are introduced to Amalickiah: “Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and a strong man; and his name was Amalickiah. And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power” (Alma 46:3–4). Amalickiah is based on the *mlk* root. Note that he is both “against their brethren,” and that he was “desirous to be king.”

More complicated is the interesting case of the Amlicites and Amalekites. Royal Skousen notes that Joseph likely pronounced Amlicites *Amlikites*. In fact, “the first two occurrences in [the printer’s manuscript] of *Amlicites* (in Alma 2:11–12) are spelled *Amlikites*.¹¹⁸ He then notes:

There is one additional Book of Mormon name, *Amalekite*, that could be included in the above list of names taking the form *am-l-k*. The printer’s manuscript (and every published edition) uses the term *Amalekite(s)* to refer to a group of religious apostates, 14 times in Alma 21–27 and 5 times in Alma 43. Yet the original manuscript and other evidence suggests that these Amalekites were not an otherwise unidentified group of religious dissidents, but were in fact Amlici’s own group, the Amlicites.¹¹⁹

J. Christopher Conkling accepts Skousen’s suggestion and notes that: “Chronologically, the Amlicites and Amalekites fit together perfectly; they never overlap.”¹²⁰ However, Benjamin McMurtry provides what I believe is a much more careful examination of the posited two different groups:

The first textual reference to either of these groups is the appearance of Amlici in Alma 2:1. The rise of Amlici was in the commencement of the fifth year of the reign of the judges. Amlici gains a following, and they call themselves Amlicites (Alma 2:11).

118. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Four: Alma 21–55*, 1605.

119. *Ibid.*, 1606.

120. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 111.

They do battle with the Nephite armies. Amlici is killed by the sword of Alma the Younger, and his followers are defeated and scattered. This all occurs in the fifth year of the judges.

The first textual reference to the Amalekites occurs in Alma 21:2: “Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem.” We must not fall into the trap of thinking that because this story appears nineteen chapters after the story of the Amlicites that it takes place at a later time. The text reveals that Alma 21 takes place “when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves in the borders of the land of the Lamanites” (Alma 21:1). This separation took place “in the first year of the judges” (Alma 17:6). The Amalekites very likely existed long before the first year, due to the fact that their city was already “great” when it was first discovered by Aaron in the first year of the judges. They continued to be a distinct people until the eighteenth year of the judges (Alma 43:4, 6).¹²¹

McMurtry’s solution is to posit the two as different peoples with similar names. I suggest that Mormon is using names for his own textual purposes rather than providing the names by which those people were known to others. Mormon gave apostate groups a generic designation of *Amlicite/Amalekite* with at least the implied meaning of apostate-of-Zarahemlaite-lineage.¹²²

Mormon does not use the name as a pejorative, but as a lineage/cultural designation. Names with that root can have a positive influence, providing that they accept Nephite religion and political dominance. Living among apostates in Ammonihah, there is a righteous descendant of Nephi (Alma 10:3): Amulek. I suggest that Mormon is indicating that regardless of heritage, he had been part of the apostate religion, but had been converted (see Alma 10:5–8).

121. Benjamin McMurtry, “The Amlicites and Amalekites: Are They the Same People?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 270–71.

122. Mark A. Wright noticed this possibility and convinced me that it is the most plausible solution to the problems Skousen, Conkling, and McMurtry are attempting to resolve. It is the reason that they come to opposite conclusions while examining the same data. It is probable that there were two different groups who left at different times. Both shared the characteristic of the Zarahemla/Mulekite heritage. For Mormon, that was all that needed to be highlighted. The actual names of those involved was not only superfluous but might have hidden the important connection that Mormon saw in them.

Mormon's use of *mlk*-root names for apostates should be read as a generic designation rather than as personal names. That use also suggests that when we see *king-men* in Mormon's text that we are seeing the English translation of a *mlk*-root word. We should see *king-men* as a political party with roots in the descendants of Mulek. The specific use of this designation is intended to create a direct antithetical parallel with the Nephite-supporters, the *freemen*.

And it came to pass that those who were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat were called *king-men*, for they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to *overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land*.

And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the *freemen* had sworn or covenanted to maintain their *rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government*. (Alma 51:5–6)¹²³

Parallel to the implications of divisiveness that was inherited from the *mlk*-ites, Mormon also weaves in a theme of the destructive inheritance of the Jaredites among the Nephite nation. Even without a genealogical connection, Mormon makes certain that he includes the information that the last Jaredite king, Coriantumr, comes to and lives with the people of Zarahemla. Then, the next time we see that name: “And they came down again that they might pitch battle against the Nephites. And they were led by a man whose name was Coriantumr; and he was a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites; and he was a large and a mighty man” (Helaman 1:15).

A different type of subtle manipulation of names might be present in the unusual string of fathers and sons with the same names. The succession of Nephite dynasties, beginning with Alma₂, is quite complex. Continuation of the political line from father to son becomes rarer, and in 3 Nephi the government is completely dissolved, only to implicitly reappear in 4 Nephi. These dynastic/book changes are precisely the place where the most curious naming trend in the Book of Mormon occurs. At the end of the book of Mosiah, we have Alma₁. His son, Alma₂, begins the

123. On a related note, notice that the freemen weren't concerned with the nature of government or the person, but with the “rights and the privileges of their religion.” This is another confirmation to the close connection between religion and government, and why political differences were often expressed as religious differences, and vice versa.

book of Alma, but it ends with his son Helaman₁ keeping the records. The book of Helaman begins with Helaman₂ and ends with his son, Nephi₂. The book of 3 Nephi begins with Nephi₃ — as does the book of 4 Nephi.

From a cultural standpoint, the succession of same-named fathers and sons is an anomaly. Without the artificial addition of numbers to separate names, we have Amos the son of Amos, the son of Nephi the son of Nephi, the son of Helaman the son of Helaman, and the son of Alma the son of Alma. In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for a grandparent/grandchild to share a name, but it was very rare for a parent/child to have the same name. In a world without surnames and without the concept of the clarifying junior/senior, having a parent and child with the same name would lead to too much confusion. Yet we have that precise issue not once, but four times with four sets of same-named father/son pairs.

Joseph Spencer noticed an important pattern in these books and names:

[W]hile each book in Mormon's history recounts a particular succession, each break between books also marks a succession. At the same time, Mormon softens the impact of these breaks by having all cross-book successions be those in which the successor shares his name with his father...

That Mormon highlights dynastic continuity even at points of historical transition makes clear his interest in maintaining the essential progression of the trajectory of Christian preaching that underlies his history.¹²⁴

I suspect that I see the data he noticed in a slightly different light, but the recognition of the pattern is an important contribution. Combined with the understanding that Mormon uses names for textual purposes, this allows us to see a reason for the naming patterns that would otherwise be unattested in much of antiquity.

Mormon discussed the explicit division between church and state when Alma₁ was required to adjudicate a case of religious apostasy. This was a difficult problem, because it dealt with religious principles, but religion and politics had always been nearly synonymous in Nephite society. Thus, it is possible that Alma₁ was adjudicating a case of treason. He took the case to the Lord, who told him to forgive upon repentance, and if there were no repentance, to blot their names from church records. There was no indication that there was a political penalty. The creation of a *church*

124. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem: OR: Salt Press, 2012), 111.

had created a situation where there was the possibility of the separation of church and state, and this case confirmed the division (see Mosiah 26:5–36).

What Mormon is tracing then, is a dual system. On one line is the political succession and on the other the religious succession. Even as the political dynasties undergo turmoil, the fact that the same-named religious figures straddle the dynastic changes allows Mormon to suggest that there was a continuation of the religious line even as there was political turmoil.¹²⁵ Thus, these father/son names have an important function in the text that is unlikely to have occurred naturally by using those father's and son's given names.

The appearance of the name Nephi in this sequence may have served a particular textual function. Not only do we have Nephi₂ and Nephi₃, providing the continuity across differently named books, we have them at an important ending and beginning. The change in book names might imply a discontinuity in the ruling line, but 3 Nephi makes it clear that there was not only a discontinuity, but a dissolution. Nephi₃ lives during a time when the Nephite government ceased to exist and all who had been part of the larger government returned to the rule of their separate tribes. When we again have Nephites reforming, what better name to have represent the emergence of the new people than Nephi (Nephi₃).

A final interesting example of Mormon's manipulation of names comes from Mormon's inclusion of Alma₂'s final instructions to his three sons. Mormon took these instructions from Alma₂'s personal record, and therefore made a conscious decision to include them. They have little historical significance, and do not move Mormon's narrative along. Nevertheless, Mormon saw something important in them.

I suggest that at least a major reason for including them can be discerned from the names of the sons. I suggest that Mormon provided the names to fit with their stories and that the names we see were not those their parents gave them. Just as Zeezrom and Antionah referred to real people who probably were not known by those names, I believe that Mormon replaced the names of Alma₂'s sons with metonyms to reinforce a specific, intended lesson for his readers.

The oldest son, Helaman, bears a name previously given to one of king Benjamin's sons (Mosiah 1:2). It is, therefore, a good, strong Nephite name.

125. Ibid., 112: "This first trajectory of continuous Nephite preaching is, however, coupled with a second trajectory — that, namely, of the progressive political collapse of the Nephite state... For the moment, it is only necessary to recognize that the initiation of Nephite preaching cannot be separated from the beginning of the collapse of the centuries-Old Nephite state — just as the culmination of Nephite Christian anticipation cannot be disentangled from the culmination of Nephite political deterioration."

Helaman received the plates, and nothing in the instructions Alma gives him suggests that he was anything less than a faithful Nephite.

The next son is Shiblon. Shiblon has an ambiguous name. It is the name of a unit of measure (Alma 11:15), and therefore has a positive connotation. However, Shiblon was also the name of a Jaredite king (Ether 1:11–12). Shiblon is basically a good son, but in Alma’s final blessing, note how Alma suggests that Shiblon might be spiritually ambiguous:

And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.

Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom.

Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy — yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times. (Alma 38:10–14)

Right after the admonition to be diligent and temperate, Alma lists the things that might tempt Shiblon to not be diligent or temperate. Those things are descriptions of apostasy. Apparently, Shiblon was a good son, but with the possibility of being tempted into apostasy.

The third son bears the name *Corianton*. That name is not otherwise attested in the Book of Mormon, but it shares the basic form *Coriant-um*, a Jaredite king (Ether 1:13–14). Similarly, Coriantor was also a Jaredite king (Ether 1:6–7). Of course, there is also Coriantumr, who was the last Jaredite king as well as the name of a prominent Nephite dissenter (1:15).

As suggested by his name, Corianton is the son who did apostatize (for a time). Alma tells Corianton that one of the things he did wrong was: “thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom” (Alma 39:2). That doesn’t seem so bad, but it is also the very thing Alma warned Shiblon against (Alma 38:11). As the child with the most obviously Jaredite name, it is unsurprising that he was the one to cause the greatest problem and to become an actual apostate rather than only have the potential to become one, as is suggested for Shiblon.

The names of Alma's sons so directly correspond with the information we read about them that it would require an incredible coincidence to have those be the names their parents gave them.¹²⁶ Given that we see Mormon intentionally creating names in other places, and even including a description of weights and measures so that we might understand them, it is best to see these names for their metonymic function.

Fitting History into Types

As Mormon begins to relate Nephite history at the beginning of the reign of the judges, the very first story he selected to tell was of “a man brought before [Alma₂] to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength” (Alma 1:2). Mormon tells first of his apostate teachings, and then of the slaying of Gideon, which was the crime for which he appeared before Alma₂. Not until Mormon tells us that he was condemned to die does he tell us the name of the criminal: Nehor (Alma 1:15). This introduction is unusual not only for withholding the name, but also that his false teachings were emphasized even over the crime for which he was executed.

I believe that we can surmise that in the first year of the reign of the judges that there was such a large, strong, man brought before Alma₂. We may accept that he killed Gideon. It is the name that is interesting, and perhaps intentionally created for narrative effect.

Nehor is both a Jaredite land and city (Ether 7:4, 9). Mormon uses Jaredite names in the way that old Hollywood westerns used black hats. In Mormon's text, any person with a Jaredite name should be examined to see how they fit into Mormon's narrative. In the case of Nehor, it is a complicated relationship with a religion. Knowing that Nehor murdered Gideon tells us that he is a bad man. Having a religion associated with his name tells us that it is a bad religion, an apostate religion.¹²⁷

Mormon calls this apostate religion the order of Nehor, or order of the Nehors.¹²⁸ Mormon describes Ammonihah as a city whose people

126. The use of literary names rather than given names is a practice also seen in the Bible, where they typically function as wordplay. See Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2018), xlvi.

127. For an analysis of the nature of Nephite apostasy, see Mark A. Wright and Brant A. Gardner, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 25–55. The same article with an adapted introduction also appears in Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 257–74.

128. For “order of Nehor,” see Alma 24:9; “order and faith of Nehor” Alma 14:16; “order of the Nehors,” Alma 21:4, 24:28.

subscribed to the “profession of Nehor” (Alma 15:15). When Ammonihah was destroyed, it was called “Desolation of Nehors” (Alma 16:11).¹²⁹

The chronology of the order of the Nehors is even more convoluted when we find that the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a city named Jerusalem in which they “had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4). Benjamin McMurtry notes:

We must not fall into the trap of thinking that because this story appears nineteen chapters after the story of the Amlicites that it takes place at a later time. The text reveals that Alma 21 takes place “when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves in the borders of the land of the Lamanites” (Alma 21:1). This separation took place “in the first year of the judges” (Alma 17:6). The Amalekites very likely existed long before the first year, due to the fact that their city was already “great” when it was first discovered by Aaron in the first year of the judges. They continued to be a distinct people until the eighteenth year of the judges (Alma 43:4, 6).¹³⁰

Mormon is using the name of Nehor to describe religious practices that were well established prior to the time that Nehor is introduced into the narrative. Not only do we have Nehorite Amalekites before Nehor, but an analysis of the teachings associated with the order of Nehor shows that the court of king Noah followed the same basic religion.¹³¹

Mormon created a subtle theme which associated apostate religion with the remnants of the Jaredites. Mormon used the Jaredite name for both the condemned man and the religion so that his readers would clearly understand that neither the man nor the religion was to be admired.

Making History into Prophecy

When Mormon selected material from Alma₂'s personal record, he included not only information about Alma₂'s preaching, but also the accounts of the missionary work of the sons of Mosiah. Why did Mormon concern himself with this mission to the Lamanites? As a Nephite, and particularly a Nephite living at during the final days of the Nephite nation, his view of the Lamanites would have been as enemies. It was a Lamanite

129. I believe it likely that Mormon used Desolation of Nehors as an intentional parallel to the land of Desolation.

130. McMurtry, “The Amlicites and Amalekites: Are They the Same People?” 271.

131. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:41–51.

army that was pursuing his fleeing Nephites, and a Lamanite army that would destroy them at Cumorah.

Mormon's experience with the Lamanites stands in stark contrast to the converted Lamanites from the missionary labors described in the book of Alma. Why does Mormon include those stories? As with all of Mormon's editorial choices, suggesting that history required him to include the information is too simple. Mormon did not write because the history had occurred, but for what the history could teach to future readers. Mormon's purposes looked forward, not backward.

Mormon declared that purpose rather clearly in his final statement, which we have as Mormon chapter 7:

And now, behold, I would speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers; yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel; and these are the words which I speak:

Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel.

Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved.

Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you.

Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up.

And he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead, whereby man must be raised to stand before his judgment-seat.

And he hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end.

Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before

you, not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you.

For behold, this is written for the intent that ye may believe that; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them.

And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore ye are numbered among the people of the first covenant; and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, and are baptized, first with water, then with fire and with the Holy Ghost, following the example of our Savior, according to that which he hath commanded us, it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. Amen. (Mormon 7:1–10)

When Mormon closes his writing, he tells us why he wrote. He wrote to a specific people, those who remained after there were no more Nephites (Mormon 7:1). He wrote to the Lamanites. What did he hope for them? That they would repent and believe in Christ (Mormon 7:5). He very clearly says, in verse 9, that “this is written for the intent that ye may believe that” (“that” being the Bible’s testament of Christ). That is his reason for writing.

If his reason for writing looked forward to repentant and converted Lamanites, then it is clear that he included the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah to demonstrate that it was possible that the gospel could touch Lamanite hearts, and not only convert them, but make a righteous people of them. He promised as much when he wrote: “All these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, a righteous people, insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith” (Helaman 6:1).

The past evidence of the true conversion of the Lamanites was intended to foreshadow the future conversion of the Lamanites, to whom Mormon wrote and to whom his hopes extended. In spite of witnessing the Nephite demise, Mormon’s message is optimistic for the future.

Mormon’s Explanation for the Nephite Demise

It is inconceivable that Mormon could witness the end of the Nephites and not have those events influence his worldview and his message. How many times did Mormon ask himself how a people with such promise

could come to such an end? Along with his testimony of the Savior, Mormon wrote to provide his answer to that question.

For Mormon, it was impossible to understand the end without understanding the beginning. Hence, he began with the story of Lehi and his family leaving Jerusalem and coming to the New World. After that beginning, he used history as the natural framework for his story. Although we do not have Mormon's version of early Nephite history, we can be certain of some things that were included. One that he surely emphasized was the Nephite foundational promise. Nephi recorded that his father said:

Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever. (2 Nephi 1:9)

When we finally see that promise in Mormon's writings, it is as a reference and not new information. In the story of Alma and Amulek at Ammonihah, Mormon quotes Alma saying: "Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 9:13). Alma clarifies what he means by being cut off from the presence of the Lord:

But behold, I say unto you that if ye persist in your wickedness that your days shall not be prolonged in the land, for the Lamanites shall be sent upon you; and if ye repent not they shall come in a time when you know not, and ye shall be visited with utter destruction; and it shall be according to the fierce anger of the Lord.

For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people. I say unto you, Nay; he would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God; (Alma 9:18–19)

One reason Mormon includes the story of Alma and Amulek at Ammonihah is to stand as historical confirmation of the fulfillment of the negative side of the Nephite foundational promise. While peace and prosperity were promised, they were conditional upon following God's teachings. The negative aspect of the foundational promise was that failure to follow God's teachings would result in destruction. Therefore, when Mormon tells of the destruction of Ammonihah not once, but twice — once from the Lamanite perspective and once from the Nephite perspective — we can be certain that there was a larger purpose than merely relaying history, for Mormon didn't need to tell that tale twice. He was directing our attention to the importance of this event.

If repetition signals something to which Mormon wanted his readers to pay attention, then the story of the plates of Ether was particularly important. Mormon recounts the basic story three different times. The first recounting is when Ammon meets Limhi, and Limhi brings records to Ammon "which contained the record of his people from the time that they left the land of Zarahemla" (Mosiah 8:5); he also "brought twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings." (Mosiah 8:9). At that time, Limhi asks if Ammon knows someone who might translate (Mosiah 8:12).

The second story is found in Mosiah 21 where Mormon tells how those twenty-four plates were obtained (Mosiah 21:25–27). That recounting also indicates that "Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Mosiah had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings" (Mosiah 21:28).

Finally, we get the plates of Ether again when Mosiah translates them with the "two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow" (Mosiah 28:12–13). Mormon could have found a more compact way to tell this story: instead he told it three times in three different settings. The record of Ether is at the heart of Mormon's sub-theme, explaining how and why the Nephites would be destroyed. It is interesting that as important as the theme was, it was sufficient to reference it rather than retell it. Mormon intentionally uses only the moral of their story without the elaboration of their story. That task he promises (Mosiah 28:19), but perhaps understood all along that he would leave it to Moroni.

The development of historical Christianity included the elaboration of the role of Satan to the point where all wrongness might be attributed to Satan. Mormon does not blame Nephite woes on Satan; he blames the Jaredites.¹³² They were his model from history of how a nation might be

132. Mormon does use Satan as a means of the reappearance of the Gadianton robbers after they had been removed from the land.

utterly destroyed. More than that, Mormon creates the case that their history actively affected the Nephites. Mormon carefully links the Jaredite secret combinations to destruction, then links both Jaredites and the destruction of governments to the secret combination he calls the Gadianton robbers.

This thread that will run through Mormon's account begins with the translation of the plates of Ether. Note how Mormon describes the translated record that Mosiah read to his people: "Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower" (Mosiah 28:17). Mormon copies this text to make explicit the important lesson of those twenty-four plates. They were "an account of the people who were destroyed."

As Mormon elaborated his text, these descriptions are associated with the Gadianton robbers. In Mormon's turning of history into story, the Gadianton robbers personified the Jaredite secret combinations. The ties between the Jaredites are reinforced by similar language, such as *murders*, *robblings*, and *plunderings*, but most importantly by linking both the Gadiantons and the Jaredites to the same geography. The Nephites' ancestral enemies, the Lamanites, always entered Nephite lands from the south. Mormon links the Gadiantons with the land northward — the Jaredite homeland. This was a conceptual homeland. Although Mormon describes *the north* that will be the ultimate source of the Nephites' demise, we should not expect that he was dealing with actual, historical geography. That both the Gadiantons and Jaredites came from the lands northward was the connection. Our modern interests in locating Book of Mormon peoples on a map were not Mormon's concerns, and we should not assume that the historical geography of the Jaredites was the equivalent of the lands northward that Mormon describes. His interest was not in accurate geography, but rather in symbolic geography.

While copying material from Alma₂'s personal record, Mormon came to Alma 22:27: "And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land."

Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction.

Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit— (Helaman 6:25–26)

He stopped copying and inserted his own information. He marked his return to Alma's record by repeating this information in Alma 22:35: "And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren." There is a chapter break, and then: "Behold, now it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation among all his people" (Alma 23:1). Mormon both declared that he was returning to the original text and used the repetition of the departure point as he reengaged the copied text.

In between the repeated information, Mormon provides a geography lesson. Part of the intent was to help his readers understand the physical extent covered when the proclamation was sent among all the Lamanite king's lands. However, Mormon also provides an essential definition. He wrote: "the land which they called Bountiful . . . bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla" (Alma 22:29–30). The land Desolation is directly tied not only to the Jaredites but specifically to the *destroyed* Jaredites.

Mormon's inserted explanation was triggered by the need to explain Lamanite lands, but it expanded to a general description of the lands pertinent to the Nephites. For Mormon, that included a description of the place, and the association, of the northern lands. I consider it probable that Mormon created the name *Desolation* for the land northward, specifically for use in his story. It is a word he used before in a parallel context. In Alma 16, a chapter Mormon wrote using the large plates rather than Alma₂'s personal record, Mormon says: "And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate" (Alma 16:11). Mormon used his authorial license to rename Ammonihah to the more symbolic "Desolation of Nehors." Mormon clearly intends that his readers see Desolation — whether Ammonihah or the land northward — as the land of a destroyed people.¹³³

During the great war discussed at the end of the book of Alma, Mormon tells of a people led by a man named Morianton. Mormon reports that what they intended to do was very dangerous, and so he

133. Mormon's use of the destroyed lands and peoples is a reference to the negative version of the promise of the land. They would be preserved upon righteousness but destroyed upon unrighteousness. These people were destroyed, hence that, in itself, demonstrates that they were not righteous.

reports that they were stopped. Without telling us why, Mormon writes: “Therefore, Morianton put it into their hearts that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water, and take possession of the land which was northward. And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (*which would have been a cause to have been lamented*)” (Alma 50:29–30).

Mormon gives his readers no hint about why this journey north would have been much lamented. However, he drops a geographic hint that he will later elaborate. He says that northward there was a land “which was covered with large bodies of water.” We see that phrase in another passage where Mormon reports Nephites heading to northward lands.

The departure phrase comes in Helaman 3:3: “*And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention and many dissensions; in the which there were an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land.*”

The return is declared explicitly and also repeats the information from that marked the departure point for the insertion:

And now I return again to mine account; therefore, what I have spoken had passed after there had been great contentions, and disturbances, and wars, and dissensions, among the people of Nephi.

The forty and sixth year of the reign of the judges ended;

And it came to pass that there was still great contention in the land, yea, even in the forty and seventh year, and also in the forty and eighth year. (Helaman 3:17–19)

In between, Mormon inserted specific descriptions of both the geographic and ecological features of the land northward. It was a land of many waters, and it was a land so devoid of trees that buildings were made of cement.

Significantly, Mormon also says of the land northward:

And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them.

But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building of temples, and of

synagogues and their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.

But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites.

And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites. (Helaman 3:13–16)

When Mormon speaks of “this people,” we might think that he is referring to the Nephites under the reign of Helaman. I suggest that “this people” refers specifically to those who have gone north. Mormon notes that there is much that could be said about them and that there were histories kept. Those texts speak of “their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations.” Those are themes he associates with the north and with the Gadianton robbers.

Mormon noted that many of the people of Ammon had gone north. They were known as a particularly righteous people, and he has them at least symbolically carry the ability to record history to the north. However, Mormon then describes what happened to the Nephites in the north: “they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites” (Helaman 3:16).

Later in the book of Helaman, Mormon reports on efforts to preach the gospel in the land northward:

Behold, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward.

For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward, and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them;

And they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity. (Helaman 7:1–3)

The dangerous nature of the lands northward is reiterated in 3 Nephi:

And the land which was appointed was the land of Zarahemla, and the land which was between the land Zarahemla and the land Bountiful, yea, to the line which was between the land Bountiful and the land Desolation.

And there were a great many thousand people who were called Nephites, who did gather themselves together in this land. Now Lachoneus did cause that they should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the great curse which was upon the land northward. (3 Nephi 3:23–24)

Although little Nephite history involved the lands northward, Mormon nevertheless made sure to emphasize them. When he did, it was their dangerous aspects that were emphasized. Not only does he generally see the lands northward as cursed, but they bring the curse of the destruction of civilizations with them. Attempts to preach the word of God fail in the north. Even when good people go north, they are not heard from again (such as the people of Hagoth), or they are described as having become as corrupt as the others in that dangerous land.

Regardless of the actual history behind what Mormon wrote, he wrote so that his readers would understand that he saw danger in the land northward. He also specifically provided geographic clues so that his assumed readers — those he believed would have had some of his own cultural understanding — would be able to identify the particular north-people who would become Mormon's Gadianton robbers at the end of Nephite history. They were a people from the north bringing with them the destruction of society.¹³⁴ In Mormon's mind, it was no coincidence that the Nephite nation met its end after it had been forced into the land northward. Mormon understood the symbolism when he equated the hill Ramah, around which the Jaredites gathered to meet their final destruction, and Cumorah, which fulfilled that very same function for the Nephites.

Lest we miss Mormon's message, he made it clear:

134. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History*, 325–42.

And behold, in the end of this book ye shall see that *this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi.*

Behold I do not mean the end of the book of Helaman, but I mean the end of the book of Nephi, from which I have taken all the account which I have written. (Helaman 2:13–14).

