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**Title** Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites

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**Abstract** In Alma 21 a new group of troublemakers is introduced—the Amalekites—without explanation or introduction. This article offers arguments that this is the same group called Amlicites elsewhere and that the confusion is caused by Oliver Cowdery's inconsistency in spelling. If this theory is accurate, then Alma structured his narrative record more tightly and carefully than previously realized. The concept also challenges the simplicity of the good Nephite/bad Lamanite rubric so often used to describe the players in the book of Mormon.





# Alma's Enemies

The Case of  
the Lamanites,  
Amlicites, and  
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Amalekites

J. Christopher Conkling

**M**OST READERS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON RECOGNIZE THAT THE LAMANITES WERE THE PERENNIAL ENEMIES OF THE NEPHITES.<sup>1</sup> SHORTLY AFTER LEHI'S COLONY ARRIVED IN THE NEW WORLD, THE LORD MADE CLEAR THAT THE LAMANITES WOULD BE A "SCOURGE" UNTO NEPHI'S SEED "TO STIR THEM UP IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME" (2 NEPHI 5:25; COMPARE 1 NEPHI 2:24). MUCH OF WHAT FOLLOWS IN THE RECORD DESCRIBES SEEMINGLY INCESSANT LAMANITE-NEPHITE TENSIONS THAT END ONLY WITH THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF NEPHITE CIVILIZATION. THE LAMANITES WERE A THREAT THAT NEVER WENT AWAY.

Recent textual studies, however, indicate that the matter of the Nephites' enemies may not be as black and white as that. This is certainly true during the public career of Alma the Younger (circa 91–73 BC), when the Nephite missionaries to the Lamanites came into contact with the mysterious Amalekites (see Alma 21–43). As we will see, these Amalekites were in fact the same group as the Amlicites, whom Alma encountered earlier in his career (see Alma 2–3). This observation is based on evidence in the text of two kinds: spelling variations in the original handwritten manuscripts of Oliver Cowdery and hints in the traditional text that many readers have not noticed. These findings shed new light on the structure of Alma's writings and lead us to the more crucial question, Is reading the text in terms of generally good Nephites versus usually bad Lamanites too simplistic for what the record actually says?

This study is a corrective to traditional Book of Mormon scholarship. For example, George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, in their *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, hold that “the Amalekites were a sect of Nephite apostates whose origin is not given.”<sup>2</sup> The more recent *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* shares this point of view in the article on Amalekites: “The Book of Mormon does not supply any information concerning the origin of this group.”<sup>3</sup> Hopefully we can now clear up the mystery of the Amalekites' origin.

## Internal Evidence

Years ago some students of the Book of Mormon noticed curious happenings in the book of Alma. The book begins with Nehor and quickly moves to a major Nephite threat tied to Nehor, the apostate Amlici. Amlici's followers, the Amlicites, attempt to take over the government and to seize an election but are defeated in major battles and seemingly wiped out (see Alma 1–2). Still, Alma spends the entire next chapter (Alma 3) telling about the threat and mark of the Amlicites, after their disappearance. This seems to be a lot of detail about a past threat. From a structural point of view, Alma 3 reads more like a warning and an introduction to a problem than a comment about a problem no longer present.

Some 18 chapters later, the missionary Aaron runs into another group of troublemakers, called Amalekites, who are allied with the Amulonites

and helping to harden the Lamanites (see Alma 21:2–4). This new group is introduced among two other groups we already know well, the name thrown in almost casually as if the reader were fully aware of who they are: “Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem. Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations” (Alma 21:2–3). Upon reading that passage for the first time, most people are probably unaware that they have met yet another new group, one with no given origin.

In comparing the Amlicites with the Amalekites, we find that Amlici and the Amlicites are mentioned 43 times between Alma 2:1 and 3:20 and never mentioned again. The Amalekites are mentioned 19 times between Alma 21:2 and 43:44, often in connection with the Nephite-dissenting descendants of Noah's priest Amulon or with the Nephite dissenters called Zoramites. The Amlicites had theology, political organization, aristocracy, armies, Lamanite alliances, military organization, ties to Nehor, and distinctive, self-imposed skin markings (see Alma 1:4–6; 2:1–2, 5–6, 9, 12, 14, 24; 3:4–6), just as the Amalekites had theology, cities, sanctuaries, synagogues, and ties to the Lamanites, the Amulonites, the Zoramites, and “the Nehors” (see Alma 21:2, 4, 6; 43:6). Aaron, son of Mosiah, contended with an Amalekite in one of the Amalekites' synagogues (see Alma 21:5–11) and later had a discussion with King Lamoni's father about their beliefs (see Alma 22:7–18).<sup>4</sup> When asked if he believed in God, the Lamanite king began his answer by commenting on the Amalekites' belief and worship sanctuaries (see Alma 22:7). Both groups were apparently influential enough to warrant such detail.

At first reading, this casual introduction of a new group called Amalekites (see Alma 21:2) might not have bothered us since the Book of Mormon often takes a shotgun approach to its abbreviated historical record, where names are noted without introduction, including the crucial name *Mormon* itself (see Mosiah 18:4). However, unlike the case with the names of individuals, we cannot find another instance in this abridged record where a



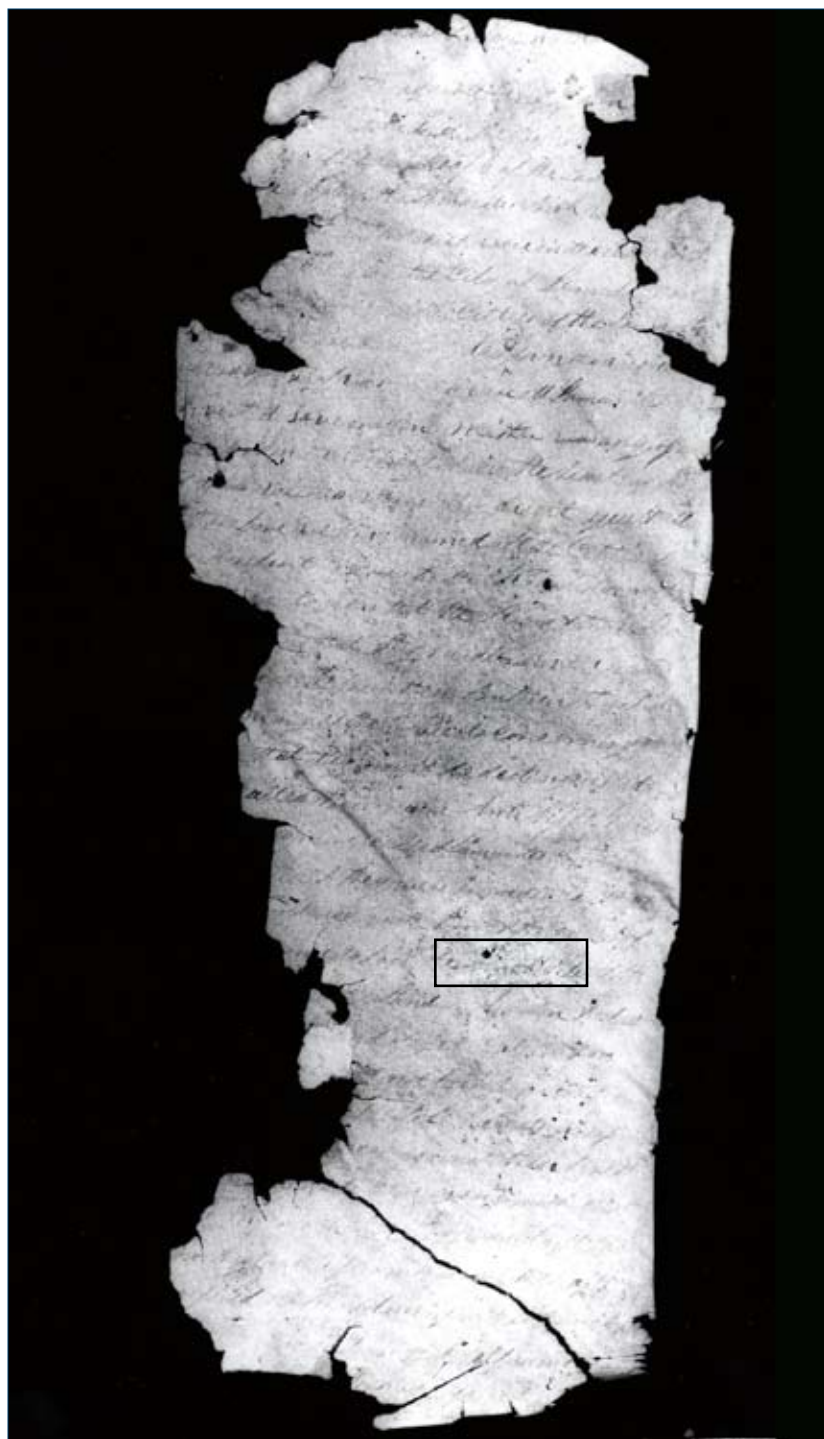
group is introduced without explanation or introduction—the Amalekites are the only exception.<sup>5</sup> While there are two Amalekis in the record (see Omni 1:12–30; Mosiah 7:6), neither one has any known connection with this group. If there were an Amaleki who founded this group, the record is silent about him.<sup>6</sup>

Chronologically, the Amlicites and Amalekites fit together perfectly; they never overlap. Alma tells of his problems with a large group of obstinate Nephite dissenters called Amlicites, who are after the order of Nehor and allied with the Lamanites. Aaron and Ammon, who were in the Lamanite lands during the same time period, tell of their problems with another formidable Lamanite ally after the order of Nehor, a people whose name—*Amalekites*—is spelled much like the name *Amlicites*. They both pursue the same kinds of goals at the same time and cause the same problems. Both groups are specifically *not* pure-blooded Lamanites (see Alma 2:1–11; 24:28–29). One group is introduced as if it will have ongoing importance. The other is first mentioned as if its identity has already been established. To be sure, the text reads more clearly if these groups are one and the same. John L. Sorenson recognized this strong similarity some years ago and speculated that “it is possible that they [Amalekites] constituted the Amlicite remnant, . . . their new name possibly arising by ‘lamanitization’ of the original.”<sup>7</sup>

### Textual Evidence

This new description of the Amlicites and Amalekites as identical groups gained further credibility when Royal Skousen, editor of the long-term Book of Mormon critical text project, presented early textual support for the same conclusion. In 2002 he explained that the apostate groups in the book of Alma currently spelled *Amlicites* and *Amalekites* are most likely the same group of dissenters, founded by Amlici, and that the names should be spelled identically.<sup>8</sup> Skousen noticed that these types of errors in the original and printer’s manuscripts were due to inconsistencies in Oliver Cowdery’s spelling style.

Skousen’s careful analysis of the original, dictated manuscript shows how such errors might have crept in. Often when a name was first introduced, Joseph Smith would apparently pause to spell it out.



Fragment from the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon including Alma 24:1, which contains the variant spelling *Amelicites* (highlighted), suggesting how the spelling *Amalekites* was later introduced into the printer’s manuscript and how the Amlicites and Amalekites came to be mistakenly viewed as two different groups. The second instance of the word on this page falls within a lacuna and thus is not extant. Black-and-white ultraviolet photograph courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

year to be a very industrious people yea & they were friendly with the  
 ites therefore they did open a correspondence with them to the Cause of God  
 did no more follow them & it came to pass that the Amalekites & the Amulon-  
 ites & the Lamanites <sup>who</sup> were in the land of Amulon & also in the land  
 of Helam & <sup>who</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> in the land of Jerusalem & in fine in all the land  
 round about <sup>who</sup> had not been converted & had not taken upon them  
 the name of Antiochus Lehi were stirred up by the Amalekites & the  
 Amulonites to anger against their brethren & their hatred became exceedingly  
 sore against them even inasmuch that they began to rebel against their  
 King inasmuch that they would not that he should be their King therefore

Section of the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon at Alma 24:1, where the spelling *Amalekites* appears twice (highlighted). Photograph courtesy of the Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

tion for many year they gathered together their armies in the land of  
 it came to pass that the Amulonites came with their thousands & they  
 into the land of Amulon which was the land of the Amalekites & they  
 in the name of Jerabemnah which was their leader & now as the Amalekites were of a more  
 sked & a murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in proof thereof therefore  
 Jerabemnah appointed Chief Captains over the Amulonites & they were all the Amalek-  
 ites & the Amulonites, now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards  
 the Lehitites that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his  
 designs for behold his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the  
 ites & this he did that he might <sup>usurp</sup> great power over them, also that he might

Fragment from the original manuscript at Alma 43:6, containing the variant spellings *Amaleckites* and *Amelekites*. Black-and-white ultraviolet photograph courtesy of the Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

made preparations for war, yea they gathered together their armies in the land  
 of Jerusalem, it came to pass that the Amulonites came with their thousands, & they  
 came into the land of Amulon, which was the land of the Amulonites, & now as the  
 name of Jerabemnah was their leader, & now as the Amalekites were of a more  
 sked & a murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in proof thereof therefore  
 Jerabemnah appointed Chief Captains over the Amulonites & they were all the Amalek-  
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 ites & this he did that he might <sup>usurp</sup> great power over them, also that he might

Section of the printer's manuscript at Alma 43:6, where, contrary to the spellings in the corresponding passage in the original manuscript (above), the spelling *Amalekites* appears twice (highlighted). Photograph courtesy of the Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.



Thus we find words crossed out in the original manuscript with corrected spellings above. Joseph apparently did not respell the name when spoken later, for we find Cowdery spelling certain names in many different ways, despite their original correction. After Cowdery prepared the manuscript, the printer presumably was told to refer to the original spelling of names for all subsequent instances of names. In the case of *Amlicites/Amalekites*, there was no mention of either group by name between Alma 3:20 and 21:2. Thus when the printer came across the name again in what is now Alma 21:2, he likely supposed this was a new group and, rather than referring back to the spelling in what is now Alma 3:20, simply followed the printer's manuscript. The *Amalekite* spelling may have seemed logical because there were biblical Amalekites (see Numbers 13:29) and there were earlier men in the Book of Mormon named Amaleki (see Omni 1:12; Mosiah 7:6).<sup>9</sup>

Skousen notes that the handwritten spelling in Alma 24:1 in the original manuscript supports the view of a confused spelling of the names. It does not show *Amalekites* as in the current edition but *Amelicites*, which is not quite *Amlicites* but closer than *Amalekites*. The spelling of the original manuscript in Alma 24:28<sup>10</sup> is *Amelicites*, and only part of the word—*Amelic[...]*—is visible in Alma 27:2. The spelling of the two occurrences in Alma 43:6 is *Amaleckites* and *Amelekites*—different spellings in the same verse. In verses 43:13 and 43:20 we read in partially faded letters *Amalickites* and *Amelickites*. In Alma 43:44 the spelling is *Amalekites*.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that the spelling was rather loose and that many of the common letters, especially the *c* and the *k*, were interchanged freely. The fact that the words currently spelled *Amalekites* were often spelled with a *c* alone or with a *ck* adds additional support to the internal evidence previously noted. Using the earliest records we have (Cowdery's handwritten manuscripts), there is little support that the *Amlicites* and *Amalekites* were two separate groups.

### What Difference Does It Make?

If this theory that the *Amlicites* and the *Amalekites* are the same group is accurate, then Alma structured his narrative record more tightly and carefully than we may have previously realized. What once was seen as two introductory chapters (Alma 2–3) devoted to a problem soon to disappear

can now be seen as introducing the major threat and problem that Alma had to deal with the rest of his life. While theoretically he could have begun his record with the travels of Mosiah's sons, he apparently felt the need to introduce the major conflict faced by both missionaries sent to the Nephites (Alma and companions) and those sent to the Lamanites (Ammon, Aaron, and companions) before the record could adequately explain the trials of any group. Perhaps there is a similarity here to how Mormon (or Helaman) paused to tell us to carefully pay attention to Gadianton when his group was first introduced (see Helaman 2:13–14). In a similar vein, Alma (or Mormon) provided much detail about the *Amlicites* in chapter 3 because the *Amlicites* would return to afflict Alma and the Nephites throughout the rest of Alma's life.

The record of Alma's ministry (Alma 1:1–45:19) begins and ends in the same place, embroiled in problems resulting from the apostasy of Nehor and the *Amlicites*. Both his earliest battle and his final battle 18 years later end with the same story: the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers being thrown into the River Sidon, which carried them to “the depths of the sea” (Alma 3:3; 44:22). Thus Alma's record carefully shows how dissension, which was dealt with by preaching the word, can lead to apostasy and then to treason, which was dealt with by legal action and war.<sup>12</sup>

The great battles during Alma's reign were against Lamanite armies allied with or led by Nephite apostates such as the *Amlicites* (*Amalekites*), half-Nephite *Amulonites* (see Alma 21:2–25:9), or *Zoramites* (see Alma 30:59–43:44). Alma 43:6 states, “As the *Amalekites* [*Amlicites*] were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, [the dissenter] Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all *Amalekites* [*Amlicites*] and *Zoramites*.” Alma 43:44 adds, “They were inspired [to war] by the *Zoramites* and the *Amalekites* [*Amlicites*] who were their chief captains and leaders.” And Alma 43:13 ties all these groups together in the final battles before Alma's departure: “Thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were *Amalekites*



[Amlicites] and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah [Amulonites].”

Further, when we read of the atrocities encountered by the missionary sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites—including the slaughter of the 1,005 Anti-Nephi-Lehies (see Alma 24:21–22)—perhaps we will be more likely to notice that Alma’s mention of the true villains is in line with the book’s structure: “The greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites [Amlicites] and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.” And among the converts to the truth “were none who were Amalekites [Amlicites] or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel” (Alma 24:28–29).

This new reading helps shed light on another previously perplexing question. Traditionally it has not been possible to tie the 14-year mission of King Mosiah’s sons (see Alma 17–26) very tightly with Alma’s 14-year ministry (see Alma 1–16).<sup>13</sup> The only concrete touchstone between the two was the Lamanites’ marching to destroy Ammonihah in the 11th year of the judges as told by Alma (see Alma 16:2–9) and its twin narrative in Alma 25:2–3. Yet there is nothing about the large movements of Lamanite armies in the fifth year as told in Alma 2:24 and 27, which included a Lamanite king (see Alma 2:32–33). The Amlicites were obviously allied with Lamanites (see Alma 2:24), and Ammon and Aaron had been dealing with Lamanite kings no less, but the account of the sons of Mosiah mentions nothing of this threatening alliance of Amlicites. Now, however, we see that these major events of Alma 2 are also referred to by Ammon and Aaron, at least in terms of the Amlicite political influence (see Alma 21:2–5, 16; 22:7). Ammon and Aaron refer to the same problems of Amlicite political influence with the Lamanites in the same time period that Alma faced them (see Alma 24:28–29).

One question remains. Alma 21:1–4 mentions that the first place Aaron went as a missionary was to the partly Amalekite [Amlicite] city of Jerusalem. How could the Amlicites have helped build a great Lamanite city in the first year of the reign of the judges if Nehor didn’t become active before that first year and the Amlicites did not originate until the fifth year? (see Alma 2:1). There are two answers: (1) the record tells of many activities of the mis-

sionaries before Aaron reached Jerusalem and never says that he arrived there in the very first year (see Alma 17:6–18)—perhaps it was the second, third, or fourth year, or later (only a very few incidents are recorded from a mission lasting 14 years); (2) the problems with both Nehor and Amlici must have come to a climax in the years recorded in Alma 1–2, but they had apparently been going on for several years before (see Alma 1:16–23). It is highly unlikely that Amlici could rise to prominence with almost half the population’s support, undertake a lively national election, receive an illegitimate coronation, raise a huge army, move major parts of the Nephite population, form alliances with the Lamanites, and manage three major battles all in one year (see Alma 2:2–3:25). Even modern dictators with advanced transportation and mass communications have not accomplished all that in a single year. Alma tells us specifically that much of it did indeed happen in a single year—at least “all these wars and contentions” (Alma 3:25). But the slow building up of a power base and the forging of foreign alliances may have been going on for years before.<sup>14</sup> This is how real people and movements in history work.

Another example from secular history makes this point: modern disruptive groups such as Communists and Nazis have a tendency to continue to linger, regroup, transform themselves, or reappear in various forms. So too in the Book of Mormon. Just when we think we have heard the last of the Amlicites in Alma 2:36–38 or of the Amulonites in Alma 25:4–9, we find out they are still around in Alma 21:2 and 43:13. Again, as regards the historicity of the Book of Mormon, this is how real history often seems to work.

Further, if we read these scriptures in the way Brigham Young advised—“as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago, . . . as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them”<sup>15</sup>—we may recall that Alma too had experienced personal apostasy and redemption in his own youth. We might wonder, What was Alma’s first reaction to Nehor and Amlici, this new generation of apostates? Were they similar to the way he had once been? Could they have been old friends or allies, even disciples? The passage in Mosiah 27:32–28:1 tells of a little-known mission to the Nephites by Alma and Mosiah’s sons, seemingly between one and eight years in duration, indicating that Alma’s conversion was

likely less than a decade old. When we later read that Alma fought with Amlici in hand-to-hand battle (see Alma 2:31), we could wonder what his thoughts might have been. Alma had once been like Amlici (compare Mosiah 27:8, 19 with Alma 2:1–2), and had Alma remained that way, Amlici might have rebelled even more successfully—since there might not have been a righteous man like Alma to stop him. Both men began life on a similar path, and they continued on it until they made a crucial choice to continue or change. In killing Amlici, was Alma killing a version of his old self yet again? Even after killing Amlici, Alma faced Amlici’s dissenters until his last battle (see Alma 43:44).

### Ethnic and Tribal Issues

As we better comprehend whom Alma saw as the true enemies, we may decide to rethink the simplistic, tribal-based reading of the Book of Mormon—Lamanites as “bad guys,” Nephites as “good guys.” Although John Sorenson and a few other Book of Mormon scholars never use the term *race* to describe the differences between Nephites and Lamanites,<sup>16</sup> most readers of the Book of Mormon see an ethnic dimension in the book, however loosely we may define the somewhat imprecise terms *race* and *ethnicity*.<sup>17</sup> For example, both official

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and unofficial Latter-day Saint art and film show what seem to be different racial or ethnic characteristics in Book of Mormon peoples,<sup>18</sup> sometimes with moral connotations (see Enos 1:20).

There have always been group-based approaches to national or personal problems where blame was put on the outsiders, on “them.” Because of limited means of transportation, communication, and in-

formation exchange, all ancient societies in every culture were race or tribal based when compared to modern Western societies. Loyalty to one’s local group, race, or tribe was vital for reasons of survival. The book of Ruth and the parable of the good Samaritan, among numerous other biblical passages, oppose but tacitly acknowledge the racial thinking so prevalent in biblical culture. Even the “civilized” ancient Greeks actually thought themselves physically different “by nature” from other human races—as different as Greeks were from animals.<sup>19</sup> In fact, any ancient record not reflecting some of that racial or tribal bias would probably not qualify as an authentic ancient record. The so-called racial or ethnic dimension is typical of ancient documents in this aspect. What makes the Book of Mormon stand out is not how much blame is put on “them,” the Lamanites, but rather how little. This is surprisingly true even in the Book of Alma, the book with the longest treatment of wars and contentions with the Lamanites.

An understanding of this requires a close reading of the record, distinguishing at times between what is *said* and what is *shown*. For instance, when the story of Ammon and his companions is introduced, the Lamanites are called “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them. . . . They were a very indolent people, . . . and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers” (Alma 17:14–15). Later, the Lamanites are said to be “in the darkest abyss” (Alma 26:3). However, if we read the account of Ammon and Aaron’s 14-year mission among the Lamanites side by side with Alma’s mission among the Nephites, what the records *show* is that the Lamanites were almost as civilized, decent, receptive, and, yes, hostile, dishonest, murdering, and persecuting as Alma’s Nephites. They had highways, transportation, government, religious buildings, planned cities, various religious customs, government officials, soldiers, outlaws and renegades, and kings and subkings (or “chiefs”),<sup>20</sup> just as the Nephites had, and were not quite as uncivilized as the Nephites originally feared. If anything, their record shows that it was the Nephite apostate groups—Amlicites, Amulonites, and Zoramites—who were responsible for most of Alma’s problems with the Lamanites. As already noted in Alma 21:3, these apostate groups were “still harder” than the Lamanites.



In fact, Book of Mormon prophets rarely blamed their people's problems on outside aggressors, but rather on internal dissent and sinfulness. Indeed, after the original Laman and Lemuel, who understood the gospel well enough to be accountable for their own choices regarding it, there were only one or two other pure Lamanite individual villains named in the entire book.<sup>21</sup>

When we look at the truly vicious villains in the Book of Mormon, the record shows that after Laman and Lemuel they came almost exclusively from the Nephite groups: Sherem, Noah and his priest Amulon, Nehor, Amlici, the people of Ammonihah, Korihor, the Zoramites in the book of Alma, Amalickiah, Ammoron, Jacob, Pachus and the king-men, Morianton, Kishkumen, Paanchi, Gadianton, and probably Zerahemnah. Even when the record calls some of these lesser-known villains such as Tubaloth and Coriantumr "Lamanites" or even "bold Lamanites," we have already been told that their true parentage was Nephite or Mulekite.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, the Nephites did not consider the Lamanites to be peaceful neighbors, and these unrighteous Lamanites did send armies from time to time to attack the Nephites, but there is no mistaking that the record emphasizes that the majority of the time, it was the Nephite dissenters who were the true "hard hearts" who continually stirred up, recruited, and inspired the reluctant Lamanites to go into battle (see Alma 21:3; 23:13–15; 24; 27:2–3; 43:44; 47:1–6; 48:1–3; 52:1–4; 62:35–38; 63:14–15; Helaman 1:14–33; 4:4). Indeed, within two verses of the death of the dissenting Nephite Ammoron, the great Nephite-Lamanite wars were over (see Alma 62:36–38), and the peace was not broken for another eight years—when more Nephite dissenters stirred up Lamanite hearts (see Alma 63:14–16). The great Nephite-Lamanite wars of the book of Alma, according to the record, were wars where there were large Lamanite and Nephite allies on both sides of the conflicts. The verses in Alma 23:8–13 indicate how large the Lamanite pro-Nephite faction was.

To read the text this deeply, we could well consider the destruction of the city Ammonihah. As S. Kent Brown has noted, the incident contains different information from two different narrations, from the "northern" Nephite perspective and from inside the "southern" Lamanite milieu.<sup>23</sup> The traditional Nephite perspective shows only Lamanites as aggressors (see Alma 16:2–11). But the second nar-

ration points out that the Lamanites who attacked and destroyed Ammonihah were those Lamanites who were "more angry because they had slain their [own] brethren" (Alma 25:1), who, as is just seen three verses earlier, were primarily Amalekites (Amlicites) and Amulonites (see Alma 24:28–29). The city Ammonihah was itself a city so dedicated to "the profession of Nehor" (Alma 14:18; 15:15) that, after its annihilation, it became known as the Desolation of Nehors (Alma 16:11). In short, for reasons not quite clear, the Ammonihah incident features, ironically, the destruction of Nephite Nehorites by a large number of Nephite Nehorites. The battles following this attack were described from the "Nephite" point of view as battles with Lamanites (see Alma 16:2–12); however, the "Lamanite milieu" point of view explains that these battles nearly marked the end of the half-Nephite Amulonites (see Alma 25:4–13). Of the pure Lamanites who returned from these battles following the destruction of Ammonihah, many converted and joined the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and were then attacked yet again by the Amalekite (Amlicite)-inspired Lamanites (see Alma 27:2, 12). This led to Ammon's emigration with the pure Lamanites down to the Nephite lands for good (see Alma 27:11–26).<sup>24</sup>

Alma continually emphasized that individuals and groups raised with greater light are more accountable than those raised in cultures ignorant of or antagonistic toward gospel principles. Thus he often compared the pure-blooded Lamanites favorably against the dissenting Amlicites, Zoramites, and Amulonites: "We can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things" (Alma 24:30; see Alma 9:15–23; 46:8; 47:36; 50:21; 53:9).

We can even look at the overall structure of the Book of Mormon, in which we most often find an attention to personal choice rather than a group-based approach to "good" and "bad" peoples as the true source of sin and evil. To summarize broadly, the book begins by describing the initial Nephite-Lamanite conflict. From Alma on, the book describes a series of jagged, gradually ascending climaxes—conflicts with Nephites and allied Lamanites against hostile Nephite apostates and



*Alma the Younger Counseling His Son*, by Darrell Thomas. © 1981 Intellectual Reserve Inc.

their Lamanite allies. These conflicts become more pronounced until the book reaches its greatest height and its greatest fall. The apex is achieved in a Christ-centered community in 4 Nephi 1:2–23, a time when race or groups truly had become a non-issue: “Neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:17). The record does not indicate whether or not they all looked the same, but it does indicate that they all behaved the same and were treated the same. There is no denying that this is the highest ideal reached in the Book of Mormon. Its lowest point follows just a few pages later, beginning in Mormon 3:9–16, when the Nephites become so full of vengeance and hatred that they want to make the first attack into Lamanite lands aiming at complete annihilation, at which point General Mormon “utterly refuses” to lead his Nephites any longer (Mormon 3:11, 16). Things deteriorate rapidly from there to the absolute barbarity described by Mormon’s letter to his son Moroni in Moroni

9:3–10, telling us gruesome details about how both sides have sunk to almost unimaginable horrors of rape, torture, and cannibalism. The end is near. This is what the book’s structure demonstrates to be highest and lowest points of these societies.

We should also remember that in 4 Nephi 1:36–38, the terms *Nephite* and *Lamanite* are given religious and political but non-ethnic meanings thereafter, something that seems to have happened often, such as in Helaman 3:16 and elsewhere. We are told that the term *Nephite* was only a religious or political identification of those groups who initially believed in Christ, whereas *Lamanite* meant only those who rebelled against the gospel, regardless of ethnicity, although even then some questions remain.<sup>25</sup> In any case, Alma’s record seems carefully organized around who was considered the Nephites’ major problem—dissenting, apostatizing Nephites more than Lamanites.

### *Alma’s Message: Beware the Enemy Within*

Alma knew that his teaching that the sources of evil are often internal was not always easy to hear. Indeed, he ended his ministry by delivering the flip side of the oft-quoted “Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:30), with an equal but opposite “Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land” (Alma 45:16). Alma’s entire nation, if not repentant, would become extinct (see Alma 45:11, 14). This was a prophecy so horrific that he commanded Helaman not to repeat it at the time (see Alma 45:9). Then, after blessing his sons, the earth, and the church, Alma departed out of the land for good (see Alma 45:8, 15–18). This is a decidedly different tone than the more positive side of Alma so often emphasized—the impact and elegance of his words in Alma 5, 29, 32, and 36, for instance. While his testimony of the Savior is crucial, we should not overlook this other way that he organized his writings. By getting a clearer picture of how Alma began and ended his testament with the influence of Nehor and the Amlicite-led dissenters of Nephite origin, we gain deeper insight into Alma’s understanding of individual and societal evil. Alma places his greatest emphasis on internal evil. The battle is most often fought within ourselves. ❏



18. See James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
  19. Many thanks to S. Kent Brown for the insight that the fact the Zoramite leaders were able to “[find] out privily the minds of all the people” (Alma 35:5) without resorting to intimidation reinforces the argument that these people were a distinct clan. A familial relationship would encourage this kind of trust and accessibility to people whereas a mixed-clan community would not.
  20. Michael L. Schwalbe and Douglas Mason-Schrock, “Identity Work as Group Process,” in *Advances in Group Processes*, ed. Barry Markovsky, Michael J. Covaglia, Robin Simon, and Edward J. Lawler (New York: Jai Press, 1996), 122–23.
- of Agricultural Economics* 24/1 (Spring/Summer 2002): 44–58.
6. “Out of Sight, Out of Mind,” *The Economist*, 20 May 2000, 28.
  7. York W. Bradshaw and Michael Wallace, *Global Inequalities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996), 28.
  8. See James W. Lucas and Warner P. Woodworth, *Working Toward Zion: Principles of the United Order for the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1996), 3.
  9. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Handful of Meal and a Little Oil,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 31; see also H. David Burton, “More Holiness Give Me,” *Ensign*, November 2004, 98–100.

**The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11**  
Thomas A. Wayment

1. A text critic is one who considers the process by which an accepted text has been passed down through history. All known textual variants are considered in this process as well as historical influences that may have led to alterations in the text. Therefore, it is the work of the text critic to consider which text most accurately represents what the original author wrote or intended.
2. For example, the term *the law and the prophets* had become a technical term for the Old Testament in Jesus’s day (see Matthew 11:13; 22:40). The descriptive nature of the term adequately expresses the contents of the Old Testament while Mosiah’s reference seems to include only the first portion of the Old Testament.
3. Moroni does explicitly state that the Hebrew had also been altered by them; therefore what we call Hebrew may have been significantly different from what he referred to as Hebrew (see Mormon 9:33).
4. Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 141–42.
5. The superscription included by Mormon before the beginning of Alma 7 reads, “The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.” See *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part I*, ed. Royal Skousen (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 420.
6. Alma frequently uses introduc-

- tory formulas to introduce quotations from the brass plates and earlier Book of Mormon prophets; see Alma 9:13, 24; 11:37; 30:8; 33:3, 15, 19. In Alma 11:37 Amulek uses a very similar method to introduce a prophetic quotation from an angel by saying, “I cannot deny his word, and he hath said” (compare Alma 12:21).
7. Matthew 3:3, 4:14, and 12:17 each introduce an Isaiah quotation with an introductory formula. It is a common feature of the New Testament to introduce an Old Testament quotation using a formulaic introduction.
  8. The Book of Mormon contains one other translation of Isaiah 53:4, which is found in Mosiah 14:4. The Mosiah quotation follows the KJV’s English translation of Isaiah 53:4 much more closely than the quoted version in Alma 7:11.
  9. It is important to note that although *infirmities* and *pains* differ slightly different meanings, each noun is in the plural and not the singular.
  10. The lexical range, or established range of meaning, for these two terms can be better appreciated in Deuteronomy 7:15; 28:61 and Isaiah 38:9 for *hōlāyēnū*; and in Exodus 3:7 and Isaiah 53:3 for *mak’ōbēnū*.
  11. Matthew uses *astheneias*, which should be correctly rendered as a “weakness” of any sort, and *nosous*, which would be the natural term for disease.
  12. This is surprising given the Gospel of Matthew’s penchant for adhering to the Septuagint over the Hebrew Old Testament. Matthew does not follow the Septuagint in any substantive manner for this quotation. One suggestion is that he wanted to correct the more loosely worded Septuagint, which had translated these terms as “sins and pain.” See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 2:37–38. No significant textual variants to this passage would warrant the suggestion of divergent manuscript traditions for the Hebrew text and the text used by Matthew or Alma.
  13. The parallel between Matthew and Alma suggests that Isaiah 53 carried a messianic interpretation even before Christ’s mortal ministry. For Latter-day Saints, and Christians gener-

ally, Isaiah 53 is one of the most important Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, but hints from the Targum on Isaiah and the *Great Isaiah Scroll* of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that this passage was understood messianically before Christ came; see Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: Clark, 2003), 303–4. Although this evidence cannot prove a messianic understanding of Isaiah 53 during the early Christian period, it suggests that other Jews had understood this passage as referring to the ministry of the Messiah before his advent.

**Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites**  
J. Christopher Conkling

1. John L. Sorenson writes that the Nephites saw things this simply: “In a broad sense the Nephites’ rivals were called Lamanites, but that master rubric obscured differences that seem to have made little difference to the Nephites. At a strategic level, if Nephites wore white hats, they considered that any sort of Lamanite wore a black one” (“Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 bc,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges [Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000], 171). Of course, many otherwise astute readers of the Book of Mormon see the Nephite-Lamanite rivalry in the same simplistic terms as the Nephites apparently did, since their view of the Lamanites is reflected in the record. For example, Fawn M. Brodie wrote: “The Nephites, peace-loving and domestic, and the Lamanites, bloodthirsty and idolatrous. The two races fought intermittently for a thousand years” (see Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* [New York: Knopf, 1978], 44).
2. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 3:290.

**“No Poor Among Them”**

Lindon J. Robison

1. A study of a connection between commandment keeping and economic prosperity could deal with economic issues in each Book of Mormon era; I have chosen to deal with matters that span the entire record.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), 183.
3. In an earlier issue of this journal, I discussed how keeping the commandments to love God and one’s neighbors leads to increased specialization, trade, freedom of choice, and prosperity; see Lindon J. Robison, “Economic Insights from the Book of Mormon,” *JBMS* 1/1 (1992): 35–53.
4. Actually, Adam Smith was well aware of the importance of friendly relations. The first chapter in his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is titled “Of Sympathy” (London: A. Millar, 1759).
5. Colleagues and I found that the same requirement for friendly relations exists today. A survey of 1,500 farmland owners/operators in Michigan, Illinois, and Nebraska showed that less than 2 percent of the sales occurred between a seller who viewed the buyer as unfriendly. See Lindon J. Robison, Robert J. Meyer, and Marcelo E. Siles, “Social Capital and the Terms of Trade for Farmland,” *Review*

3. *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 44.
4. These Amalekites/Nehorites differ from other apostates such as Korihor in that they definitely believed in God (see Alma 1:4; 22:7), whereas Korihor did not (see Alma 30:37–38). This may help explain why Korihor was killed by the apostate Zoramites (see Alma 30:59), who were kindred spirits with the Amalekites (see Alma 43:4–6). Not all apostates in the book are the same. See John L. Clark, “Painting Out the Messiah: The Theologies of Dissidents,” *JBMS* 11 (2002): 18–27.
5. We are told explicitly how the Amlicites arose and who their leader was (see Alma 2:11), and the same is generally true for the Amulonites (see Mosiah 23:31–24:9), the Zoramites (see Alma 30:59–31:4), the Ammonihahites (see Alma 8:6–7; 16:9), the Amalickiahites (see Alma 46:3, 28), the people of Morianton (see Alma 50:28), the king-men (see Alma 51:5; the leader is not named), the Gadianton robbers (see Helaman 2:4; 6:18), and of course the Nephites, the Lamanites, the people of Zarahemla, and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies/Ammonites. Indeed, Alma or Mormon tells us exactly how and why groups in towns and villages got such names—“after the name of him who first possessed them” (Alma 8:7). The only exception is these mysterious Amalekites in Alma 21:2.
6. In the casual introduction, the Amalekites are introduced alongside the Amulonites and Lamanites, both groups whom we know well from their detailed introductions. Even the occasional allies of the Amalekites, the mysterious Zoramites, are given an introduction in Alma 30:59: “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 . . .” I use the word *mysterious* because this Zoram is unknown—neither the Zoram of 1 Nephi 4:35 nor the Zoram of Alma 16:5 seems a possible candidate.
7. John L. Sorenson, “Peoples of the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 194.
8. See Royal Skousen, “The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon,” in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*, ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 54. Skousen has also indicated (personal communication) that Lyle Fletcher first suggested this emendation to him in the early 1990s.
9. See Royal Skousen, “History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon,” in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, 15. The various ways that *Amlicite* and *Amalekite* were spelled by Cowdrey can be seen in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 245; and Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 396–97, 514.
10. Of course, there were no verses in the original manuscript. References in this paper to chapter and verse refer to current chapter and verse numbering.
11. Skousen, *Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 246, 254, 267, 358, 361, 366.
12. These ideas are from Orson Scott Card, “Dissent and Treason,” *Ensign*, September 1977, 53–58.
13. Sidney B. Sperry, for example, says “there are few or no data within these chapters [Alma 17–26] that enable us to point out specific dates” (see his *Book of Mormon Chronology* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970], 12).
14. Sorenson surmises about Amlici’s long history that “it would be a good bet that part of Amlici’s appeal to a sizable population was that he was a descendant of the old chief, Zarahemla. He might well have been a person of privilege who wanted kingly authority to augment power he already possessed. He certainly had a strong political base before he launched his move. . . . It is apparent that Amlici had made an arrangement with the Lamanites” (Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 195–96).
15. *Journal of Discourses*, comp. George D. Watt et al. (London: Latter-Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855–56), 7:333.
16. For example, Sorenson prefers such terms as *religious groups*, *lineage groups*, and *different peoples*. See his “Peoples of the Book of Mormon,” 194; and “Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites,” 171.
17. In some ethnic studies, certain secular scholars have questioned if race has scientific meaning at all, although most admit that the common person understands what race implies. Some scholars require 40 to 4,400 generations of separation to define a race (a minimum of 800 years at the rate of five generations per century). See Jay A. Sigler, ed., *International Handbook on Race and Race Relations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), xiii–xiv; and Michael Levin, *Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 19–20. To distinguish various groups, the Book of Mormon does not use the word *race*, nor does it mention separation into tribes until 3 Nephi 7:2–4, 12–14. Moreover, the book does not show even a different language arising during the almost 500-year separation of peoples between 2 Nephi 5:7 and the book of Alma (this was not the case with the Mulekites in Omni 1:17–18). Whether or not scholars determine that a group living separately for roughly 500 years could be technically considered a different race, tribe, or ethnic subgroup, there is no doubt that the Nephites saw different skin characteristics in the Lamanites from the start (see 2 Nephi 5:20–25; Jacob 3:3–9; Alma 3:6–7) that related to sin and righteousness (see Enos 1:20).
18. See the current *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd* film and numerous Latter-day Saint seminary films as examples.
19. See Walter Kaufmann, *Philosophic Classics: Thales to St. Thomas* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 1:582.
20. See Sorenson, “Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites,” 174; also S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 99–102, 104–13.
21. The closest we come to the purely evil Lamanite individual is King Laman in the book of Mosiah (see Mosiah 7:21–22; 9:10–12) and his son (see Mosiah 10:6, 11–20). Even here Zeniff’s first opinion was that “when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed” (Mosiah 9:1). Zeniff even relates that it was his “blood-thirsty” Nephites who planned the first aggression against the Lamanites in an effort to regain land abandoned less than a dozen years earlier (see Mosiah 9:1–6). Upon entering their city unmolested, Zeniff finds the king willing to move his own population to give the land to the Nephites, whom he left in peace for 12 years until a war broke out. Only then did Zeniff start to describe them negatively (see Mosiah 9:10–14). Compared to secular despots and warmongers, Laman does not initially come off so badly. What’s interesting about Mosiah 9:1–9 is that the original, positive description of the Lamanites changes so drastically to their being described as “lazy and idolatrous” and practicing “cunning and craftiness” (Mosiah 9:10, 12). If King Laman had been so cunning from the start in giving up choice lands for 12 years, he was indeed a long-term strategist, for that was probably a fourth to a third of the average life span in that era. Even here the Lamanite hatred of Nephites is attributed to the false traditions of their fathers (see Mosiah 10:11–18).
22. Ammoron, a “bold Lamanite,” was really a Nephite-Zoramite (Alma 54:23–24), and thus so were his brother Amalickiah (see Alma 52:3) and his (Ammoron’s) son who later became the Lamanite king Tubaloth (see Helaman 1:16); the Lamanite leader Jacob was a Zoramite (see Alma 52:20); Pachus and the king-men were Nephites from Zarahemla (see Alma 51:5–8; 62:6); Morianton and his people were Nephites (see Alma 50:25–36); Paanchi was a Nephite (see Helaman 1:3–7); Coriantumr was a “descendant of Zarahemla,” a Mulekite (see Helaman 1:15); and Kishkumen



and Gadianton were Nephites from Zarahemla (see Helaman 1:9–12; 2:4–14).

Zerahemnah is the only uncertain figure in the group. Five pieces of evidence make his Nephite (Zoramite and/or Mulekite) heritage likely: (1) in Alma 43:3–5 we are told that the Zoramites had become Lamanites and that the leader of the combined group was Zerahemnah; (2) Zerahemnah only chose Zoramites and Amalekites (Amlicites) as his captains; (3) Zerahemnah's first attack was through Zoramite lands as if he knew that area best (had been raised there?); (4) Alma 43:44 says that "their chief captains and leaders" were Zoramites and Amalekites and immediately calls Zerahemnah their "chief captain, or their chief leader"; (5) the similar-

ity of his name to Zarahemla may signify a Mulekite side to his family history. A possible reading (although not the only possibility) is that Alma or Mormon went into detail about the Zoramites becoming Lamanites in order to explain why the Lamanite leader would have been a Zoramite.

It would be dishonest to pretend that lineage plays no role in Book of Mormon thinking. If these villains were not pure-blooded Lamanites, they were also not pure-blooded Nephites (in terms of literal descendants of Nephi). They were often of mixed ancestry (Amulonites) or were from Zoramite and Zarahemla (Mulekite) ancestry. Sorenson points out that the major dissidents Nehor, Gadianton, and Kishkumen had Jaredite names (one pos-

sibly even "pre-Jaredite"). See Sorenson, "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites," 167–68, 194; and *Ancient American Setting*, 195–97. The point is not that there had never been Lamanite or Nephite reprobates in the thousand-year history, but that in the highly abridged version of the record, those names were not focused on or included as the villains of primary importance.

23. See S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 105–6, 112.

24. For me, such subtleties add evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. How or why would a young Joseph Smith think to describe the destruction of Ammonihah with such

slight but differently shaded descriptions? Yet it is just what we might expect from people who really lived in such a divided community. Why would Joseph describe the Lamanites with relative pleasantness in Mosiah 9:1–7 and switch, just a few sentences later, to the total negativity of Mosiah 9:10–10:18? It is just the sort of thing we might expect from a real Zeniff writing a few verses before and then in the midst of a violent confrontation after 13 years.

25. An example of such questions is, If the terms *Nephites* and *Lamanites* had only religious or political meanings and not hereditary ones, what do the further subclassifications mean, such as Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites, as described in 4 Nephi 1:36?