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“And it came to pass . . .”:
The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon
Leading to the Eighteenth Year
of the Reign of the Judges

Dan Belnap

ONE OF THE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN SHAPING the Book of Mormon’s content is the editorial hand of its principal narrator, Mormon. A particularly subtle but significant editorial decision was determining how much text was to be allocated to any given narrative. For instance, Mormon devotes 36 pages just to the five days described in 3 Nephi concerning the death of Christ and his appearance in the New World. This detail may not seem particularly noteworthy, but the Book of Mormon overall has only 531 pages. Thus almost 6.8 percent of the book is dedicated specifically to the events and teachings pertaining to Christ’s appearance in the New World, a percentage that increases to 8 percent if one includes all text associated with the whole year in which Christ makes his visit. Or, to put it another way, in a record encompassing a thousand years of history, almost 7 percent of the text covers only five days of events.¹

1. This is based on the assumption that the English translation reflects, to some degree, the original text in terms of length—i.e., that the number of English pages, according to the current pagination of the text, reflects roughly the amount of text, not number of pages or leaves, devoted to the event on the gold plates Joseph Smith received from Mormon. Percentages would naturally be lower (approximately 5%) if one included in the calculation the 116 manuscript pages lost and never reproduced by Joseph Smith. Similarly, the presumed sealed portion of the plates, if revealed, would also reduce the percentage.

No doubt many will understand why so much text is dedicated to this particular event since the entire Book of Mormon, from beginning to end, focuses on Christ's appearance. Yet these five days are not the only example of a specific time period being given particular emphasis in the Book of Mormon.² The block of text beginning with Alma 30 and ending with Alma 46 encompasses the pivotal period from the latter end of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges to the beginning of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges and comprises 45 pages of text (approximately 8.5 percent of the book), suggesting that the narrator viewed the events described therein as highly significant.³

While Mormon as narrator does not always provide explicit reasoning behind his editorial decisions, this particular block of scripture must be regarded as meaningful since it introduces us to Korihor (the

2. The five days mentioned here do not necessarily correspond to five consecutive days but represent the total number of days explicitly associated with the visitation of Christ: the day of the destruction (the 4th day of the 1st month of the 34th year following the new calendar described in 3 Nephi 1), the two other days of darkness that immediately follow, the day of Christ's actual appearance (see 3 Nephi 11–18), and the second day of his visitation (see 3 Nephi 19–26).

3. This number increases substantially when one adds in the entire nineteenth year of the reign of the judges. This three-year period comprises a total of 52 pages of the Book of Mormon (approximately 10 percent of the total Book of Mormon as currently configured) and makes up a sizeable portion (38 percent) of the text reporting on the first 40 years of the reign of the judges. Making this still more impressive is the fact that, according to the Book of Mormon, only 126 years pass from the changes instituted by Mosiah₂ to AD 34 and the visit of Christ. That entire period covers just over half of the Book of Mormon (51.6 percent). (If one discounts the small plates, which make up 142 pages, this 126-year period covers a staggering 70.6 percent of the Book of Mormon.) This emphasis has not gone unnoticed; see Matthew M. F. Hilton and Neil J. Flinders, "The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 237: "In the midst of his accounts of military encounters described in the book of Alma, Mormon inserts an extended explanation of the 'iniquity of the people' (Alma 31:1). Thirteen chapters (Alma 29–42) are devoted to reporting a contest of ideas and activities that affected both individuals and groups, describing problems and strategies to remedy these problems. Apparently the content of these chapters is significant to understanding Mormon's interest in the military events (see Alma 30:1–6; 43:1–3)."

only individual in the book designated as “Anti-Christ”; Alma 30:12), describes the Zoramite secession, outlines the emergence of the political dissenter Amalickiah and the related Nephite civil war, and includes the highly personal instruction from Alma to his sons during this chaotic period of Nephite history.

The narratives in Alma 30–46 themselves do not arise out of a vacuum. Although it appears that Mormon’s primary concern is the Nephite relationship with God (or the lack thereof), he also includes information concerning the status of society as a whole—political, economic, and otherwise.⁴ This paper does not seek to answer the question of why Mormon devoted so much text to the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges as much as it seeks to describe the environment from which the events of the eighteenth year arose. In this case, it is necessary to explore Mormon’s descriptions of the immediate years *preceding* the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, along with the major sociopolitical movements associated with those years, to gain a full appreciation of his editorial decisions concerning this emphasized portion of his narrative. With that in mind, this paper seeks to explore the emergence of three such sociopolitical dynamics: (1) the creation of a new political system (judgeship rather than kingship), along with its relationship to the church, (2) the reemergence of political and social power among the

4. Grant Hardy, in his study *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 119, notes this feature of Mormon’s editorial decisions: “We can see the tensions implicit in Mormon’s historiographical project. He tries to portray himself as a careful editor who pays close attention to sources, accuracy, and historical details. Yet the situation is complicated by his ambition to write literature—to create complex, interlocking narratives that invite us to see more than he explicitly comments on, that are open to multiple interpretations, and that will repay repeated readings. At the same time, he wants his readers to draw particular moral lessons from his work. To that end, he guides them step by step through a much abbreviated account, deliberately choosing which facts to include or omit, suggesting appropriate emotional responses, and even occasionally telling them exactly how they should interpret specific events. Balancing his three agendas can be a delicate enterprise.” As Hardy says elsewhere, “what [Mormon] leaves out is often as important as what he chooses to include” (107).

Mulekite majority, and (3) the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the effects they had on the greater Nephite community.⁵

“There should be no persecutions” (Mosiah 27:3)

The first of the three dynamics mentioned above was the creation of a new political system. Just seventeen years prior to the events beginning in Alma 30, the Nephites underwent a massive political transformation from a monarchy to a representational form of government, with all the instability that such a change would engender. For the preceding five hundred years, a monarch had governed the Nephites, with all final decision making—legislative, judicial, and executive—resting in one individual. Such a system certainly has its drawbacks, as the last Nephite king, Mosiah₂, makes clear in his defense of his proposal to replace it. Because one individual formerly held so much power, the greater society was more or less dependent on that individual. When the individual was morally and ethically good, then society reflected his goodwill; conversely, if the individual was corrupt, then the community suffered, both at his hand and by emulating his unethical behavior (see Mosiah 29:13–24; see also Mosiah 11).

But the Nephite shift described in Mosiah 29 resulted from more immediate concerns, namely the succession after Mosiah₂. With the rightful heir, Mosiah’s son Aaron, proselyting among the Lamanites, the king was concerned that if he appointed someone else as his successor, Aaron might return and lay claim to the throne, resulting in civil strife. No doubt his heightened awareness of the problems of royal succession

5. See Brant Gardner’s six-volume series on the Book of Mormon—*Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007)—for an excellent example of a contextual, historical approach to the Book of Mormon. It should be noted, though, that Gardner admits his approach is colored by his personal belief that the Book of Mormon is situated in Mesoamerica. While this location may represent the current consensus, it is not universally agreed upon, and valid criticisms both for and against that viewpoint continue to be expressed.

in the Jaredite writings (see Ether 7–15), along with the unfortunate events surrounding King Noah (see Mosiah 11–19), influenced his decision to end the monarchy and forestall calamity.

In any case, Mosiah suggested a governmental reform in which the community would “appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law” (Mosiah 29:11). These judges would be selected “by the voice of this people” (Mosiah 29:25). There would be a ranking of judges, with higher and lower ones, and the judges would regulate each other. If a lower judge did not follow the law, then a higher judge would judge the matter; if a higher judge became corrupt, then a “small number” of lower judges would judge him, “according to the voice of the people” (Mosiah 29:29).⁶ Mosiah desired to rectify the inequality that can occur

6. Although the Book of Mormon refers about twenty-two times to the “voice of the people,” its exact function within the political structure is not clear. At times this process appears similar to our concept of direct democratic assembly (such as in Mosiah 22:1 and Alma 2:2–7) or as a synonym for common consent (see Mosiah 29:26–27; Helaman 1:8; 5:2), but elsewhere it sounds almost like an office within the political structure. For instance, in Alma 46:34 Captain Moroni is appointed as such by “judges and the voice of the people.” In at least two instances, the explicit, verbal decisions made by the voice of the people are provided (see Mosiah 29:2 and Alma 27:22–24). In the latter verses, the language of the voice of the people is the actual treaty text between the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Although we are told that the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land “desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting” of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, the specificity and brevity of the written agreement suggest that it is not just a document cobbled together by multiple assemblies but rather the final product of a much smaller committee. In other words, it appears that while the “voice of the people” may in fact be represented in democratic assemblies, the results of their deliberations are then collated and organized into a final form by others (perhaps by certain judges; see again Alma 2:7). Finally, in Alma 51:15 we read of Captain Moroni sending a petition “with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it,” asking that he (Moroni) be granted emergency powers to conscript dissenters if they capitulated or to execute them if they did not. The text suggests that Moroni had public support, but how exactly the petition represents the voice of the people is unclear. To confuse matters even more, even though the petition was written to the governor of the land in conjunction with the voice of the people, we are told in verse 16 that “it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people.” Thus, a petition was sent by the voice of the people to be approved by the voice of the people. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:486–90, who also discusses the role of the voice of the people.

when one man exerts such excessive control over the lives and actions of his fellow men and to establish instead a land in which “every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32).

As simple and elegant as the new system of judges may appear, what is striking is how little information the text itself provides on its intended function. For example, no mention is made of enforcement.⁷ Who is to enforce the new system or legitimize the elections? What about those who break the law? Does the military, whose primary function is to enforce the borders against outside forces, also act as the internal police force?⁸ Who is to gather taxes? (Are there to be taxes?) Who is responsible for infrastructure maintenance? These questions may seem mundane, but they reflect the basic, administrative responsibilities of any government. In a monarchy, the king ultimately bears the sole responsibility for maintaining the state. In a representative system, such responsibilities need to be decided upon and enacted by group acceptance, which, just by virtue of including others, leads to greater indecision as well as to potentially harmful compromise.⁹

7. While nothing in Mosiah 29 refers to any office other than the judgeships, it appears that some flexibility was built into the system for other positions. For instance, the chief captain Moroni, we are told, was appointed by “the chief judges and the voice of the people” (Alma 46:34). See John W. Welch, “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 53: “The change from kingship to judgeship was put into effect by the law of Mosiah promulgated and acknowledged in Mosiah 29. It appears from the record that the law of Mosiah did not contain any concrete provision establishing the office of a military leader, but rather the law anticipated that the chief judge would assume military leadership as occasions demanded. Over time, the position of chief captain evolved among the Nephites. . . . This office was legally constituted as a result of the division of governmental powers that resulted when Alma relinquished the judgment seat.”

8. A. Brent Merrill, “Nephite Captains and Armies,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 271, writes: “The only type of standing army or police force mentioned in the Book of Mormon appears to have been the elite guards assigned to protect key political-religious-military leaders.”

9. John W. Welch also explores the ramifications of the ambiguity in the new political system in his study *The Legal Cases of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 233: “The provisions in Mosiah’s reforms that guaranteed equality (Mosiah 29:38) and freedom of belief (Alma 1:17)

As for the judges themselves, Mosiah suggests that “wise men ought to be appointed as the judges,” wise men who would judge “according to the commandments of God” (Mosiah 29:11). As with the problem of administrative responsibilities laid out above, we are not told what constituted a “wise man,” although the context suggests that on at least one level a wise man was one who was familiar with the religious tenets of the Mosiac law and accepted them. In Mosiah 29:39, we are told that following the acceptance of the reforms, the different Nephite communities “assembled themselves together in bodies . . . to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges,” suggesting that the lower judges were from the local communities.

As we shall explore in greater detail in the second section of this paper, these local communities were most likely based on affinities: Nephites associated with and lived near other Nephites, Mulekites associated with and lived near other Mulekites, church members associated with and lived next to church members, and so on. Thus a Mulekite community would likely have appointed a Mulekite as a judge rather than a Nephite outsider. Such a system would lead to greater communal responsibility in terms of governance, but it also had the potential to create special interests that would run counter to the needs of the overall state. Moreover, these judges probably already had a certain standing within their respective communities.¹⁰ While possible, it is

had the potential of being interpreted very broadly to expand the powers of the diffuse democratic factions in the land of Zarahemla.”

10. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:482, who suggests that secondary affiliations may not have played important roles in judge selection. Yet it appears that religious affiliation was part of, and meant to be a part of, the selection process (see Mosiah 29:11–12). The possibility that church members would live next to other church members reflects the role of religious affiliation that, along with tribal affiliation, appears to have governed the sociological structure of Nephite society. As Alma 1 makes clear, religious social divisions included Christians, followers of Nehor, and those of neither group (see Mosiah 26:1–4). Settlement patterns would have reflected this element of social organization as well as differences in religious affiliation and tribal groups, which are not necessarily secondary to tribal or kin-based organizations. One example of this pattern is the largely Nephite community of Ammonihah, which is separated from other Nephite communities by the religious belief of the people and a retention of their own

doubtful that an average Nephite would become a judge. Instead, the new system probably strengthened the already existing social hierarchy of elites without the overarching dominance of the monarchy to keep such elites in line.

Another challenge to this new system was its relationship to the church. Under Mosiah₂, the church held a special status, evidenced by a royal proclamation prohibiting persecution by unbelievers of those who belonged to the church of God (see Mosiah 27:2).¹¹ With the dissolution of the monarchy, this patronage no longer existed, but if the judges were wise men who knew the law of God, as suggested by Mosiah, the church's influence on the new governmental system would have been significant. This certainly was the case when one considers the highest office of the land—the chief judgeship. In fact, the first two chief judges were both explicitly ecclesiastical leaders as well as political officers. Alma the Younger was already high priest and head of the church when he was appointed as the first chief judge.¹² Eight years later, when Alma

judges (see Alma 8–15). Similarly, the Zoramites of Antionum (see Alma 30–35), who are Nephite, are also detached from the greater Nephite communities of Zarahemla and Gideon, ostensibly because of religious differences. Although the term *church* shows up 117 times in the Book of Mormon, the church as a formal institution is established only in Mosiah 18. Thus the church as a formal organization for those who have been “baptized unto repentance” is a relatively late social force established during the last years of Mosiah₂.

11. This edict was coupled with an internal church policy that no church member was to persecute another. See Welch, *Legal Cases*, 214–15: “King Mosiah’s privileging of Alma’s enclave must have set a powerful and somewhat awkward precedent when less desirable religious, hereditary, or political groups, such as Nehor’s followers, began to seek or assert the right to equal privileges and circumstances.”

12. Perhaps Alma₂ was also a member of the Nephite aristocracy. In Mosiah 17:2, we are told that Alma₁ was a “descendant of Nephi.” The phrase “descendant of [personal name]” is found twenty-three times in the Book of Mormon. While in one instance it appears to refer to a general affiliation of a specific individual (see Mosiah 25:2), the phrase is most often used to denote direct lineage of individuals. Interestingly, we are not given Mosiah₁’s lineage. We know that he becomes king when the Nephites immigrate to Zarahemla and that both Nephites and Mulekites accept this kingship. Whether or not his lineage played a role in that selection is unknown. In Alma 10:2–3, Amulek provides his full lineage, showing that he is a true descendant of Nephi, and Alma 17:21 declares that the Lamanite king Lamoni is a descendant of Ishmael. According to

abdicated his seat as chief judge, he selected “a wise man [Nephihah] who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force” (Alma 4:16). Nephihah remained chief judge until the twenty-fourth year of the reign of the judges, meaning he was chief judge for sixteen years. Thus for the first twenty-four years of the reign of the judges, the chief judges, Alma and Nephihah, were both believers and church officials.¹³

Concern that an individual might become too powerful appears to have prompted internal changes within the church’s ecclesiastical structure. In the ninth year of the reign of the judges, Alma stepped down from the chief judgeship to concentrate solely on his role as high priest, whereupon he immediately reordered the church personnel, installing new ecclesiastical leadership in several Nephite cities: Zarahemla, Gideon, Melek, and Ammonihah. A decade later, Helaman, the next high priest and one of Alma’s sons, instituted another “regulation” in the church, which included the appointing of new priests and teachers

Alma 54:23, the Nephite apostate Ammoron is a descendant of Zoram (which means his brother Amalickiah is as well). One interesting case appears in Alma 55:4, where a descendant of Laman is sought. A former servant of the Lamanite king who was falsely accused by Amalickah of killing the king is found. If the Book of Mormon cultures are similar to other ancient cultures, then a monarch’s servants most likely came from high-ranking families or lower-ranking members of the royal family. Assuming this is the case, then Amalickiah’s murder of the Lamanite king and subsequent accusation against the attending servants may have served not only to get rid of the current monarch but also to do away with any members of the court loyal to the now-deceased king (see Alma 47:20–28). The fact that the servant was found in Zarahemla suggests that the servants fled not just from the murder but also from the accusation of treason, perhaps seeking political asylum in Zarahemla. See Kyle P. McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 158: “The title ‘servant of the king’ referred not to a menial functionary, but to a ranking member of the court. This is clear not only from the biblical evidence (e.g. 2 Kings 22:12; 25:8), but also from surviving Israelite (and other Northwest Semitic) seals inscribed with the title after the proper names.”

13. Of the ten judges mentioned in the text between Alma’s inaugural appointment and the assassination of Lachoneus, 120 years later, at least six were believers, four of these serving as church officials.

throughout the land “over all the churches” (Alma 45:22).¹⁴ This regulation and the events that follow it are described in detail, thus meriting a closer review.

Following the installment of new ecclesiastical leaders, “there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman” (Alma 45:23), suggesting that it was specifically a change in leadership that caused the dissension. It is difficult to know to whom the pronoun *them* in this passage refers. It may be the specific assemblies affected by Helaman’s regulations, or it may be the newly released teachers and priests (some of whom no doubt resented the changes). If this is the case, the text’s reference to “them” being exceedingly rich (“they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches” [v. 24]) may refer just to the priests and teachers, rather than to the church in general (as the text might also be read). How did this wealth originate? Only a few years earlier, the Nephites had confronted Nehor, who contended that the people should financially support the priests (see Alma 1:3). The Nephite church condemned this doctrine as a general practice. Yet the text reports that the church took care of those priests who “stood in need” (Mosiah 18:28). Moreover, in the Old Testament, although priests did not own individual property, they were allotted certain economic privileges—a right abused more than once in biblical narratives. Thus, it is possible that Nephite priests, like their ancient Israelite counterparts, took advantage of their position to build their personal wealth. It is also possible that some priests were themselves of high-ranking Nephite lineages and served as judges.

14. The term *regulation* is found six times in the Book of Mormon and refers to new institutional principles. While it may refer to both ecclesiastical and political changes, most of them are political. Captain Moroni is described as “making regulations to prepare for war against the Lamanites” (Alma 51:22). Possibly these regulations were meant to be short term, for following the conclusion of the war led by Captain Moroni, “regulations were made concerning the law. And their judges, and their chief judges were chosen” (Alma 62:47). Later, 3 Nephi 7:6 reports that “the regulations of the government were destroyed, because of the secret combination of the friends and kindreds of those who murdered the prophets.”

That this may be the case is indicated by the text's description of Amalickiah's followers in their dissension against Helaman: "the greater part of them [were] the lower judges of the land" (Alma 46:4). Only six years later, a group known—because of their promonarchical stance—as king-men emerged and were described as those who were of "high birth" (Alma 51:8). The record does not specify whether the king-men and the original followers of Amalickiah overlapped in terms of social makeup, but their presence does reveal a strong monarchical movement in the first twenty years of the new political system. Moreover, their description in Alma 46:1–10, immediately following the narrative of Helaman's regulation, suggests that some of Amalickiah's followers were either the newly deposed ecclesiastical leadership or members of those leaders' congregations. If the two groups did overlap, the conjunction between lower judges, ecclesiastical leaders, and social elites would have justified concern.

In light of the close relationship between church leadership and the new political structure, the tension between those belonging and those not belonging to the Nephite church, particularly in the early years of the reign of the judges, is unsurprising. In fact, from the very first year of the judges' reign, "whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church" (Alma 1:19). This persecution followed the execution of Nehor, who, having killed Gideon (an elder of the church and possibly a newly appointed judge) in a heated confrontation, was seized by church members and taken before Alma. Although Alma decried Nehor's endorsement of priestcraft, it was rather the enforcement of religious beliefs by the sword that condemned Nehor: "Behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced [presumably by the sword or threat of violence] among this people it would prove their entire destruction" (Alma 1:12).¹⁵

15. Contra Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:26, who suggests that priestcraft is the crime for which Nehor is punished. In Alma 30 Mormon explicitly states that the legal system was based on performance rather than belief. What one believed, as well as the verbal expression of such belief, was not liable to legal action, but the actual

Although Alma stresses the legal nature of this event (“thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king, acknowledged by this people” [Alma 1:14]), this event may have appeared to nonbelievers as an attempt to consolidate and institutionalize the church’s newly established political influence at the expense of other religious traditions. Certainly, the fact that Nehor was taken not by individuals representing the civic leadership but by “people of the church” and judged by the high priest of the church, regardless of his protestations of legal precept, would have been troubling to those of other belief systems. In any case, the antipathy between those inside and outside the church, the latter perhaps feeling sympathetic to the case of Nehor’s followers, generally resulted in verbal and physical confrontation (see Alma 1:22).¹⁶

That said, not all interactions between those belonging and not belonging to the church were necessarily confrontational. For instance, in the fifth year of the reign of the judges, the people were confronted with the threat of Amlici, a follower of Nehor who sought to reinstitute a monarchy. According to Alma 2:3, his growing popularity increased his followers’ desire to install him as king, which alarmed the people of the church as well as all those “who had not been drawn away after the

performance of wrongdoing was punishable by law. While priestcraft or Nehorism was morally destructive, it was not necessarily illegal since it was a belief. But enforcing one’s religious beliefs by battery was illegal (being a “performance”) and thus Nehor was taken and tried accordingly.

16. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 234, writes: “The trial of Nehor tended to disable Nehor’s followers and to alienate them from the new reign of judges; . . . the fact that Alma went out of his way to exculpate and exonerate Gideon from any wrongdoing in this case must have emboldened the members of the church to perform their duty to prevent people in other religious groups from trespassing the laws of God or of the state. Nevertheless, it seems likely that these legal developments and attitudes contributed to the polarization of segments of Nephite society that quickly ensued. . . . Almost certainly as a result of this verdict and execution, the rift between the people of Christ and members of other groups within the community deepened in the second year of the reign of judges.”

persuasions of Amlici.”¹⁷ By that point, the Nephite population included at least three political affiliations: Amlici’s followers, likely made up in part of Nehor’s followers; members of the Nephite church, who were antimonarchical; and those who were neither church members nor followers of Amlici. Apparently the latter two groups were large enough to represent a majority of the people, as witnessed by the “voice of the people” deciding against Amlici.¹⁸

Yet such alliances were rare and short lived. By the eighth year of the reign of the judges, persecution had begun again, this time instigated by members of the church. The reasons for this persecution are outlined in Alma 4:6–9 with the increase in the overall prosperity of the church as one of the major contributing factors. Whether the prosperity was a direct result of the new governmental system is not clear. What we do know is that the new prosperity led some to become “scornful, one towards another” and to “persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure” (Alma 4:8), constituting a “great stumbling-block” to those not belonging to the church (Alma 4:10).¹⁹

17. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 234, describes the situation: “Amlici’s reaction constituted a rejection of everything that Alma and the reforms of Mosiah stood for. Political support for this opposition movement must have gathered momentum from several sectors in Zarahemla: more than ever, the Mulekites would likely have wanted to see the return of the kingship.”

18. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 114: “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 (Alma 2:2–3:25). . . . Alma tells us specifically that much of it did indeed happen in one 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.”

19. Part of the problem may have been specific patronage, as happened 121 years later. According to 3 Nephi 6, there were secret collusions among the judges, lawyers, and priests who conspired, using their kinship relationships, to destroy “the people of

The consequence of this persecution was Alma's before-mentioned abdication from the chief judgeship to concentrate solely on the office of high priest. Yet ill feelings persisted, best exemplified in Alma's interaction with the city of Ammonihah.

In the tenth year of the reign of the judges, as part of his ministerial itinerary, Alma entered the city of Ammonihah and was immediately confronted with the following sentiment:

Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church which thou hast established in many parts of the land, according to your tradition; and we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions. And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephiah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us. (Alma 8:11–12)

As these verses make clear, the people of Ammonihah did not believe that Alma held any political authority over them. While they recognized his ecclesiastical authority as leader of the church, they were not of the same faith and therefore unaccountable to him regarding spiritual matters. The people promptly reviled Alma, spitting on him and eventually driving him from the city. Although it is easy to condemn the inhospitable behavior of the Ammonihahites, their reaction may be more understandable when put into the context of general church persecution of nonmembers just two years earlier. The fact that Ammonihah was made up of Nehorites only accentuated any already existing animosity.

Alma 8–16 recounts Alma's confrontation with the people of Ammonihah, who eventually took him and his preaching companion,

the Lord" (3 Nephi 6:27–28), setting at "defiance the law and the rights of their country" (3 Nephi 6:29–30). This led to the collapse of Nephite government: "Now it came to pass that those judges had many friends and kindreds; and the remainder, yea, even almost all the lawyers and the high priests, did gather themselves together, and unite with the kindreds of those judges who were to be tried according to the law" (3 Nephi 6:27). Following the collapse, society degenerated into large tribal groups that probably furthered the role of patronage in social interaction (see 3 Nephi 7:1–14).

Amulek, before the chief judge of the territory. Although they had spoken predominantly on religious matters, the case made against them was that “they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land” (Alma 14:5). The political and legal thrust of this accusation was perhaps fair from their point of view since the political nature of Alma’s ministry was clear. Alma was persuaded to return to Ammonihah because, as the angel told him, “they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people” (Alma 8:17).

Although lacking evidence that the people were actively planning to rebel or overthrow the new political system, Amulek accused them of threatening to destroy liberty by abusing the law and choosing improper leadership (see Alma 10:17–21, 26–27). Unsurprisingly, the people responded to Amulek as they did to Alma: “This man doth revile against our laws which are just and our wise lawyers whom we have selected” (Alma 10:24; cf. 14:20). It is unclear which laws Amulek supposedly reviled, although it seems likely that the Ammonihahites viewed Alma’s and Amulek’s ministry as a threat to their community’s right to choose their own judges. Moreover, they likely took umbrage at Amulek’s declaration that only the prayers of the righteous, presumably church members, kept the city of Ammonihah from destruction. As for the original angelic warning that prompted Alma’s second visit, it may have referred to what appears to be an Ammonihahite innovation: the employment of lawyers.

Ostensibly appointed to administer the law on behalf of the people, Mormon indicates that Ammonihah’s unique political class of lawyers “did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness” in order to “have more employ” since their “sole purpose [was] to get gain” (Alma 11:20). This class was not a part of the original structure outlined by Mosiah₂, but developed during the first eight years of the reign of the judges. If Mormon’s account is accurate, this group often escalated disputes. If the ideal purpose of the new government was to provide means for all to enjoy their rights and privileges, the introduction of these lawyers had the potential of destroying that

liberty by lionizing or demonizing those on the other side of a dispute, actually inflaming the problem rather than alleviating it. Yet this class appeared to have become an essential part of the political-legal system of Ammonihah.²⁰

The condemnation and imprisonment of Alma and Amulek revealed another challenge to the new system. This third concern arose as early as the first year of the reign of the judges, when, following the execution of Nehor, “the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible” (Alma 1:32). Following the trial of Alma and Amulek in Ammonihah, those who had believed in their words were punished by those in power in the city, either through execution or exile. This was blatantly illegal since one’s personal belief was not punishable. Possibly, citing the Nehor case as an ironic precedent, Alma’s converts could be accused of threatening the laws and judges of the land, but even if this were the case, clearly execution was still not the appropriate response. What the Ammonihahites did was illegal but unpunishable under the system of judges. What the Ammonihah episode demonstrated was that one could get away with breaking the law under the new system. This problem may have posed the biggest threat to the city.

In light of all this chaos, it is not surprising that in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges Korihor—a man who proclaimed that “ancient priests” had usurped the “power and authority” of the people and had kept the people in virtual bondage, that “they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges” (Alma 30:23, 27)—became popular so quickly. By tapping into this populist turmoil, Korihor threatened the social, political, economic,

20. One may notice the adjectival designation of their lawyers as “wise,” perhaps alluding to the Mosiah reforms and the “wise men” chosen by the population. Gardner suggests that the Book of Mormon’s use of the term *lawyer* likely reflected the New Testament’s use of the term because of Joseph Smith’s familiarity with the King James Version of the New Testament and thus carried a more specific meaning of scribe (see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:171–72). This is certainly possible, though Mormon’s description suggests that the Ammonihahite lawyers represented a social innovation following the legal changes of the Mosiah reforms.

and certainly spiritual foundation of Nephite civilization, a consequence Mosiah had sought to forestall with his reforms. Ironically, Mosiah's desire that each enjoy "his rights and privileges" would come to haunt the Nephites.

"They were gathered together in two bodies" (Mosiah 25:4)

Religious affiliation and its intersection with the new political system were not the only challenges facing Nephite society. Social and cultural distinctions also had the potential of causing conflict, particularly between the Nephites and the Mulekites (Zarahemla's original settlers), the latter of which represented the majority of the population in Zarahemla.²¹ While little is said about interactions between the Mulekites and the Nephites, what does appear in the record is revealing. During the reigns of both Benjamin and Mosiah,²² the Mulekites and the Nephites apparently viewed themselves as separate peoples.²² In fact, the

21. For the complexity of "Nephite" and "Mulekite" designations, see John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 12: "But every rule-of-thumb we construct that treats the Nephites as a thoroughly homogeneous unit ends up violated by details in the text. Variety shows through the common label, culturally (e.g., Mosiah 7:15; Alma 8:11–12), religiously (e.g., Mosiah 26:4–5 and 27:1; Alma 8:11), linguistically (e.g., Omni 1:17–18), and biologically (e.g., Alma 55:4; note the statement concerning Nephi's seed 'and whomsoever shall be called thy seed,' Alma 3:17). 'Nephites' should then be read as the generic name designating the nation (see Alma 9:20) ideally unified in a political structure headed by one direct descendant of Nephi at a time. Even more indicative of social and cultural variation among the Nephites is the usage by their historians of the expression 'people of the Nephites.' It connotes that there existed a social stratum called 'the Nephites' while another category was 'people' who were 'of,' that is, subordinate to, those 'Nephites,' even while they all were under the same central government and within the same broad society. Limhi was ready to accept such a second-class status for his people, the Zeniffites, and assumed that the dependent category still existed as it apparently had when his grandfather had left Zarahemla (see Mosiah 7:15)."

22. John L. Sorenson, "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 B.C.," in *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), 167: "The people of Zarahemla were more numerous than

reconciliation of these two groups was likely one of the primary objectives of Benjamin's well-known discourse (see Mosiah 1–6).

According to Mosiah 1, Benjamin instructed his son Mosiah₂ “to make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people, or the people of Zarahemla [the Mulekites], and the people of Mosiah [the Nephites] who dwell in the land” (Mosiah 1:10), thus revealing that a full generation after the two peoples joined together in the land of Zarahemla, they still distinguished themselves as separate entities. Following his admission that there were two distinct communities, Benjamin described his hope to give the two communities a new, common name that would erase former distinctions: “And moreover, I shall give this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem, . . . a name that never shall be blotted out” (Mosiah 1:11–12).²³

Unfortunately, this specific purpose seems not to have been fully accomplished. A generation after Benjamin's speech, when Mosiah₂ called his people together to read the account of Alma and the record of Zeniff, “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). The text further reports that the people of Zarahemla were “numbered with the Nephites” because “the kingdom had been

the descendants of the four tribes who constituted the original broad Nephite faction referred to in Jacob 1:14 (see Mosiah 25:2). These ‘Mulekites’ were also linguistically separate (see Omni 1:17–18). They constituted a population whose social distinctness and political power became so submerged under Nephite rulership that little is heard of them as a group throughout the Nephite record. It is obvious, however, that no majority population simply disappears from a social scene; what must have happened is that the people of Zarahemla, the majority, became socially and politically invisible to the eyes of the Nephite elite record keepers in the capital city. No doubt those ‘Mulekites’ maintained cultural distinctness in their ethnic strongholds, like the Anglo-Saxons under Norman governance.”

23. This purpose for the speech may also explain why Ammon delivered Benjamin's discourse to the Nephite colonists in the land of Nephi in Mosiah 8:3. Having been separated from the main Nephi society, the colonists had become somewhat estranged, and the speech, with its talk of one people using one name, may have served to let the colonists know they were welcome in Zarahemla.

conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi” (Mosiah 25:13). Thus for at least two or three generations following assimilation, the two primary cultural designations in Zarahemla remained separate and distinct from one another, even after a direct attempt to unite them.²⁴

The explicit recognition of cultural or social distinctions would have been reflected not only in public gatherings but also in other culturally significant exchanges. One such exchange would have been language usage. Although the two groups originally emigrated from the same area (ancient Jerusalem immediately prior to the Babylonian exile; see Omni 1:12–19), the intervening five hundred years of independent development had led to significant changes in their language. Upon meeting, they could not understand one another since the Mulekites’ language “had become corrupted”; Mosiah thus “caused that [the native people of Zarahemla] should be taught in his language” (Omni 1:17–18). Yet despite these obstacles, the groups established effective communication within a very short period of time.²⁵

24. Nothing in the text indicates that this situation changes. In the sixty-third year of the reign of the judges, the lands are still designated as follows: “Now the land south was called Lehi, and the land north was Mulek, which was after the son of Zedekiah” (Helaman 6:10). Thus almost one hundred years after Benjamin’s speech, the differences between the two communities in Zarahemla were still represented, at least in geographical designations. As Gardner rightfully points out, “The two groups initially had different religions, cultures and languages. Those are tremendous obstacles to overcome” (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:418).

25. “Mulekite” was probably a Semitic language since the original Mulekites claimed that one of their ancestors was Mulek, a son of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Unfortunately, little evidence of Mulekite as a spoken language exists, a situation complicated by the fact that we do not have the original text and are thus reliant, in any attempt at reconstructing the language using Mulekite names, on transliterations within the Book of Mormon and thus on the spelling of the translators. But the presence of the terms *Mulek* and *Melek* are a tantalizing possibility as to the nature of the Mulekite language. The designation of *Mulek* is found seventeen times in the Book of Mormon and refers to the name of an individual person, a city, and a larger geographical area. The city Mulek was in the north near Bountiful, but on the eastern seashore. As already pointed out, Helaman 6 informs us that the “land north”—apparently everything north of where the Nephites originally settled (the land of Nephi)—“was called Mulek, . . . for the Lord did bring Mulek into the land north” (Helaman 6:10). Finally, the book also mentions the individual named Mulek, Zedekiah’s son. This individual is associated with the royal family

The text's designation of the Mulekite language as "corrupted" is problematic, particularly as it may reveal a long-standing Nephite bias of cultural superiority attested early in their history. In the second and third chapters of his book, Jacob notes with dismay the Nephite elite's sense of superiority, both in terms of socioeconomic status and physical characteristics, in comparison with less advantaged Nephites and the Lamanites. Approximately five centuries later, this same sense of cultural superiority was displayed when the Nephites encountered another independent culture. The use of the term *corrupted* and Mosiah's directive for the Mulekites to learn Nephite and not the other way around suggests that, at least to the Nephite community, the Nephite language had remained pure to the mother tongue.

of Judah, although one should note that this information stems from a five-hundred-year-old oral history (see Omni 1:18). The designation may well be a proper name. The Bible mentions, at least once, a certain Melek, son of Hosea. Though no individual is called Melek, a territory near Zarahemla is named Melek. Elsewhere *mlk* is found in conjunction with other nominal elements (Melchizedek, etc).

Both *Melek* and *Mulek* appear to reflect the West Semitic root *mlk*, which means "king." The noun *mlk* is a segolate noun, meaning that its original pronunciation followed a consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant(-vowel) as opposed to the consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel-consonant(-vowel) pattern common to many Semitic words. Both Book of Mormon terms follow the second pattern, in which a secondary vowel is placed between the second and third consonants, even though originally this secondary vowel was not present. In biblical Hebrew, this secondary vowel is pronounced with an *e*, or schwa sound. What subsequently happened in the Hebrew development of segolates was the harmonization of the first vowel sound with the second, thus *mVlek* becomes *melek*. (In other West Semitic languages, the segolate noun retained its original vowel sound—a long *u*, a long *a*, or short *i*.) All this suggests that at the very least two different Semitic language patterns were present among Book of Mormon peoples, one reflecting an older West Semitic vowel pattern. Moreover, if the "noncorrupted" Nephite language resulted from having a biblical text, then *Melek* is a Nephite term (biblical Hebrew) while *Mulek*, the Mulekite term, stems from a nonbiblical but related West Semitic language. With that said, Royal Skousen has argued that, based on the printer's manuscript, *mulek* should be read as *muloch*, which may reflect the Hebrew as well since the final letter of *king* in Hebrew is a soft *k* sound (*kh*) rather than a hard *k* sound; see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Volume 4, Part 3, Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1466; see also Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:416.

It may well be that the Mulekite language diverged more radically from the Semitic mother tongue (presumably biblical Hebrew), but the Nephite tongue no doubt changed as well, particularly since the written form appears to have employed ideograms rather than the Hebrew alphabet.²⁶ The designation of “corrupt” for the Mulekite language was only relative.²⁷ Yet the Book of Mormon never questions the idea that Nephite should be the dominant language, and Mosiah’s insistence on its usage suggests a political purpose. In fact, the restriction

26. The text states that Nephi made his record in “the language of [his] father which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:1). What is meant by “language” is unclear, though it is often assumed to be Egyptian writing forms. We are told in Mormon 9:32–33 that at least Mormon and Moroni wrote with characters known as “reformed Egyptian,” which Moroni then tells us were “altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” Moroni goes on to say that, had the plates been larger, he would have written in Hebrew, but that the Hebrew had been “altered” as well. Thus, at least a thousand years after the founding of the Nephite community, both the written and spoken languages of origin appear to have been “corrupted.” As for the brass plates, the text claims that they too were in some form of Egyptian: “were it not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things . . . except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings” (Mosiah 1:3–4). Thus, while evidence suggests that the Nephites spoke a Hebrew variant, the written form was apparently an Egyptian variant. Consequently, written Nephite does not appear to have been “pure” to the original Hebrew, in either written or spoken form.

27. Barbara Loester has noted a similar relationship between subordinate cultures and the designation of their languages as “corrupt” in Scotland, England, Bavaria, and greater Germany. See Barbara Loester, “Scotland and Bavaria: Regional Affiliation and Linguistic Identity in ‘Peripheral’ Communities,” in *Identity through a Language Lens*, ed. Kamila Ciepiela (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 63: “From a linguistic point of view, their regional varieties (or languages) are distinctly different from the national standard languages. These regional varieties are often considered ‘bad,’ ‘incorrect,’ or are perceived to indicate a lack of formal education as they deviate phonetically, lexically, and, to some extent, grammatically, from the standard variety. Out of these differences, linguistic, historical and cultural, we can observe a development of stereotypes, such as the tight-fisted Scot or the slow-witted Bavarian.” Note that in Mormon 9:33, Moroni states that the Nephites had *altered* the original Hebrew. Gardner points out the difference between “altered” and “corrupted,” noting: “The connotations suggest an insider/outsider perspective. For the insider, changes are simply alterations. For the outsider, who must confront ‘alterations’—particularly alterations of such magnitude that the other group cannot be understood—it is a case of ‘corruption’” (Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:60).

or enforcement of language use often manifests the tension between dominant and minority cultures, particularly since language is used by each society to retain cultural distinctiveness.²⁸ In the case of the Nephites and the Mulekites, their interaction began with the Nephites as a population minority that quickly established political and religious supremacy through controlling the dominant language. The Nephite policy may have been enforced partially because of fear. For the Nephites, their language and texts were instrumental in the retention of their cultural significance and were thus potentially threatened by the presence of the larger, preexisting culture of the Mulekites.

This concern may manifest itself in explicit textual references to the Nephite elite being taught the Nephite language. Approximately one generation following the Mulekite-Nephite convergence, Benjamin “caused that [his sons] should be taught in all the language of his fathers” (Mosiah 1:2). Zeniff, a contemporary of Benjamin who attempted a permanent reclamation of the ancestral land of Nephi, made a similar declaration: “I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the Nephites . . .” (Mosiah 9:1). These texts suggest that full immersion in the Nephite language was unique enough to deserve written recognition, which in turn indicates an apparent need to receive formal training. The curious phrase “in all the language” suggests that the Nephite language may have been threatened by another robust language tradition, thus necessitating complete linguistic immersion. And it was not only *Nephite* elites who apparently learned the Nephite language. Zarahemla, the last Mulekite ruler, apparently learned Nephite as well. This last

28. What appears to exist in the Nephite-Mulekite population is diglossia, or the use of two languages concurrently; throughout history cultures have taken advantage of this situation to impose power over another culture. See Marilyn Martin-Jones, “Language, Power and Linguistic Minorities: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Bilingualism, Language Maintenance and Drift,” in *Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language*, ed. Ralph Grillo (London: Routledge, 1989), 106–25, quoting P. Eckert, “Diglossia: Separate and Unequal,” *Linguistics* 18 (1980): 1056: “Diglossia does not arise; it is imposed from above in the form of an administrative, ritual or standard language. By virtue of its political and economic status, this language becomes requisite for access to power and mobility within society.”

detail highlights another policy concern—what to do with the pre-existing Mulekite elite.

Though quickly forgotten, the Mulekite people had viable political leadership prior to the immigration of the Nephites, which was based on lineage connected to the last Judahite king, Zedekiah. No official policy concerning Mulekite royalty is made explicit in the text, but Nephite leaders no doubt had guidelines in place for handling them. Apparently they did not implement, like the biblical David, a policy of extermination. (Much of Saul's clan was executed to eliminate the threat of Saulid pretenders.) Instead, it seems the Nephite leadership sought to incorporate the Mulekite elite into the new system of judges, hoping that assimilation would align this group with the new Nephite elite.

Such a policy would explain the curious decision by Mosiah₂ to place Ammon₁, a descendant of Zarahemla, at the head of an embassy to the estranged Nephite colony in the ancestral land of Nephi. According to the text, sometime during Benjamin's reign a group of Nephites left the land of Zarahemla to reclaim the former Nephite territory known as the land of Nephi, what the text calls "the land of their inheritance" (Omni 1:27). Zeniff, one of the survivors of the original party, explicitly stated their desire to possess the "land of their fathers" (Mosiah 9:3). It thus appears that some Nephites felt uneasy living in a territory not technically their own (perhaps revealing again the perceived cultural superiority exhibited earlier). In any case, the colonization effort was beset with challenges from the beginning. The first attempt at reclamation failed because of internal dissension, while the second successful attempt lasted only three generations, resulting in conflict with and eventual subjugation to the Lamanites.²⁹

29. Gardner, tentatively associating two Mesoamerican sites with the Book of Mormon cities of Zarahemla and Nephi, suggests that the land of Nephi was bigger and wealthier than Zarahemla and that this group of Nephites therefore desired to return and partake of this prosperity. While this may help confirm his Mesoamerican placement for the Book of Mormon, it does not take into account the explicit reasons demonstrated above for the group's return, which appear much more purposive and ominous than simply becoming more prosperous (see Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:228).

Three years into his reign, Mosiah₂, “wearied” by constant requests from his people, sent sixteen Nephite “strong men” on an expedition with the purpose of finding and reconciling the Nephite colonists. The designation of “strong man” is found elsewhere in both the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament, seemingly denoting those who held high military or social office.³⁰ A party of Nephite elites indicates the delicacy of the mission and the strong emotions surrounding the whole affair. Upon arriving in the land of Nephi, Ammon reports the recent history of the Nephites in Zarahemla to the colonists, shares with them Benjamin’s discourse with its distinct political overtones concerning reconciliation, and helps them plan their escape from Lamanite subjugation. It appears he represented Mosiah₂’s interests in each case; certainly, he never stepped outside of those boundaries. When asked if he could baptize the estranged group, his response was that he was unworthy of doing so. While readers may assume this was because he felt himself spiritually unworthy, his words may rather have been a recognition that such an act would be outside the scope of his diplomatic mission. In any case, Mosiah’s designation of Ammon as ambassador reflected his apparent hope to assimilate the Mulekite elite into the Nephite political spectrum.³¹

30. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 173: “The title *gibbôr hayil* [strong man or mighty man] often carries a military connotation (Josh 1:14; 8:3; 10:7, etc.), but this does not exhaust its meaning, as is sometimes assumed. Basically the expression describes social standing and implies economic power. It may be used in reference to a nobleman or wealthy citizen, such as Jeroboam (I Kings 11:28) or Boaz (Ruth 2:1). The *gibbôrê hayil* are the taxable gentry (II Kings 15:20), who in the feudal hierarchy of the monarchy are associated closely with the court (II Kings 24:14; I Chron 28:1), where the feudatory obligation of military service is especially important. Thus while the expression may have referred originally to military prowess (though to be sure *hayil* may mean ‘wealth’ as well as ‘[physical] strength’), it became applicable to any high-ranking citizen.” In 1 Nephi 3:31 Laban is also described as a “mighty man.” His responsibilities match up to those of other mighty men. He is the military commander of fifty men, he is one of the city elders who counsel with the king, and he is the possessor of the tribal record of Manasseh.

31. Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived,” 10: “Why were Ammon and company not recognized immediately as Nephites? Was their costume and tongue or accent so much different than what Limhi’s people expected of a Nephite that this put them off?”

Yet with the seismic political shift from monarchy to judgeship, Mosiah's original intentions regarding the Mulekite cultural elite were upended. As explained earlier, the new system relied on a hierarchy of judges, from lesser judges representing small localities to higher judges representing greater geographical areas. Just as adherents or sympathizers represented religious communities, so too would Mulekites represent their own cultural communities. I have already suggested that during the entire period of Nephite leadership, the Mulekites retained their cultural identity. With the creation of the judgeship system, the Mulekites would have regained direct political influence. Just as Nephite elites appear to have been chosen as judges, Mulekite elites would likely have been chosen to represent their communities.

While the Nephite kings were largely moral, effective leaders, it is intriguing that with Mosiah₂'s announcement of the new political system, the text reports that the people in the land "assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, . . . and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them" (Mosiah 29:39). Because of the reform, Mosiah₂ actually *increased* in popularity: "Yea, they did esteem him more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant who was seeking for gain, . . . but he had established peace in the land, and he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage" (Mosiah 29:40). In light of the implicit Nephite sense of superiority reflected in the text,

Ammon was a 'descendant of Zarahemla' (Mosiah 7:13), a point that he emphasized in his introduction to the king. Does this mean that he somehow looked different than a 'typical' Nephite? Or had the Zeniffites had encounters with other non-Nephite types in their area which might have prompted Limhi's cautious reception? And what personal relationship had Ammon to the Zeniffites, after all? As a person descended from Zarahemla, that is, a 'Mulekite,' why did he refer to Zeniff's presumably Nephite party as 'our brethren' and show them so much concern that he would lead this arduous expedition to find out their fate? The social, political, ethnic, and language relationships involved in this business are not straightforward, to say the least."

part of this appreciation may have been in recognition that Mosiah had reinstated some Mulekite political identity.³²

Of course, this new freedom had the potential of highlighting or exacerbating latent social divisions kept under relative control during the monarchy's rule. Nevertheless, such tension appears infrequently in the Book of Mormon. The conflict with the king-men, beginning in the nineteenth year of the reign of judges, possibly reflected tensions between the Mulekites and the Nephites, but the text does not clarify who the king-men were beyond their being "lower judges" and those "of high birth."³³ Interestingly, these individuals coalesced around Amalickiah and his brother Ammoron, descendants of Zoram—a man who, in their own words, was "pressed and brought out of Jerusalem" by the Nephite forefathers (Alma 54:23). Those who sought for kingship were not simply greedy individuals but were also representatives of groups who believed they had real historical and political grievances with Nephite dominance. Certainly, during the reign of Ammoron's son, the Zoramite-Mulekite connection became very apparent. In the forty-first year of the reign of the judges, the city of Zarahemla was overrun by the Lamanite chief captain, Coriantumr, a "large and mighty man" who was

32. Gardner believes this to be Mormon's eulogy and not necessarily a reflection of the people's actual reaction to the reforms (see *Second Witness*, 3:482). This is possible, but the language suggests that Mormon is emphasizing the people's response to the reforms. Thus "they assembled, . . . they were exceedingly rejoiced, . . . they did esteem him more, . . . for . . . he had granted unto his people that they should be delivered" (Mosiah 29:39–40).

33. John A. Tvednes, "Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 299, describes the status of the king-men: "The text informs us that these were people of 'high birth' (Alma 51:8), 'who professed the blood of nobility' (Alma 51:21), and who felt that they should rule—perhaps because of descent from King Zarahemla or King Zedekiah of Judah. The passage in question dates from the twentieth year of the reign of judges; hence, twenty-five years after Mosiah announced his retirement and therefore four generations after the agreement made between the earlier Mosiah and Zarahemla, uniting the two peoples. Moroni was able to crush the rebellion. . . . The king-men who survived the war 'were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and *in their cities*' (Alma 51:20; italics added). If this means that they were settled in specific cities, then they are more likely a tribal group than a political faction with representation throughout the Nephite lands."

“a descendant of Zarahemla; and he was a dissenter from among the Nephites” (Helaman 1:15). Tubaloth, Ammoron’s son, had appointed him to his military post. Unlike earlier Lamanite military excursions that targeted outlying areas, Coriantumr bypassed remote cities and marched straight to Zarahemla, the old Mulekite capital. Thus this military incursion by a Mulekite of elite lineage, promoted by a Lamanite king who descended from Zoram, brings to focus a number of sociological challenges within Nephite society. All the groups represented in this event—the Mulekites, the Lamanites, and the Zoramites—seem to have harbored resentment against the Nephite disdainful dominance.

“They were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon” (Alma 27:26)

The third element challenging the Nephites in the years leading up to the eighteenth year of the judges’ reign was the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies into the land of Zarahemla. The first five centuries of Nephite history were punctuated by frequent conflicts with the Nephites’ rivals, the Lamanites. Yet in the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges, that defining antagonistic relationship underwent a radical change that affected the Nephites for at least the next century. As Alma the high priest was traveling that year among the Nephite communities in the south (near the Nephite-Lamanite border), he encountered the four sons of Mosiah, who had left years earlier to preach to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi (the same territory where Ammon the Mulekite and his “strong men” had gone to find the estranged Nephite colonists). Upon their meeting, Mosiah’s sons acted as emissaries for the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, a community of Lamanite converts who sought religious asylum.

The narrative describing the formation of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies consists of Alma 17–28. This detailed account suggests that the missionary work of Mosiah’s sons is one of the more significant narratives in the Book of Mormon. More than a decade of preaching by Ammon², along with his three brothers and their associates, proves instrumental in the conversion of “many thousands” of Lamanites (Alma 26:13), including the Lamanite king and two of his sons (one of whom was

next in line for the throne). By the tenth year of the Nephite mission, the converted king had died and his son Anti-Nephi-Lehi assumed his throne. The unconverted chose this time to rebel and attack the converted. The converts, meanwhile, had entered into an oath never again to shed blood. In the ensuing battle, over a thousand converted Lamanites were killed without offering any resistance. Yet their example led to more than a thousand further conversions among the Lamanites. As a result of this second conversion, the remaining unconverted Lamanites took vengeance directly on the Nephites, whom, it appears, they blamed for the disruption of the greater Lamanite society.³⁴ A lightning-quick strike deep in Nephite territory resulted in the utter annihilation of Ammonihah in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges.³⁵ For the Nephites, this attack appeared to come out of the blue. Preceding it, there had been six years of peace.³⁶ The Lamanite reprisal was in fact so unexpected that there was insufficient time to raise an army before

34. The invasion may be understood as one in which the Lamanites felt themselves besieged by Nephites. The failed Nephite attempt at reclaiming the land of Nephi had been just a few years earlier. Moreover, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies began to “open a correspondence” with the Nephites (Alma 23:18). Thus the unconverted may have seen the conversion effort as an attempt by the Nephites to foment unrest. This situation was repeated a few years later, only that time it was the Nephites who feared open correspondence between a segment of Nephite population and the Lamanites; it too generated military conflict (see Alma 31:2–4).

35. An intriguing side note concerns the supposed instrumentality of the order of Nehor in the destruction of Ammonihah. According to the text, Nephite dissenters (Amalekites or Amulonites) and those of the order of Nehor encouraged the Lamanites to attack the Nephite city Ammonihah (see Alma 24:28–29), the Nehorite stronghold. Either this represents one of the most bitterly ironic passages in the Book of Mormon, or the presence of “Nehor” had become the Nephite explanation behind any and every misfortune, whether historically accurate or not.

36. The most recent conflict had been the conjoining of the Lamanite army with that of Amlici following his push to become monarch in the fifth year of the reign of the judges (see Alma 2–3). The conjoining suggests prior coordination on the part of Amlici and whoever the Lamanite king was at the time. Intriguingly, this battle was concurrent with the ministry of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. This may suggest that semi-independent city-states rather than a unified nation characterized the Lamanites (and perhaps the Nephites as well). While some may believe this merely confirms the Mesoamerican location hypothesis, it should not be

Ammonihah was totally destroyed. Although the Nephites were ultimately successful in repelling the invasion, disposal of the Ammonihahite dead took days, and the resulting smell apparently kept others from reinhabiting the city for years (see Alma 16:11).³⁷

Unfortunately, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were the direct cause of the next military conflict as well. In the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges, Lamanite animosity against the Anti-Nephi-Lehies resulted in a terrible, bloody battle following the decision of the converted Lamanites to remove to the land of Zarahemla, which they did with all of their “flocks and herds” (Alma 27:14). As noted earlier, the sons of Mosiah

treated as primary evidence for this hypothesis since much of the political landscape in the ancient world is best understood in terms of city-states.

37. Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 116: “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. The traditional Nephite perspective shows only Lamanites as aggressors (see Alma 16:2–11). But the second narration 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).” 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. See also Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 117–18: “Alma 16 also provides an intriguing example of multiple lines of causation, where we can see Mormon thinking through historical incidents both spiritually and politically. The first verse is remarkable for Mormon’s insistence that this Lamanite raid was absolutely unexpected and unprovoked. . . . The meaning is clear: an act of God destroyed the Ammonihahites in retribution for their arrogance, brutality, and rejection of the prophets. . . . However, a little later in the book of Alma, chapter 25 offers another narrative unit, one that relates the missionary adventures of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites (Alma 17–27). It turns out that the city of Ammonihah was not destroyed as if by lightning from heaven. There was a perfectly natural sequence of causes and effects that led to the Lamanite raid, and this series of events was set in motion by Ammon and his brothers. . . . So in Alma 8–18 and 17–25, we find two separate narrative strands that culminate in the destruction of Ammonihah, but the explanations given in each version are different. One is spiritual (due to God’s justice) and one political (due to Lamanite aggressions in the aftermath of Anti-Nephi-Lehi conversions). Nevertheless, both seem equally valid; apparently God’s will is sometimes manifest through ordinary historical means, and Mormon, as a historian as well as a moral guide, is interested in promoting both perspectives.”

went ahead of the converts and consulted with the Nephite leadership. A treaty was established, and the people of Ammon settled in the land of Jershon. They were followed by a Lamanite army who engaged in a confrontation with the Nephite armies that Mormon described as the worst military conflict experienced by the Nephites to that point in their history:

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. (Alma 28:2–3)

Of the dead, we are simply told that Lamanite casualties “were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered” (Alma 30:2).

The effect these events had on the Nephite population is difficult to judge exactly, but one cannot experience the worst battle in one’s history and not have it affect the society at some level—especially when it was an influx of one’s former enemies that precipitated the attack. The loss of so many family and kindred because of a people who formerly were “wild” and “ferocious” (Alma 17:14) and would not fight on their own behalf was no doubt galling to some. And the Nephite disdain for Lamanites in general would likely have played a role.

Much has been made of Lamanite animosity toward the Nephites, but the Lamanite reasons for this animosity have not been noted in any great detail. With the death of Lehi, father of both the Nephites and the Lamanites, and the subsequent exodus of the Nephites’ eponymous ancestor and his followers into the wilderness, the bitterness and ill feelings never resolved in the original colony but became the foundation of each community’s perception of the other. From the Lamanite perspective, the conflict arose over Nephi usurping the leadership position of Laman, his oldest brother. Although written by a Nephite king a little over four hundred years following the original exodus, a passage in Mosiah 10 summarizes well the Lamanite traditional belief that

they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea; And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea; . . . And again, they were wroth with [Nephi] when they had arrived in the promised land, because they said that he had taken the ruling of the people out of their hands; . . . And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness . . . and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them. And thus they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could do to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi. (Mosiah 10:12, 15–17)

Similar language is used a century later when the king over the Lamanites encountered Ammon, the son of King Mosiah, traveling with his (the king's) son Lamoni, a converted lesser Lamanite ruler:

His father was angry with him, and said: Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property. (Alma 20:13)

Thus Lamanite animosity had its roots in political and social divisions through which the Lamanites were “wronged of their rightful inheritance,” and the Nephites were viewed as deceitful usurpers.³⁸

38. It appears that the Nephites may have had similar feelings. In the twenty-ninth year of the reign of the judges, and in a moment of annoyance, Captain Moroni, in a letter to the Lamanite king, Ammoron, threatened: “Behold, I am in my anger, . . . if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance” (Alma 54:13). His outburst reveals one layer of Nephite animosity, which contrasts with the Lamanite tradition concerning what happened in the land of first inheritance. Whereas the Lamanites believed they had been tricked and cheated out of their proper place of authority, the Nephites believed they had been

Unfortunately, the Nephites themselves harbored negative stereotypes that demonstrated contempt toward the Lamanites. Where the Lamanites viewed their relationship with the Nephites in terms of grievances for perceived historical slights, the Nephites held disdain for the Lamanite people and culture in general. The prophet Jacob addressed this prejudice early in Nephite history, accusing the Nephites:

Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins; . . . Wherefore a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that you revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall you revile against them because of their filthiness. (Jacob 3:5, 9)

Jacob's reference to the "darkness of their skins" does not define this term, but its later equation with filthiness is similar to racist equivalents found elsewhere historically. Thus it seems we find the Nephites exhibiting racist prejudices against the Lamanites, a behavior that required remonstrance from a prophet.

In addition to explicit racism, the Nephites demonstrated implicit contempt through their lack of empathy for cultural differences. We have already seen that the Nephites claimed cultural superiority when interacting with the Mulekites. The Nephites also exhibited disdain for Lamanite cultural practices. For instance, in one text the Lamanites are described as

wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven. . . . And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

forced out of the land of first inheritance. Incidentally, this provides further support that Zeniff's return had a more serious purpose than simply seeking for a place of greater prosperity.

Leading a nomadic lifestyle or eating raw meat is not inherently wrong, but the above description makes it clear that it was not the “Nephite” way and thus was something Nephites understood as inappropriate or improper.³⁹ Significantly, the context for these Lamanite behaviors is missing from such descriptions, and its lack allows the emphasis to fall on negative characterizations. For instance, Gardner points out that while “beasts of prey” were most likely herbivorous like sheep and goats, they were wild and thus could be contrasted with Nephite consumption of domesticated animals. The distinction thus served to suggest the animalistic nature of the Lamanites.⁴⁰ Similarly, we read elsewhere that the Lamanites “loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts” (Jarom 1:6). Again the context for these acts is missing, allowing such descriptions to maintain and even enhance negative stereotypes. Some Lamanites in some specific contexts likely drank blood, but the implication that all Lamanites drank blood and that doing so was associated with a *love* of murder is most likely inaccurate. Certainly this characterization is a common trope found in historical polemics used to demonize others.⁴¹ Another problem appears to be the imputing of motives. Whether the writers of the above passages actually interacted with Lamanites to understand their intentions is unknown. However,

39. One might argue that eating raw meat violates the law of Moses, normative for Book of Mormon peoples before the resurrection of Christ. However, earlier in the Book of Mormon, the Nephites apparently understood the eating of raw meat as acceptable, at least in certain circumstances (see 1 Nephi 17:2). Gardner, making this same case, points out in *Second Witness*, 3:16, that “this information is more a value judgment than a cultural description. It is intended to contrast the uncivilized Lamanite with the civilized Nephite. Lamanites and Nephites are not just enemies, they are opposites. The Nephites are not just religiously superior, they are culturally superior.”

40. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:16, who contrasts this description of Lamanite hunting with Enos’s own hunting earlier in Enos 1:3–5.

41. For more on the sensationalism of the “other” via descriptions of their ritual practice, see David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73–128.

these writers still claim that the Lamanites' only motive is to continually destroy the Nephites (see Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:20).⁴²

The representation of the Lamanites as less than human is particularly apparent in Mosiah. Zeniff, the founding leader of the Nephite colony discussed before (see Mosiah 7–24), describes the Lamanites as a “wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people” possessing a “cunning, and lying craftiness,” concluding that “for this very cause has king Laman . . . deceived me, that I have brought this my people up into this land, that they may destroy them” (Mosiah 10:18). As elsewhere, both negative stereotypes and insidious motives were assigned to Lamanite behavior, although this particular instance is especially problematic. It appears in the middle of a motivational speech meant to “stimulate” a Nephite army to go “to battle with their might” against the Lamanites (Mosiah 10:19). As it turns out, however, the reason for this particular military conflict is quite complicated. According to Zeniff, the territory he and his people had come to hold had been controlled by the Lamanites but was turned over to the Nephite colonists by an agreement with the Lamanite king (see Mosiah 9:6–7). The treaty remained in force until the thirteenth year of Zeniff's reign, at which time the Lamanites

42. Conkling suggests that this discrepancy—what is said about the Lamanites compared to what they do—may be one of the central messages of the Book of Mormon: “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, . . . 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’), just as the Nephites had, and were not quite as uncivilized as the Nephites originally feared” (Conkling, “Alma's Enemies,” 115).

came up to battle. Responding to the impending attack, Zeniff attributed the aforementioned motives to his Lamanite enemies: “they were a lazy and an idolatrous people; therefore they were desirous to bring us into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands” (Mosiah 9:12). Yet just one verse earlier, Zeniff admitted “that after we had dwelt in the land for the space of twelve years that king Laman began to grow uneasy, lest by any means my people should wax strong in the land, and that they could not overpower them and bring them into bondage” (Mosiah 9:11). Although the last part of this verse makes accusations similar to the subsequent verse, the earlier part suggests that Lamanite rulers had become understandably uneasy about a growing Nephite presence in their territory. That the Lamanite concern was justified may be evidenced by the fact that prior to the treaty, there were conflicts within Zeniff’s own Nephite community over whether they should enter into the treaty or simply slaughter the Lamanites outright (see Mosiah 9:1–2).⁴³ This antipathy among a group of Nephites toward the Lamanites, as well as the defensive rebuilding of these Nephite cities (see Mosiah 9:8), may have provided the impetus for the preemptive attack by the Lamanites.

Following this first conflict in which Zeniff’s people successfully defended themselves, another decade of peace passed before the second battle described in Mosiah 10. In this case, King Laman had died and his son had been enthroned, although, like other new kings whose power is not yet established in the first year, he may have believed that the Nephites represented a direct threat to his nascent reign. What seems problematic is Zeniff’s reasoning that the attack reflected the “cunning, and lying craftiness, and fair promises” of the then-deceased King Laman, who supposedly allowed the Nephites to grow and prosper

43. Gardner, using Mesoamerican history as a model, suggests that the Lamanite attack is a result of their desire to pull in Zeniff’s people as tributaries and that twelve years was insufficient time to “wax strong” enough to overthrow Lamanite hegemony (see *Second Witness*, 3:235–26).

while fully intending to have them destroyed twenty-two years later, even after his own death.⁴⁴

One last example may not be as blatant in its stereotyping as others, but it is just as negative. During the reign of Noah, Zeniff's son, the Lamanites attacked again, perhaps in response to an ostentatious building program that included an observation tower built expressly to spy on the surrounding Lamanites (see Mosiah 11:12). Upon seeing the Lamanites approach, Noah fled, leaving behind many of his people to counter the attack. Those left behind sent forth their daughters to plead for them. "The Lamanites [then] had compassion on them, for they were charmed with the beauty of their women" (Mosiah 19:14). In this familiar literary trope, the unsophisticated "wild man" appears to be tamed by the beauty of a woman—not just any woman, but a cultured, sophisticated woman who represents the refined (and therefore better) nature of a particular culture. While such stories often end positively, with the wild man becoming a productive member of the refined community, the scenario could also be used to draw lines of demarcation. The woman might not agree to charm the wild man, or the wild man's inordinate fixation on the woman's beauty may demonstrate that he

44. Others have noted the apparent Nephite discrimination here. Again, see Conkling, "Alma's Enemies," 131n21: "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)."

should *not* be a part of the community.⁴⁵ In this case, though, the text presents the Lamanites as country rubes awed by the physical beauty of the Nephites' daughters.

The immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies into Nephite territory occurred within this cultural and political environment of prejudice and hostility. Not only was there a five-hundred-year history of Lamanite-Nephite distrust and animosity, but just three years prior to their arrival, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies had indirectly caused the annihilation of an entire Nephite city. Their later settlement in Nephite territory then led to the worst military event in Nephite history up to that time. These factors were well known to the people involved. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies were sensitive to the challenges their presence would present to the Nephites "because of the many murders and sins [they had] committed against them" (Alma 27:6). In light of this, their leader suggested they become slaves to the Nephites "until we repair unto them the many murders and sins" (Alma 27:8). Although the incoming community did not expect such reparations, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were willing to appease the inevitable tensions that would arise from their presence by voluntarily submitting themselves to such a state. Moreover, it would also have at least implied their acquiescence to Nephite cultural/social/religious superiority.

Of course, such an act of submission was unacceptable to the sons of Mosiah, who in response reiterated their father's injunction against slavery. Instead, they proposed to meet with the Nephite leadership to plead their case. Alma, the high priest and former chief judge, acted as their sponsor before the chief judge. After hearing the case, the "chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land, desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (Alma 27:21). Although this was not the first time the voice of the people had weighed in on a large-scale sociopolitical issue, a decade had passed since the last time. Even though the text is not clear on how the judges acquired the voice of the people, the result

45. For an example of the former, see the Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh. For an example of the latter, see the familiar European folktale Rumpelstiltskin.

was a treaty (outlined in Alma 27:22–24) with stipulations for both the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The latter were to receive the land of Jershon by the east shore. The Nephites agreed to place military forces in the territory to “protect our brethren in the land Jershon . . . on account of their fear to take up arms against their brethren lest they should commit sin . . . that they may inherit the land of Jershon” (Alma 27:23–24).

Though readers often focus on the apparent goodwill behind the agreement, indications in the text suggest they reflected lingering Nephite concerns. For instance, the land of Jershon given to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies was situated on the other side of the river Sidon from Zarahemla, meaning that there was no direct geographical contact between the newly installed Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the Nephite capital. Moreover, a Nephite military presence was established with the official understanding that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies would not pick up a weapon in the newly provided territory because of their “great fear,” which arose from their “sore repentance . . . on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness” (Alma 27:23). Finally, the treaty clarified that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were expected to provide physical sustenance for the military force stationed among them.

While these conditions may seem reasonable, even just, they were remarkably similar to the stipulations of the Lamanite-Nephite agreement established during the reign of King Laman and King Zeniff in the land of Nephi, including the stationing of a military force among the Nephites and the required provision of sustenance for the military force. In that case, the agreement was made to alleviate security concerns on the Lamanites’ part regarding an overzealous Nephite community living in their midst. Of course, on that occasion the agreement served as evidence to the Nephites for why they had been treated wrongly by the native Lamanite people. The treaty between the Nephites and the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, on the other hand, received no such negative assessment, even though one can identify the same security concerns behind it. In any case, the immigration of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the ensuing, horrific battle would affect the Nephites for generations to come.

Conclusion

As all the above circumstances suggest, the first seventeen years of the reign of the judges were a challenging time. Continued fallout from a massive political restructuring, reemerging native population powers, and the influx of new immigrant groups who did not fully assimilate deeply challenged their society. When experienced simultaneously among the Nephites, these challenges created a sociopolitical environment in which individuals or events could threaten the social fabric by exacerbating the tensions already present. The resulting crises defined the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges and the few months prior to and following it.

For the discerning reader, the above historical factors and their subsequent consequences may seem similar to modern circumstances. If so, then it would appear that Mormon deliberately framed the crises within their historical framework with his audience in mind, for there is no question that we are his intended audience (see Mormon 8:34–35). And if this is the case, then the necessity of seeing the larger picture—recognizing that political, social, and religious crises do not arise out of a vacuum but emerge from larger sociopolitical challenges set in motion years earlier—may be one of the more important lessons that Mormon provides.

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