A Study of Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite Governmental Institutions and Policies as Portrayed in The Book of Mormon

Donald Arthur Cazier

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A STUDY OF NEPHITE, LAMANITE, AND JAREDITE
GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES
AS PORTRAYED IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Ancient Scripture
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Donald Arthur Cazier
August 1972
This thesis, by Donald Arthur Cazier, is accepted in its present form by the Department of Ancient Scripture in the College of Religious Instruction of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Hyrum L. Andrus, Committee Chairman

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July 25, 1972
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the willing assistance and invaluable suggestions of Dr. Hyrum L. Andrus, committee chairman, Dr. Monte S. Nyman, committee member, and Dr. Robert C. Patch, department chairman, in the preparation of this thesis. Appreciation is also expressed to Dr. Chauncey C. Riddle, who suggested the topic, and to Dr. Paul R. Cheesman, who read the first five chapters and offered several helpful suggestions.

Special gratitude is expressed to the writer's wife, Virginia, for her help in typing and proofreading the manuscript and for her patience while the writing was in progress. Similar appreciation is extended to Ginette, Susan, Carina, Cheryl, David, and Danny for their cooperation in the project and for temporarily foregoing some of the time their father could otherwise have spent with them.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe the governmental institutions and policies of the Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite nations on the basis of information contained in the Book of Mormon itself, although an introductory chapter reviews the governmental practices of the ancient Israelites, whose culture, according to the Book of Mormon, Lehi's colony transplanted in the New World. Insofar as was possible, conclusions were drawn concerning the following aspects of these civilizations during their recorded history:

1. The governmental structure under which these nations lived at different times in their history and the theoretical powers and duties of their officers.

2. The laws which were enacted and domestic policies which were pursued.

3. The rights enjoyed by the citizens.

4. The "foreign policy" of these nations, where applicable, including military policy.
5. The teachings of Book of Mormon prophets and secular leaders concerning governmental matters.

6. The reasons for the relative success or failure of the various types of government, the reasons for the change from one type of government to another, and the lessons which can be drawn from the political experiences of the Book of Mormon peoples.

DELIMITATIONS

This study was delimited by choice in the following respects:

1. No attempt was made to prove the divine origin of the Book of Mormon or to demonstrate its authenticity as either an historical or a religious document.

2. No analysis was made of ecclesiastical institutions, except insofar as they were directly related to the civil government.

3. No attempt was made to analyze the government of the Lamanites following the close of the Book of Mormon record.

4. No detailed discussion of specific military strategy and methods, apart from overall military policy, was included.

5. No review was undertaken of archaeological findings concerning Book of Mormon times. According to Ross T. Christensen,

Archaeology . . . cannot ordinarily be relied upon to produce direct evidence of the non-material aspects of culture. . . . We could not, for example, hope to learn much concerning ancient
swimming strokes, or theological doctrines, or kinship structures, or spoken languages.¹

Dr. Christensen could as easily have included political institutions in his list of examples.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Any analysis of the Book of Mormon from the standpoint of political institutions is limited of necessity by the book's relative scarcity of information on the subject, although enough details were included to make the present study feasible. By its own admission, the Book of Mormon is essentially a religious, not a political history. This is particularly true of the portion dealing with the first five hundred years of Nephite history, during which time two separate sets of plates were maintained: one devoted to "an account . . . of the ministry" and the other containing "an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions" of the people.² Only the religious record of this period was incorporated into the present Book of Mormon.

The record of the second five hundred years of Nephite civilization, while including details of both religious and secular life, is an abridgment of "many books and many records of every kind,"

¹Ross T. Christensen, "Present Status of Book of Mormon Archaeology," Millennial Star /London/, CXIV (Sept., 1952), 207.

²The Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1958), 1 Nephi 9:3-4. Hereafter references to the Book of Mormon will be cited in the body of this thesis.
so highly condensed by the prophet-historian Mormon that less than "a hundredth part" of the proceedings of the people could be included. (Helaman 3:14-15.) The problem is even more acute in the Book of Ether, which covers some thirty generations of Jaredite history in a mere thirty-two pages. Rich as parts of the Book of Mormon are in details of political institutions, it is obvious that much has been omitted.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Value of Political History

Latter-day Saint scriptures and leaders have repeatedly emphasized the importance of studying both history and political science. A revelation dated May 6, 1833, instructed Joseph Smith "to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and of man, and all this for the salvation of Zion." 3 John Taylor made clear that this commandment applied not only to the president of the Church but to each member, although the saints in his day were apparently slow to comprehend it. Addressing an assembly in the Tabernacle in 1862, he said:

As we have progressed the mist has been removed, and . . . the Elders of Israel begin to understand that they have something to do with the world politically as well as

3 The Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1958), 93:53, hereafter cited as D&C.
religiously, that it is as much their duty to study correct political principles as well as religious, and to seek to know and comprehend the social and political interests of man, and to learn and be able to teach that which would be best calculated to promote the interests of the world.⁴

To those who would question the propriety of mingling religion and politics, the spiritual and the temporal, the Doctrine and Covenants answers that man's temporal and spiritual concerns are inseparably connected—that unto the Lord all things are spiritual and are therefore related to man's spiritual welfare. (D&C 29:34.) In fact, Joseph Smith assured John C. Calhoun that at least one political question (the states' rights issue) was "a subject great as the salvation of man, consequential as the life of the Savior, broad as the principles of eternal truth, and valuable as the jewels of eternity."⁵

According to the Prophet, the saints have a moral obligation not only to learn correct political principles but to concentrate all their influence "to make popular that which is sound and good, and unpopular that which is unsound."⁶ He felt, as did John Taylor, that "if any person ought to interfere in political matters, it should be

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⁶*HC*, V, 286.
those whose minds and judgments are influenced by correct principles—religious as well as political."\(^7\)

The Book of Mormon presents itself as a source of such "correct principles" in the field of politics. Joseph Smith reported receiving detailed instructions from Moroni three times the same evening concerning the "civilization, laws, and governments" of the ancient inhabitants of the land.\(^8\) The obvious implication is that a knowledge of those laws and governments would be useful to modern man.

Since the Book of Mormon is, in some respects, a record of moral, social, and political failure, it is particularly well suited, according to Moroni, to teaching its readers "to be more wise than we have been." (Mormon 9:31.) Indeed, Moroni stated that he wrote by commandment of God (Ether 8:26), knowing by vision the conditions which would prevail in the latter days (Mormon 8:34-35), so that the Gentile inhabitants of this land in the last days might escape the fate of the Jaredite and Nephite nations, whose history he was chronicling. (Ether 2:11.) The Book of Mormon thus claims to be as much a manual for national survival as for individual salvation.

\(^7\)Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, Illinois), VI (March 15, 1844), 471.

\(^8\)HC, IV, 537.
The comparative emphasis given in the book itself to some periods of Book of Mormon history at the expense of others also suggests the concern of its authors for latter-day political and social problems. The book devotes 220 pages to the 120 years of Nephite history during which a republican form of government prevailed, while it skims over the remaining 900 years in just 270 pages. Seemingly the compiler of the record felt that his latter-day readers would profit most by observing the Nephite approach to problems most similar to their own.

Many have commented on the value of history as a guide to present policy. "History gives us a kind of chart. . . ." according to Sir John Buchan. "The hasty reformer who does not remember the past will find himself condemned to repeat it." Book of Mormon prophets agree. Alma was concerned that his son remember "the captivity of our fathers." (Alma 36:2.) And Moroni asserted that one of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon was "to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers." While a knowledge of history is useful to almost anyone, it is doubly so to the statesman, politician, and legislator. "It is there alone,"

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10 Book of Mormon, title page.
affirmed Samuel Whelpley, "he can trace the origin and operation, and, of course, the excellencies and defects of the various forms of government."\textsuperscript{11} In this same vein Woodrow Wilson predicted, "Our liberties are safe until the memories and experiences of the past are blotted out."\textsuperscript{12} The Book of Mormon claims to be a history of three separate nations on the American continent whose combined experience reflects the "origin and operation and . . . the excellencies and defects"\textsuperscript{13} of practically every major form of government known to man. And its authors assert that the liberty, prosperity, and even national survival of their latter-day successors are dependent on the application of the religious and political principles contained in their work.

Need for the Present Study

Comparing the Nephite civilization to that of the Romans during the same period, Reynolds and Sjodahl wrote:

If the existence of wise, just and liberal laws, administered in righteousness, be the rule by which we can judge of the true greatness of a nation and of the happiness and prosperity of its citizens, then the Nephites were a far happier and more prosperous people than were their contemporaries on the eastern continent.

. . . We imagine the student cannot fail to be impressed with the thought that they were at least a thousand years in

\textsuperscript{11}Samuel Whelpley, \textit{A Compend of History from the Earliest Times} (Boston: West, Richardson \& Lord, 1820), p. 201.


\textsuperscript{13}Whelpley, op. cit.
advance of their fellow men in the science of true government; and in their polity find a type of the most advanced and most liberal forms of government of the present age.¹⁴

While there have been countless volumes produced dealing with Roman law and government, little has been written concerning the Nephite institutions. It is true that various LDS writers have dealt with selected aspects of Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite political life, but no one has yet come forth with a comprehensive work dealing in depth with the subject. This study is a first step toward filling that gap.

The Book of Mormon's Contribution to American Political Thought

A further justification for the study of the political implications of the Book of Mormon is the basis it provides for an understanding of Joseph Smith's political outlook and Mormon political thought in general.¹⁵ Many of the Prophet's later pronouncements on political issues are reflections of the teachings of the Book of Mormon on the same subject. "Even to the skeptic," wrote Jean Wunderlich, the Book of Mormon "should be a significant, though hitherto neglected


¹⁵G. Homer Durham, Joseph Smith, Prophet-Statesman (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Co., 1944), p. 3.
contribution to American social thought."\textsuperscript{16} Regardless of the origin or authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the ideas of the book would demand investigation and analysis simply because the book exists and has influenced so many. As Horace Greeley wrote:

Full of error and suffering as the world yet is we cannot afford to reject unexamined any idea which proposes to improve the Moral, Intellectual, or Social condition of mankind. Better incur the trouble of testing and exploding a thousand fallacies than by rejecting stifle a single beneficient Truth.\textsuperscript{17}

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

As was previously indicated, this study was essentially an intensive internal analysis of the Book of Mormon as it relates to governmental matters. John Sorenson suggested, with regard to the social structure of the Book of Mormon peoples, "You must do some reading between the lines and sometimes two or three readings of the lines in order to see what is there."\textsuperscript{18} This study has attempted to comply with those recommendations. Pertinent information has also been drawn from the following additional sources: (1) the teachings

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Jean Wunderlich, "The Social Message of the Book of Mormon," \textit{A Book of Mormon Treasury}, comp. The Improvement Era (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), p. 274.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Horace Greeley, editorial, \textit{Tribune (New York)}, 1845, cited in Fox, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}John L. Sorenson, "Nephite Social Structure," lecture to the Salt Lake City chapter of the University Archaeological Society, Feb., 1964 (MS in Brigham Young University Library), p. 1.
\end{itemize}
and writings of Book of Mormon scholars and LDS Church authorities bearing on the concept of the political kingdom of God in Mormon thought and the government of Book of Mormon peoples in particular; (2) works dealing with the government of ancient Israel, including the Old Testament; and (3) other selected works in such fields as political science and history which were considered likely to yield relevant information.
Chapter 2

THE LATTER-DAY SAINT CONCEPT OF THEOCRACY

Latter-day prophets have taught that the full development of the kingdom of God in any dispensation involves the establishment of political as well as ecclesiastical institutions—a state as well as a church. As expressed by Sidney Rigdon at the April, 1844, general conference of the Church: "When God sets up a system of salvation, He sets up a system of government. When I speak of a government, I mean what I say. I mean a government that shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs."¹ Brigham Young likewise affirmed:

"We, as Latter-day Saints expect, look for and will not be satisfied with anything short of being governed and controlled by the word of the Lord in all of our acts, both spiritual and temporal. If we do not live for this, we do not live to be one with Christ."²

John Taylor made a similar statement. "Do you not think we need revelation about government as much as anything else?" he asked. "I think we do. I think we need God to dictate to us as much in our national and social affairs as in church matters."³

¹_HC, VI, 292. ²_JD, X, 329. ³_JD, XV, 176.
It follows, then, that to the extent that either biblical or Book of Mormon peoples were led by the Lord in matters of religion, we may likewise expect them to have been directed by him in their political affairs. Sacred history confirms that such was the case. "By a careful perusal of the scriptures," John Taylor wrote, "we shall find that God in ancient days had as much to do with governments, kings and kingdoms, as he ever had to do with religion." While civil governments under the direction of God may have differed in details of organization and procedure, they each, in the Latter-day Saint view, have been distinguished by adherence to a set of basic principles common to all types of theocratic rule. Thus, an understanding of the LDS concept of theocracy in general is basic to an appreciation of the Nephite and Jaredite institutions in particular. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to analyze the characteristic features of the government of God, as understood by the Latter-day Saints, as it has appeared in various ages of the world and as it is expected yet to be established preparatory to the millennial reign of Christ.

It should be remembered that the Book of Mormon, as well as the Bible, details frequent and determined resistance to the Lord's efforts to lead his people. Apostasy from the divine standard in political matters was as common as its counterpart in the religious

---

realm. In fact, the two nearly always coincided. Seemingly God's will has seldom been done as fully on earth as it is in heaven. Nevertheless, an examination of the principles and underlying premises of the theocratic ideal will provide a standard of measurement by which both Israelite and Nephite governmental institutions may be examined.

**LEGITIMACY**

Theocratic government is based upon the premise that all things were created by the Lord, and that as the rightful owner and proprietor of the world He is also its lawful sovereign and ruler.\(^5\)

He it is, according to the Doctrine and Covenants, "whose right it is to reign." (D&C 58:22.) In the words of John Taylor, "It is impossible that there can be any legitimate rule, government, power, or authority, under the face of the heavens, except that which is connected with the Kingdom of God, which is established by new revelation from heaven."\(^6\)

"All other governments," added Orson Pratt, "are illegal and unauthorized."\(^7\)

In the opinion of Joseph Smith, man is not only unauthorized but unable properly to control his political affairs without divine

\(^{5}\text{ID, I, 223.}\) \(^{6}\text{ID, I, 225.}\)

\(^{7}\text{Orson Pratt, Orson Pratt's Works (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1945), p. 31.}\)
assistance. He proclaimed, "The government of God has always tended to promote peace, unity, harmony, strength and happiness; while that of man has been productive of confusion, disorder, weakness, and misery."8 To the Prophet, the history of man-made governments from the beginning proclaimed "as with a voice of thunder, those imperishable truths—that man's strength is weakness, his wisdom is folly, his glory is his shame."9 However much disposed uninspired rulers may feel to benefit the world, John Taylor held, "it is out of their power, it exceeds the limits of their jurisdiction, it requires a power, spirit, and intelligence, which they do not possess,"10 In keeping with this philosophy, the Doctrine and Covenants enjoins that "man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of the flesh" (D&C 1:19), whether in matters of politics, economics, or religion, unless such counseling or teaching is done under the influence of the Holy Spirit. (D&C 42:14.) "The wisdom of their wise men shall perish," wrote Isaiah, "and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." (Isaiah 29:14.) To Latter-day Saints, therefore, the ideal society will be that promised by the Lord wherein "ye shall have no mortal king nor ruler, for I will be your king and

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8 *Times and Seasons*, III (July 15, 1842), 855.

9 Ibid., pp. 855-856.

watch over you... And you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws when I come." (D&C 38:21-22.)

THE THEOCRATIC STRUCTURE

A theocracy, or government of God, by Parley P. Pratt's definition, means "the legislative, judicial, and executive power is vested in Him. He reveals the laws, and he elects, chooses, or appoints the officers, and holds the right to reprove, to correct, or even to remove them at pleasure." While a theocracy acknowledges the ultimate sovereignty of God, it is, of course, more immediately under the direction of his authorized representatives, or priesthood, whose responsibility it is to discern and execute the will of the Almighty. Joseph Smith taught that inherent within the Melchizedek Priesthood is the authority to preside over not only ecclesiastical but political institutions. He remarked, "Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High, holding keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy." Speaking in a similar vein on another occasion, he observed: "Have we not learned the Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, which includes both Prophets, Priests,

11Parley P. Pratt, "Proclamation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," Millennial Star, V (March, 1845), 150.
12HC, V, 555.
and kings." Melchizedek himself, the scriptures attest, was not only "the priest of the most high God" to whom even Abraham paid tithes, but a political leader as well, ruling as "king of Salem." (Gen. 14:18.)

Inherent in this view is the concept that a prophet is not merely a religious figure who occasionally steps out of his field to make a political pronouncement. Rather, when the kingdom of God is fully established, he is the Lord's appointed representative to govern in both spiritual and temporal matters. Standing above both church and state, a prophet has the authority to establish policy and appoint the lesser officers of both organizations. While the direct responsibility for administering the details of the political government may be delegated by the prophet to kings, judges, or similar officials, it should never be forgotten that the king was always intended to be and was generally acknowledged to be subservient to the prophet. Only

13 Manuscript History of the Church, July 23, 1843, located in Church Historian's Office (microfilm copy).

14 Though both church and state are controlled by the same priesthood, often with the same individual at the head of both (e.g., Moses, Alma, Adam, Nephi), they have been held to be in a real sense two separate and distinct institutions. George Q. Cannon explained: "We are asked, Is the Church of God, and the Kingdom of God the same organization? and we are informed that some of the brethren hold that they are separate. This is the correct view to take." (HC, VII, 382.) The separate nature of the two organizations was further attested to by Brigham Young, who pointed out that "a man may be a legislator in that body which will issue laws to sustain the inhabitants of the earth in their individual rights and still not belong to the Church of Jesus Christ at all." (HC, VII, 382.)
In times of apostasy have political leaders attempted to reverse the procedure and dictate to a prophet the limits of his authority and responsibility.

The centralization of both ecclesiastical and political authority in one man has been the rule, not the exception, throughout both profane and sacred history. Particularly was this true of ancient governments, which almost without exception were at least in theory under the direct control of God. "State and cult are inseparable in the ancient East," wrote Nibley. Religious and political authority were for a long time not differentiated, and the dominant religion in early societies was almost always integrated with the government. "It cannot be sufficiently emphasized . . .," contended Parkinson, "that the primary functions of kingship, more especially in agricultural communities, were essentially religious."18

The earliest known governments were not only theocratic but patriarchal in nature, with political institutions based upon the


authority of age. To a certain extent, "every family is a kingdom, a nation, a government, within itself, . . . and the head of the family is the legislator, the judge, the governor." Latter-day Saints assert that this patriarchal order is of divine origin and that under its provisions righteous men are to be made "kings and priests" (i.e., political as well as religious leaders) and will "reign on the earth" over their posterity, both in time and eternity. (Rev. 5:10.) The idea of the "divine right of kings" is, in this light, a true principle, however much it has been misunderstood and perverted throughout history.

According to the Book of Abraham, a patriarchal, theocratic monarchy was instituted in the days of Adam and remained through the epoch of Noah. The same order continued into the times of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with the Patriarchs serving as political as well as religious leaders to their people, ruling under the authority of the priesthood by direct revelation from God. The Pearl of Great Price indicates that the success of this type of patriarchal theocracy caused

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19 Ibid., pp. 25-26.  
20 *Millennial Star*, XIV, 290.  
21 The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1958), Abraham 1:25-26, hereafter cited as P. of G. P.  
other nations, including the early Egyptian, to "seek earnestly to imitate that order." (P. of G. P., Abraham 1:26.) Most, however, while maintaining the form of theocracy, seem to have departed from the spirit of that institution. According to Joseph Fielding Smith:

It appears that the great majority, even from the beginning, turned away from the rightful government established by the Almighty through Adam, and which was based upon divine authority and revelation. . . . In this spirit men organized themselves into their own political governments. . . . In this way political kingdoms came into existence nourished and built upon rebellion against the established government of God first given unto man.23

To Latter-day Saints an integral part of the restoration of the gospel is the eventual reestablishment of a pure theocracy upon the earth. This reuniting of political and ecclesiastical leadership under the priesthood is "the only thing," according to Joseph Smith, "that can bring about the 'restitution of all things spoken of by all the holy Prophets since the world was."24 The Prophet taught that the Lord's people are ultimately to be governed as were the Israelites under Moses, of whose system he said:

Their government was a theocracy; they had God to make their laws, and men chosen by Him to administer them; He was their God, and they were his people. Moses received: the word of the Lord from God Himself; he was the mouth of God to Aaron, and Aaron taught the people, in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs; they were both one, there was no distinction.25

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24 HC, V, 64. 25 Ibid.
Men thus authorized and inspired of God are able to accomplish politically what others never could. As Brigham Young expressed it:

When men are placed at the head of government who are actually controlled by the power of God--by the Holy Ghost--they can lay plans, they can frame constitutions, they can form governments and laws that have not the seeds of death within them, and no other men can do it.  

**POPULAR CONSENT**

Technically, a theocracy does not provide for elections in the usual sense of the word, but it does preserve the right of the people either to approve or reject both the officers and the policies of their government once they have been proposed by the constituted priesthood authorities. In this respect, as noted by Franklin D. Richards, it "embodies the two extremes of absolute power and republicanism," preserving all of the advantages of efficiency and central authority common to a monarchy without relinquishing any of the benefits and safeguards of a democracy. Just as no person is ordained to a Church office without the vote of the members (D&C 20:65), neither could a political functionary operate in a theocracy without being accepted by his constituents. Thus, in a sense, the Lord nominates and the people elect. He makes the laws while the people ratify them.

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26 Id., IV, 267-268. 27 Millennial Star, XVII, 274.
Rather than *Vox populi, vox Dei,* the rule in a theocracy becomes *Vox Dei, vox populi.* As John Taylor wrote, "The proper mode of government is this—God first speaks, and then the people have their action. It is for them to say whether they will have his dictation or not."Joseph Smith's term for such a government was a "Theodemocracy, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness."  

**PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF THEOCRATIC GOVERNMENT**

The highest possible degree of freedom consistent with the establishment of equal rights and protection for all is the essential goal of the government of God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," wrote Paul to the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 3:17.) Brigham Young taught that such a government would "govern and protect in their rights the various classes of men, irrespective of their different modes of worship." The Doctrine and Covenants specifies that those "just and holy principles of civil and religious liberty which are incorporated in the Constitution of the United States were designed by the Lord "for the rights and protection of all flesh." (D&C 101:77.) As such, according to Orson Pratt,

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28 *ID*, IX, 10.

29 *Times and Seasons*, V (April 15, 1844), 510.

30 *ID*, V, 330.
they are an integral part of a true theocracy and will be found in the latter-day kingdom of God. 31

The political government of God, as distinguished from the ecclesiastical organization, however, has only a limited role. Whereas the protection of life, liberty, and property are held to be proper functions of government, social and economic reform are seen as the responsibility of the Church or society of Zion. The Doctrine and Covenants indicates that provision for the poor and needy and achievement of true social justice are indeed part of the Lord's program. In fact, one revelation stipulates, "If ye are not one ye are not mine." (D&C 38:27.) Another passage warns, "If ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things." (D&C 78:6.) But the same latter-day scriptural record specifies that such provision for the poor "must needs be done in mine own way" (D&C 104:16), through a voluntary system of ideal individualism and true social union known as the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. When fully developed, this program is to be administered by the United Order, the economic arm of the Church, and not by the regulations of political government--not even the government of God. 32 Participation in this system presupposes a high degree

31 ID, XIII, 126.

of obedience and unselfishness—a manifestation of love on a celestial plane available only through the Spirit of the Lord to those who accept the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Since political government, by its very nature, involves force, actual or potential, and since a theocratic government would include non-members as well as members of the Church, such a government would be ill-suited to the administration of a voluntary social and economic program adapted only to the spiritually regenerated. Mormon doctrine affirms that the Lord has authorized the use of force for purposes of self-defense (D&C 134:11), but seems otherwise to prohibit it, stressing that "no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood excepted", only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." (D&C 121:41.)

The Book of Moses relates that Satan was cast out of heaven for persisting in a scheme to assure the security of mankind at the expense of their agency (P. of G. P., Moses 4:1-3), and implies that the Lord's system involves maximizing freedom, even if that freedom should be abused. Hugh Nibley pointed out that this has been a difficult lesson for earthly rulers to learn. The normal tendency has been for political leaders not only to restrain crime but to attempt to

\[33\text{Moroni 7:48; 8:25-26; D&C 105:2-6.}\]
punish sin itself. But God's program, on the other hand, has been to preach righteousness, endorse charity, and encourage unity, but to permit such sins as selfishness, pride, and greed which lead to inequality and social injustice. Thus, only as men are spiritually regenerated through the gospel can true social justice at last become universal.

DIVINE SANCTION OF "LIMITED THEOCRACIES"

The foregoing picture of governmental structures and policies is considered the ideal. But just as the Lord gave Moses a lesser religious law as a schoolmaster to prepare his people for the more perfect law taught by Christ, so has He found it necessary, according to religious history, to vary his political instructions according to man's capacity to receive. Both the rule of the judges and the monarchy in Israel were established by the Lord, though the latter was given in consequence of the inability or unwillingness of the people to live under the former. The Church's "Declaration of Belief Regarding Governments and Laws in General" begins, "We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man." (D&C 134:1.) But no one claims that all human governments, or any of them, for that matter, coincide fully with the divine pattern. Even the United States

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Constitution, according to latter-day scripture, was "suffered to be established by the Lord," (D&C 101:77, italics added), implying that good as it is it still falls short of the ideal. "Why," asked Orson Pratt, "did not the Lord, at that time, introduce a perfect government—a theocracy?" Answering his own question, he replied, "It was simply because the people were not prepared for it." 35

But though lesser forms of government have been instituted, or at least tolerated, by the Lord as best adapted to the capabilities of mankind in a state of spiritual immaturity, they have always been considered inferior to the type of rule which will prevail when God's will is "done on earth as it is in heaven," and which scripture asserts he has attempted to establish at various times in the past. Latter-day Saints fully expect the literal fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy that in the latter days the God of heaven shall "set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." (Dan. 2:28, 44.) That such a kingdom is to be more than a religious organization is clear from Daniel's prediction that "it shall break in pieces and consume" all other kingdoms and "stand forever." (Dan. 2:44.) During the millennium it is anticipated that the Lord will be in the midst of his people and be their "king and their lawgiver." (D&C 45:59.) Though not all inhabitants of the earth will belong to the Church, even for a time after

35 JA, III, 71.
Christ's coming, they will still, according to Brigham Young, "be obliged to acknowledge His kingly government." As foreseen by Daniel, "There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Dan. 7:14.)

With the foregoing resume of the theory of theocracy as a background, let us proceed to take a closer look at the governmental institutions of the Israelites, first under the judges and later under the monarchy, before examining the equivalent institutions of their New World descendants.

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36 JD, VII, 142.
Chapter 3

THEOCRACY IN THE OLD WORLD: ANCIENT ISRAEL UNDER THE JUDGES AND UNDER THE MONARCHY

The Book of Mormon presents the Nephites as a transplanted culture, proud of their Israelite heritage. They never forgot they were "wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness." (Jacob 7:26.) In contrast to the Mulekites, they stoutly preserved their original culture, speaking their original language, maintaining their religious beliefs and practices, quoting the Hebrew scriptures, and copying Jewish architecture. There is little reason to doubt that they preserved the political ideals of their former homeland as well. As stated by John Sorenson, "We suppose that patterns of social organization continue unless there is good reason to change them."¹ Nibley asserted, "The Nephites were a small party of migrants laden with a very heavy and complete cultural baggage."² As he further pointed out, the eagerness and ease with which the Nephites adopted

¹John L. Sorenson, "Nephite Social Structure" (lecture to the Salt Lake City chapter of the University Archaeological Society, Feb., 1964), pp. 1-2. MS in Brigham Young University library.

the system of judges proposed by Mosiah suggests they were already familiar with it. Paul Cheesman reached the same conclusion: "The Nephite-Lamanite-Mulekite cultures upheld the traditions and customs of their native land, Jerusalem." A look at Old World political institutions and practices should, therefore, offer some useful clues as to the nature of their later New World counterparts.

ISRAEL UNDER THE JUDGES

The history of ancient Israel is the story of God's attempt to establish a theocratic rule among his people and their resistance to such efforts. This resistance was manifest not so much in incidental departure from a divinely established governmental structure as in an underlying reluctance to follow the Almighty at all. Theoretically, the government of Israel under the judges embodied all of the essential elements of a theocracy set forth in the preceding chapter. Nonetheless, the period from Moses to Samuel has been assailed by some as the "Dark Ages of Hebrew History," while others have asserted that

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"never did ancient Israel enjoy as free and happy a government as under the reign of the judges."6 This difference of opinion can be attributed partly to the scanty information concerning the period and partly to the evident gap between the theory and the practice of the Israelites under this particular form of government. For the purposes of the present study the theory is more important than the practice, since Lehi's colony obviously could bring only the ideals of Hebraic government with them, not the government itself.

Theocratic Origin

The government of the Jewish nation under the judges was, we are told, "founded and regulated by the express command of the Almighty himself, through the instrumentality of his appointed and special lawgiver."7 The Lord not only originated the system (1 Chron. 17:10) and framed the laws (Ex. 20ff), but personally called the first judge. (Ex. 3:10ff.) Subsequent leaders were to be appointed in the same way, either through a direct call from God or his heavenly messenger, as was the case with Gideon, or through an authorized human intermediary, as occurred with Joshua. Once called, such political leaders were to seek and abide by the Lord's will in matters of public policy. (Judg. 8:23.)

6Erastus Snow, JD, XXIII, 90.

The term "theocracy" itself was used by Josephus to describe the unique Hebrew constitution. After discussing the various usual forms of government—monarchies, oligarchies, and democracies, he declared:

Our legislator had no regard to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what, by a strained expression, may be termed a Theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God, and by persuading all the people to have a regard to him.\(^8\)

**Hierarchical Structure**

While in the desert, Israel had a hierarchy of rulers, or judges, in charge of bodies of ten, fifty, one hundred, and one thousand, with Moses the supreme authority in political and military as well as religious matters. (Ex. 18:21–22.) It was planned that in Canaan they would have an unspecified number of "judges and officers" in every city, presumably organized along similar lines. (Deut. 16:18.) We are told furthermore of elders of all the tribes (Deut. 31:28), elders of individual tribes (1 Sam. 30:26), and elders of towns. (1 Sam. 16:4.) Since the social order in Israel was patriarchal, with towns developing along clan lines, it may be conjectured that the elders of the towns were essentially the elders of the clans themselves.\(^9\)

Unfortunately, the record is unclear as to whether the "elders of the

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\(^8\) Flavius Josephus Against Apion, II, 17.

tribes" were merely the sum total or a select number of the elders of the clans, or towns, or whether they were an entirely distinct and separate body. In either case, the function of the councils of elders seems to have been to administer justice, represent their association in negotiations, and make other administrative decisions. 10

Decentralization

The government was extremely decentralized, to the point that judges with nationwide authority seem to have appeared chiefly in times of dire national emergency when a unified military effort was needed. Otherwise, "each tribe under its individual leaders maintained its independence, fought its own battles, and struggled to work out its own problems." 11 In both political and religious matters, according to Salo Baron, "the affairs of the individual were affected more by local than by national developments." 12

Functions of the Judges

Although little information is available about the rights and duties of the so-called "judges," it is clear that their functions

10Ibid.


extended beyond the judicial realm. In fact, since the administration of ordinary justice was handled by the local elders, "the judge of Israel," explained Noth, "could be applied to at the most as a court of appeal."\(^{13}\) As Bernhard Anderson elaborated:

The Hebrew word \textit{shofet} is not an exact equivalent of our word "judge," which is restricted to legal functions. In ancient Semitic thought, the role of leadership meant procuring the right of the people either by taking military action or by judging legal disputes. The word \textit{shofet} is close in meaning to "ruler"... Hence the statement that so-and-so "judged Israel" must be taken in a wider sense than the English translation implies. Primarily, the judge was a military champion or "deliverer" (Judg. 2:16), although he did play a part in internal arbitration.\(^{14}\)

In theory the judge seems to have been the moral and religious leader as well as the political and military chief, though with the notable exceptions of Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, the record is unclear as to the extent to which the Hebrew judges actually performed ecclesiastical functions. Noth suggested that a primary responsibility of the judicial office was to know the law, interpret it, apply it as needed to new situations, and proclaim it in public, thereby making the judge a teacher and legal authority as well as an administrator.\(^{15}\)

Significantly, the judges enjoyed few, if any, legislative powers. The law of Moses was considered to be the political

\(^{13}\)Noth, op. cit., p. 102.


\(^{15}\)Noth, op. cit., p. 103.
constitution and legal code of the Israelites as well as a religious
document, and was acknowledged by the spiritually attuned to be of
divine origin and perpetually binding. Joshua was specifically
commanded to observe the Mosaic law and "turn not from it to the
right hand or to the left." (Joshua 1:7.) The responsibility of rulers
after Moses' day was not the production of new legislation but
enforcement of the provisions of the existing law.

Notwithstanding the appointment of Samuel's sons, the office
of judge, unlike the office of a dynastic king, was non-hereditary,
although all seemingly held office for life. They apparently had no
fixed income, no court or courtiers, and levied no taxes on the people,
but they did receive presents to honor them and a share of the spoils
of war. 16 According to Welker:

As a rule the "judges" were simple in manner, free from
ambition and greed, moderate in their desires, unselfish,
noble in their impulses, possessed of exalted and limitless
patriotism and desirous of fighting for God and for his cause. 17

The Principle of Consent

A distinguishing element of the Hebrew theocracy under both
the judges and the monarchy was the democratic ideal as manifested
both in the direct involvement of the masses in the administration of
justice and in the idea of popular consent to changes in leadership or

16 Welker, op. cit., p. 85. 17 Ibid.
policy proposed from above. Josephus related that the members of each administrative division were to approve the leader that was to preside over it.\(^{18}\) The wording of Deut. 16:18—"Judges and officers shalt thou make thee"—further suggests the role of the people in the selection of their own officers. Popular consent is also implied in the account of the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor. The Lord's injunction that Joshua be set before all the congregation and given a charge in their sight suggests that not only public knowledge but public acceptance of the act was deemed necessary. (Num. 27:18-23.) Judges considered themselves accountable not only to God but to the people for their performance in office. Thus we find Samuel, before his death, making a final speech before all Israel wherein he gives an account of his stewardship and is exonerated by the multitude of any wrongdoing. (1 Sam. 12:1-5.)

Wolf concluded that with certain exceptions "in earliest times the 'elders' included all the free adult male citizens of the community," and that all such were eligible to participate in the town assembly.\(^{19}\) Such assemblies were customarily held in the court near the gate of the town or before the tabernacle for such

\(^{18}\) Antiquities of the Jews iii. 4:1.

purposes as the administration of justice, the distribution of land, and the discussion of public issues. Several Old Testament passages lend weight to the idea that the entire congregation, meeting in official assembly, was to make certain judicial decisions (Num. 27:1-6; 35:24-25), participate in the execution of criminals (Num. 15:35-36), and determine the course of the nation regarding war or peace. (Judg. 20:3-11.)

The twenty-fourth chapter of Joshua details the voluntary and formal acceptance of the rule of Jehovah by an assembly of the whole nation. At least, Josephus related in his version of the gathering, it was attended by "those of the greatest dignity in the several cities, with those in authority, and the senate, and as many of the common people as could be present." Disobedience to divine law would thenceforth have the force not only of rebellion against the will of God but of violation of a solemn agreement. Other instances of public involvement in the political processes are so common that Wolf set down as a general principle that "the deliberations of primitive society were ended by mutual assent and general acclamation."  

\(^{20}\)Ibid., pp. 101-103.  \(^{21}\)Antiquities v. 1:28.  
\(^{22}\)Wolf, op. cit., p. 102. See also Josephus, Antiquities v. 1:27-8, which recounts a "great assembly of the people" twenty years before the death of Joshua.
In theory, a gathering of the whole people was to take place at the end of each seven years (Deut. 31:10-13), but the increasing size of the nation made enforcement difficult. In later years, even under the judges, it is probable that democracy became more representative in nature, with the people usually being represented in the councils and assemblies by elders selected from the leading families.\textsuperscript{23} The idea of popular sovereignty was still retained in principle, however, even when its direct exercise became uncommon.

**Civil Liberty**

Civil liberty was as much an earmark of the condition of the people under the judges as was political liberty. The author of the Book of Judges reminisced, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judg. 17:6.) Samuel, likewise, in his speech to the assembled multitude in the city of Mizpeh, reminded his hearers that God "had granted them a state of liberty," which they were jeopardizing by their demand for a king.\textsuperscript{24}

Moral law prescribed that those with adequate means should relieve the poor (Lev. 25:35; Deut. 15:11), but there was no provision for civil or criminal prosecution of those who disregarded such counsel.

\textsuperscript{23}Baron, op. cit., p. 73.

\textsuperscript{24}Josephus, *Antiquities* vi. 4:4.
Mosaic law did set forth several "harvest rules" (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21) whereby the poor and unfortunate could subsist without begging. The law of jubilee, providing that all land which had changed hands should revert to its original owners, and that all bondsmen should be set free, further promoted social equality, as did the proscriptions against usury. (Lev. 25:8-55; 27:16-25.) But otherwise there appears to have been no provision for governmental promotion of social justice. As Clark explained:

According to Biblical law charity is a personal and private duty. There is nothing to suggest that a government--except in times of public calamity like the famine in Egypt--should be an agency for the care of the afflicted, the aged, or the poor. On the contrary it appears that government fulfills its appointed purposes when it keeps the peace and administers justice, leaving it to the heads of families and to the various communities to care for their own members.\(^\text{25}\)

Taxation was apparently unknown during the time of the judges, as is evidenced by Samuel's warning that things would change in that regard with the advent of a king. (1 Sam. 8:10-17.) And while failure to respond to a legitimate call to arms was considered a sin against the Lord (Num. 32:23), it seems to have been legally permissible and even advisable under certain conditions to decline induction, even on the grounds of fearfulness and faintheartedness. (Deut. 20:5-8.)

\(^{25}\text{H. B. Clark, Biblical Law (Portland, Oregon: Binfords & Mort, 1943), pp. 159-160.}\)
Warfare and Military Law

Though the preferred state was clearly peace (Lev. 26:6), the waging of war was considered necessary under certain circumstances. There is, it was said, "a time of war, and a time of peace." (Eccl. 3:8.) Invariably, such wars as were fought were conducted at the Lord's bidding or in self defense, and it was understood that the Lord would accompany his people into battle to save them against even a numerically superior foe. (Deut. 20:1-4,) "The Lord is a man of war," exulted Moses. (Ex. 15:3.) The rule in normal warfare was that a proclamation of peace was first to be extended to the anticipated foe. Only if such a proclamation was rejected would war be justifiable. (Deut. 20:10-13), and the Lord would deliver the enemy into the hands of his people.

According to the Doctrine and Covenants, such a proclamation was to be extended not once but three times before a righteous war could be conducted. Specifically, the law to ancient Israel as well as to the Nephites is stated to have been:

They should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them.
And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue;
And if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord;
Then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation,
tongue, or people. And I, the Lord, would fight their battles ... 26

Nibley alluded to the existence of non-scriptural evidence, as well, that this "ancient rule of the third offense" was observed both by the ancient Jews and Romans.27

An Unrealized Ideal

Men seldom live fully up to their ideals, and ancient Israel under the judges was no exception. All too often liberty became license and the theocracy gave way to anarchy. Judges, while appointed by God, did not always measure up to divine standards of performance, though even the worst of them were admittedly less repugnant than certain of the later kings. Only the most optimistic could totally agree with Erastus Snow's enthusiastic evaluation of the times:

For 430 years they triumphed over their foes, and they dwelt in peace and unity, and love and freedom existed, and every tribe was a commonwealth managing its own local affairs, while they all sustained a central power which counseled and directed them; and their rulers were judges inspired of God, were prophets, seers and revelators, who judged in righteousness, and exercised no control over the liberties and consciences of men.28

If Snow's assessment was somewhat above the level of the nation's achievements, it was nonetheless a picture of what their


28 JDS, XXIII, 90.
prophets asserted could, and should, have resulted. The establishment of the monarchy, though heralded by the people, was viewed by Samuel as nothing short of apostasy. Centuries after the monarchy was accepted as permanent by the masses, Isaiah still looked back with fondness on the reign of the judges and looked forward to a day when that type of rule would again prevail. Quoting the Lord, he wrote:

How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers....
Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves:
every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.
Therefore saith the Lord.... I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:
And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.29

ISRAEL UNDER THE MONARCHY

Origins

In theory, Israel lived under a monarchy even during the time of the judges, with the Lord himself occupying the role of monarch. Thus, when the Israelites approached Gideon with the plea that he become their king, he declined, saying, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you."
(Judg. 8:23.)

This was not the first time public sentiment had favored altering the administrative structure. According to Josephus, God told Samuel "they had been contriving these things from the very day that they came out of Egypt."30 Things came to a head when Samuel's sons proved unfit for the judgeship, and the assembled elders renewed their cry for "a king to judge us like all the nations." (1 Sam. 8:5.) The unique governmental pattern which distinguished Israel from all other nations was construed by the majority to be a liability rather than a strength. God comforted Samuel with the assurance, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7), and instructed him to accede to the popular demand, after first warning the nation of the oppression which would inevitably accompany monarchal rule.

Limited Monarchy

In spite of Samuel's warnings, the difference between the rule of the judges and the early monarchy was more one of form than of substance. Even in later years the Hebrew monarchy never reached the level of despotism of the typical Oriental potentate. The power and authority of the prophet, recognized constitutional limitations, the principle of popular consent, and the extreme decentralization of governmental functions all combined to limit the power of the king, in

30Antiquities vi. 3:4.
the words of Wolf, "far beyond that of any so-called 'limited monarchy' of more modern times." 31

Superiority of the Prophet

Though a monarchy in name, the Hebrew nation still retained, at least in theory, the essential elements of a theocracy. Kings were thus considered to be subordinate administratively to the prophets, who exercised both political and religious authority. Saul, for example, was selected by the Lord, through Samuel (1 Sam. 9:17), and was eventually rejected in favor of David in the same fashion. (1 Sam. 15:23.) Solomon received his appointment in the same way, being duly annointed by Zadok the priest and Nathan the Prophet. (1 Kings 1:32-39.) Although with priestly acquiescence the kingdom would normally pass from father to son, prophets never relinquished their right to decree the deposition of an unacceptable monarch and replace him with one of the Lord's own choosing, as when Elisha annointed Jehu (2 Kings 9:3) and Jehoiada installed Jehoash. (2 Kings 11:12-13.)

Prophets frequently asserted their right to counsel and even reprove reigning monarchs. Nathan's confrontation with David and Elijah's with Ahab are notable examples. Although corrupt kings could choose to disregard the preachings of an Elijah or a Jeremiah, it was not always politically expedient to do so in view of the considerable respect

31 Wolf, op. cit., p. 108.
the prophets often enjoyed among the populace. Cadbury affirmed, "The prophets of Israel . . . were the stirring social preachers of their age." Cadbury's statement is not far from a similar observation by John Taylor:

By a careful perusal of the scriptures . . . we shall find that God in ancient days had as much to do with governments, kings and kingdoms, as he ever had to do with religion. . . . In the history of the kings of Israel we find the Lord and his prophets interfering as much in their civil, as their religious affairs, as the book of Kings abundantly testify.33

The kings themselves, ideally, were to be men "after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13-14) and susceptible to revelation of the divine will. Hence we find Saul prophesying among the prophets (1 Sam. 10:9-13), David receiving direct communication from God (2 Sam. 2:1), and Solomon being favored with heavenly visions. (1 Kings 3:5; 9:2.) Each of these subsequently fell from divine favor, and their successors, in general, seem to have enjoyed few prophetic powers. But this departure from the earlier ideal was never countenanced by the prophets, who regularly assailed the lack of spirituality of the later Hebrew monarchs.

**Constitutional Limitations**

In anticipation of the day when Israel would request a king, the Mosaic law set forth regulations by which all future monarchs, in theory, 

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33 *Times and Seasons*, V (Mar. 15, 1844), 470.
were to be bound. The first stipulation was that the king be chosen of the Lord. Secondly, he was to be selected from among the people. "Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother," read the law. (Deut. 17:14-15.) The king was forbidden to multiply either horses, wives, or riches to himself, lest his heart be turned away from the performance of duty. (Deut. 17:16-17.) A further obligation of the king was to make himself a personal copy of the law and "read therein all the days of his life," since the upholding and administration of this law was his principal responsibility. (Deut. 17:18-19.) New legislation was no more the prerogative of the king than of the judges who preceded him, though he could issue temporary edicts, valid insofar as they were reconcilable with the divine laws and public opinion.34

Concurrently with the coronation of Saul, we are informed, Samuel "told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." (1 Sam. 10:25.) Presumably this involved a further clarification of the constitutional limitations upon the newly installed monarch.

Powers of the King

Within the framework of the above-described limitations, the king had broad powers to administer the affairs of the kingdom, whether

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34 Baron, op. cit., p. 74.
of an executive, judicial, or military nature. With respect to the extent of the monarchical powers, Baron concluded:

The king could adjudicate all litigations brought to his attention; he could serve as a court of appeal from all lower courts; he could establish legal precedents and, perhaps, even issue ordinances regulating certain matters of substantive and procedural law.  

In a judicial capacity the king exercised power over life and death without regard to such formalities as are customary in modern society (2 Sam. 1:15; 4:12), though such summary action may have been restricted to cases where the guilt of the offender was obvious.

The size of the country and the fact that the administration of justice was still largely in the hands of local authorities meant that the king's main function was commanding the military forces. As did the judges of earlier times, the ideal king personally led his people into battle. Josephus had nothing but praise for David, whom he lauded as a man "of an excellent character, . . . endowed with all the virtues that were desirable in a king." Elaborating, the Jewish historian continued:

For he was a man of valour in a very extraordinary degree, and went readily and first of all into dangers, when he was to fight for his subjects, as exciting the soldiers to action by his own labours, and fighting for them, and not by commanding them in a despotic way.


36Ibid., p. 40.

37Antiquities vii. 15:2.
Although Saul and David seem not to have fulfilled Samuel's predictions of unrighteous royal taxation, certain of their successors unquestionably did. "Solomon in all his glory" achieved his splendor at least in part at the expense of his people. In fact, it was Rehoboam's refusal to lighten the burden imposed by Solomon which led to the revolt of the Northern Kingdom. But the power of taxation seems to have been more assumed than granted by divine authority. Ezekiel implied that after the exile such taxation should cease, with the king possessing lands of his own from which to give his sons an inheritance. (Ezek. 45:8; 46:18.)

The power of the king seemed to include the right to appoint his own successor, as did David in the case of Solomon shortly before his death. But David assured his countrymen that it was the Lord, not he, who had made the actual selection from among David's numerous sons. (1 Chron. 28:5.)

**Popular Sovereignty**

Vestiges of democracy are observable throughout the monarchical period. Samuel's selection of Saul was not enough; he was in addition to be presented before an assembly of the people. The acclamation "God save the king" suggests popular approval of Saul's appointment.

David's ascent to the throne followed a similar pattern. First he was anointed by Samuel, in obedience to the Lord's command. (1 Sam. 16:12-13.) After the death of Saul, he was anointed again by "the men
of Judah" (2 Sam. 2:4.) But before David's authority could be acknowledged throughout the rest of the nation, it was necessary to secure the approval of representatives from the remaining tribes. "So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel." (2 Sam. 5:3.) The Old Testament record confirms that Solomon (1 Kings 1:39) and Jehoash (2 Kings 11:12) were installed in the same way, with a popular affirmation of support following the anointing by the priestly authority.

As Rehoboam discovered to his sorrow, this popular action was no mere formality, and approval of a new king was by no means a foregone conclusion. Although all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king, Rehoboam failed to agree to the covenant proposed by his prospective constituents, thus provoking the rebellion of the ten northernmost tribes, who proceeded to elect Jeroboam in his stead. (1 Kings 12:1-20.)

Popular support was needed not only to appoint a new sovereign but to authorize major reforms during his administration. Thus Josiah alone could not bind his nation to a new course of action, but found it necessary to summon "all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem ... and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great" to witness and ratify the covenant he made with the Lord on behalf of the nation. (2 Kings 23:1-3.) Years earlier Jehoiada had sponsored a similar three way pact between the Lord, the king, and the
people. (2 Kings 11:17.) The extent of the king's dependence on the populace was summarized by Nibley as follows:

In each city the Elders were the ruling body and represented the voice of the free and traditionally independent citizenry as against the king's representative or the Rabu; in the capital city they were a check on the king himself, and in Jerusalem no king could be crowned without their approval or pass important laws without their consent. 38

Decentralization

Despite the fact that Jewish monarchs assumed and wielded broader powers than had the judges, their influence on the daily lives of the masses in the provinces was almost negligible. Baron observed,

Most administrative functions, particularly on the local level, had to be entrusted to the municipal elders not subject to royal appointment. The administration of justice was so entirely in local hands that we hear nothing about a royal judiciary in the provinces until the Chronicler's report about Jehoshaphat's reform. 39

Even under the more centralized regimes of David and Solomon the crown retained significance for the common people chiefly in times of war. 40 In periods of peace Palestine "resembled a loosely-knit federation of tribes and townships more than a unified centralized state." 41


40 Baron, The Jewish Community, p. 35. 41 Ibid., p. 41.
Morality and the Public Welfare

In theory, Israel could have been as free and prosperous under a monarchy as under judges. Both systems, ideally, retained the essentials of theocratic rule. In both cases it was designated that God should ultimately frame the laws and specify the earthly administrators through revelation to his priesthood authority. The voice of the people was supposed to be obtained and respected as much under one form of rule as under the other. Political government in each instance was to be limited in its authority and was to exist primarily to protect the freedom, equal rights, and safety of the citizens.

In actuality, the theoretical limitations upon kings were frequently ignored, and the idealistic prescriptions of the Mosaic law were often unenforced. According to Baron,

All Israelites, with the exception of the gerim (strangers) and perhaps the landless proletarians, were supposed to enjoy perfect equality before the law. In fact, however, the exercise of rights in the lower strata was often curtailed by the superior power of the upper classes. In periods of affluence the kings arrogated to themselves rights denied them in most other periods. 42

Neither under the judges nor under the kings did Israel retain for long the national prosperity and freedom which the prophets testified could have been their permanent right. Such blessedness was held to be a function of obedience to Jehovah rather than of a particular political organization or program, although public insistence upon a

42 Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, p. 76.
particular form of government could itself constitute disobedience to
him. Nowhere is this relationship between righteousness and national
welfare better expressed than in Samuel's plea before the residents of
Kirjathjearim:

It behoves you not only to be desirous of liberty, but to
take the proper methods to obtain it. . . . Be righteous then,
and cast wickedness out of your souls, and by your worship
supplicate the Divine Majesty with all your hearts, and persevere
in the honour you pay to him; for if you act thus, you will enjoy
prosperity; you will be freed from your slavery, and you will get
the victory over your enemies: which blessings it is not possible
you should attain, either by weapons of war, or by the strength
of your bodies, or by the multitude of your assistants; for God has
not promised to grant these blessings by those means, but by being
good and righteous men; and if you will be such, I will be security
to you for the performance of God's promises.43

Despite the fact that later generations so disregarded this
prophetic advice that by 600 B.C. the Northern Kingdom had disappeared
and Judah was verging on catastrophe, the small party of exiles
described in the opening pages of the Book of Mormon recognized that
it was the immorality of the people, not the form of their government,
which was to blame. With a first hand familiarity with the concept of
a theocratic monarchy and its potential for success, it was but natural
that they should turn to this form of government as their numbers
increased in the New World. And with a written record detailing the
structure of the earlier and divinely favored system of judges, it was

43Josephus, Antiquities, vi. 2:1.
just as natural that they should establish an approximation of it when
Aaron's abdication made perpetuation of the monarchy dangerously
impractical.
Chapter 4

THE NEPHITE MONARCHY

The Book of Mormon records that excluding the Jaredites and the Lamanites there were at least six different governments among Book of Mormon peoples prior to the reign of the judges, all of which may properly be considered monarchies. When the story opens we find (1) a simple patriarchal organization, headed by Lehi, which, following Lehi's death, evolved into (2) the first Nephite dynasty, with headquarters in the land of Nephi. When Mosiah I led a colonizing expedition northward years later, he discovered (3) the Mulekite civilization with a government of their own. The subsequent merger of the Mulekites and the Nephite colony launched a (4) second Nephite dynasty, based in Zarahemla. (5) Zeniff's successful colonization effort in the land of Nephi led to the development of a contemporaneous monarchy which existed independently of the regime in Zarahemla for eighty years before the two groups were again united. It was here, during the reign of Noah, that the Nephites learned first hand the perils of being ruled by an iniquitous king. (6) Finally, a colony of refugees under Alma, fleeing from King Noah's oppression, founded the city of Helam, which existed for several years as a free and independent society until they,
to be reunited with the main body of Nephites under King Mosiah II. Each of these six groups will be discussed in turn.

**Patriarchal Origins**

In a sense, as has been noted, "every family is a kingdom, a nation, a government, within itself, ... and the head of the family is the legislator, the judge, the governor."\(^1\) Initially Lehi's party was small enough that this type of patriarchal rule was the only form of government needed or desired. Lehi and Ishmael each assumed responsibility for his own family, with overall leadership of the entire group falling upon Lehi. Thus it was Lehi who, at the Lord's instance, initially proposed the exodus from Jerusalem, who ordered the return trips in search of the plates of Laban and the family of Ishmael, who designated when the group should move on after an extended encampment in the Valley of Lemuel, and who specified when they were to board the ship and set sail for the New World.

The law of primogeniture, to which the Israelites of the day religiously adhered, dictated that under normal circumstances Laman should have inherited the position of family leadership following Lehi's death. But the Old Testament offers repeated examples of cases in which the oldest son was unworthy of the honor and a younger son was designated to take his place. Of Esau and Jacob the Lord declared,

\(^1\) *Millennial Star*, XIV (July 3, 1852), 290.
"The elder shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23.) Reuben's birthright passed to Joseph, because of the latter's greater fidelity. (1 Chron. 5:1-2.) Ephraim was given a greater blessing than Manasseh, in spite of Manasseh's greater age. (Gen. 48:14-19.) In like manner, to the eternal exasperation of Laman and Lemuel, the Lord promised Nephi, the youngest of Lehi's sons, "Inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren." (1 Ne. 2:22.)

Interestingly enough, Nephi's leadership responsibilities seem to have begun immediately upon receipt of this revelation, while Lehi was still alive and hearty. Nephi suggests that both his "reign and ministry"--that is, his exercise of governmental as well as ecclesiastical functions--began while their company was camped in the Valley of Lemuel. (1 Ne. 10:1.) Looking back on his early life in retrospect, following his father's death, he commented on the Lord's promise to him of family leadership as follows:

And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher. Wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life. 2

The inference is clear that Nephi had wielded official powers ever since the Lord first promised him such responsibilities.

2 Ne. 5:19; italics added.
Both Nephí and Léhi clearly understood the position held by the other. In spite of the Lord's promise to Nephí, Léhi was still unquestionably in command. Nephí's role, as long as his father was living, was to be strictly that of a subordinate and an assistant, no matter what authority he might be delegated over others in the group. Thus it was Léhi who received revelation from God for the entire company, while Nephí acted as an interpreter and expounder of his father's message. (1 Ne. 15.) Nephí's own revelations seem to have been primarily for his own instruction, or for the benefit of his future readers. Nephí might take charge of a particular project, but it was for Léhi to specify in broad terms what was to be done.

Léhi was able to testify from experience that Nephí had not sought for power or authority or prestige for himself. (2 Ne. 1:25), even when the opportunity arose for him to do so. A case in point is Nephí's conduct following the breaking of his bow. (1 Ne. 16.) Faced with starvation, even Léhi succumbed to despair and joined the rest of the group in murmuring against the Lord. Nephí, undaunted and spiritually perceptive, might have sought to approach the Lord directly for inspiration on where to go to procure food with his newly improvised weapons. Success might have enormously enhanced his prestige in the group, at the expense of his father's influence as their leader. Instead of taking such a course, Nephí recognized his father's continuing responsibility for overall leadership by asking him to inquire of the Lord, thus deliberately placing him in a position whereby he was
compelled to humble himself and resume his rightful position as head
of the family in fact as well as in name.

Lehi, in turn, acknowledged Nephi's God-given role as
second in command and constantly depended on him for leadership in
the more arduous tasks, whether the need was to secure records from
Laban, procure food for the company, or build a ship to cross the ocean.
He admonished his other sons to "rebel no more" against their brother.
(2 Ne. 1:24.) "Rebellion," of course, suggests resistance to constituted
authority, not mere defiance of a detested peer.

Both Lehi and Nephi exercised their leadership strictly through
means of persuasion and the power of example, in contrast to the
physical force often exerted against Nephi by his brethren and the sons
of Ishmael. Nowhere do we find Nephi attempting through force of arms
to compel his reluctant brethren to return to Jerusalem or to participate
in the construction of the ship. The strong-armed methods used on
Zoram were strictly for self-defense. Had Zoram escaped to spread the
alarm, Lehi's party could have been quickly overtaken and destroyed by
Laban's friends and armed servants. But even here, Nephi seems to
have used physical force simply to compel Zoram to listen to his offer.
Once Zoram understood that he could be a participating member of the
group, enjoying the same freedom, rights, and immunities, he cheer-
fully accompanied Nephi's sons into the desert with no further hesitation.
Nor did Nephi ever seek revenge for the mental or physical cruelty
inflicted by his older brethren. But a goodly part of the First Book of
Nephi is devoted to accounts of Nephi's efforts to persuade his brethren voluntarily to humble themselves before the Lord and accept their fair share of the responsibility for the success of the venture. Nephi was often so influenced by the Spirit of God on such occasions that he spoke sharply with his brethren, and since his brethren were spiritually "past feeling" they often misunderstood his intentions. But Lehi testified:

His sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him . . .

And it must needs be that the power of God must be with him, even unto his commanding you that ye must obey. But behold, it was not he, but it was the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it.3

Laman and Lemuel never accepted the idea that their younger brother should rule over them, notwithstanding the fact that an angel of the Lord had personally assured them that the Lord had ordained that he should do so because of their own iniquities. (1 Ne. 3:29.) They constantly accused Nephi of plotting to "make himself a king and a ruler" over them, that he might do with them "according to his will and pleasure." (1 Ne. 16:38.) Throughout the Book of Mormon we find Lamanites waging war against the Nephites on the pretext that the Nephites had robbed their fathers of "their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them." (Alma 54:18.) The authority of age was important to these people, as is evidenced by their care to

32 Ne. 1:26-27.
board the ship "every one according to his age." (1 Ne. 18:6.) It was so important to Laman and Lemuel that they could never publicly admit the fact of Nephi's divine appointment as their ruler, though they inwardly knew it was true.

Despite their protestations that they would not allow Nephi to be their ruler or their teacher, the fact remains that Laman and Lemuel did submit to his leadership, however reluctantly it may have been and however many times they temporarily rebelled against his rule. They followed him back to Jerusalem in search of the plates of Laban. They went at his suggestion to secure their father's wealth in an effort to buy the plates when their first attempt to procure them failed. They followed him, though murmuring, up to the city walls while Nephi made a further and successful attempt to obtain the record. Later, following a second trip from the Valley of Lemuel to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family, they followed Nephi with the same reluctance back to their father's encampment. They sought Nephi's explanations of doctrinal mysteries, and more than once they briefly repented of their sins as a result of his preaching. After first ridiculing the effort, they ultimately helped Nephi build the ship that was to convey them to the promised land. It was therefore without exaggeration that Nephi could say, once they had finally gone their separate ways, "I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life." (2 Ne. 5:19.)
THE MONARCHY IN THE LAND OF NEPHI

The Book of Mormon relates that following the death of Lehi, when Laman and Lemuel and their followers became an increasingly serious threat to Nephi and his partisans, Nephi took his family and all others who would go with him and journeyed into the wilderness for several days until they reached a place which they called "the land of Nephi." Here they settled and took upon themselves the appellation "people of Nephi," and within a short time they had built a prosperous and rapidly growing society under Nephi's leadership. With the increase in population, public sentiment pressed for a more formal governmental structure than the simple patriarchy which had prevailed theretofore. Specifically, the populace unitedly proposed the establishment of a monarchy, with Nephi as their king.

Nephi's Status as King

Opinions differ as to whether or not Nephi officially accepted the position of king over his people. His own account states, "It came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I Nephi was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did according to that which was in my power." (2 Ne. 5:18.) It appears from evidence within the Book of Mormon that whatever Nephi's initial reluctance, he did formally accept the kingly role and is properly considered the first Nephite monarch. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence in support of
this position is the fact that Jacob terms Nephi's successor the second 
Nephite king and indicates that he was to "reign in his stead."
(Jacob 1:11.) We also find that Nephi himself annointed the man who 
was to succeed him as "a king and a ruler over his people." (Jacob 1:9.) 
It is highly unlikely that Nephi would have done so had he been so 
unalterably opposed to a monarchy as to have refused the position 
himself. It is doubly unlikely that if such had been the case, Jacob 
would not have alluded to the fact that a fundamental change had taken 
place in Nephite affairs. Instead, when Nephi's successor is appointed, 
it appears to be an almost matter-of-fact transfer of power from one 
ruler to another within the same governmental framework.

There is the possibility, in view of Nephi's early misgivings 
regarding monarchal rule, that the Nephite nation became a monarchy 
more by evolution than through an explicit constitutional enactment. 
Admittedly, Nephi nowhere specifically calls himself a king. But he 
did agree to fulfill the essential functions of a king on behalf of his 
people, and it is plain that they regarded him as nothing less. Jacob, 
for instance, asserted that the people looked unto his brother "as a 
king or a protector." (2 Ne. 6:2.) By the end of Nephi's reign, 
if not much earlier, the institution of monarchy was accepted as a fact 
as much by Nephi as by anyone else, and for nearly five hundred years 
it seems to have been unchallenged as a proper and effective form of 
government.
Reasons for the Establishment of a Monarchy

At first glance Nephi's consent to the establishment of a monarchy may appear inconsistent with the seeming preference of both Samuel and Mosiah for a system of judges. The divine endorsement of the United States Constitution (D&C 101:77-80; 98:5-7) may likewise lead some to conclude that compared to a republican democracy, monarchy is a less inspired and inferior system. Nephi's own expressed reluctance to become king is another point in the argument.

A more careful reading of the Book of Mormon makes clear, however, that monarchy was viewed as the ideal, and that other forms of rule are permitted or even prescribed by the Lord only in consequence of the weaknesses of his people and their inability to live the higher law. Benjamin, for example, recognized God as a "heavenly King," (Mos. 2:19), not merely a heavenly chief judge, president, or governor. The Nephites looked back almost in reverence on such great biblical kings as Melchizedek, of whom Alma was to remark, "There were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater." (Alma 13:19.)

Nephi was undoubtedly aware of the very real advantages of monarchical rule, provided the perpetuation of righteous monarchs could be assured. Monarchies have been historically noted for simplicity of organization and their adaptability to prompt and energetic action.
and consistent and continuous policy.\(^4\) Accountability is easily determined. Contests between factions are avoided, and the king can rule impartially for all classes. As noted by Gettell, "If a good and wise despot could be assured, many arguments could be used to justify this form of government on the ground of efficiency, especially in times of crisis."\(^5\) Both Alma (Mos. 23:8) and Mosiah (Mos. 29:13) agreed that under ideal conditions—i.e., if there could be a guarantee that the king would always be righteous—it would be good forever to be ruled by kings. Whether Nephi's early reluctance to assume the kingly role was founded in personal modesty or in doubts about the worthiness of his successors is not stated. It is clear, however, that Nephi respected the right of his people to select their own form of government, and public sentiment was unquestionably on the side of monarchy. Furthermore, Nephi's failure to voice any real opposition to the proposal indicates that he, too, was convinced that the potential benefits of monarchy outweighed the risks. For over four hundred years he was right. Nephi's successors perpetuated his own type of enlightened rule at least until the time of Omni in the land of Nephi, and without exception in Zarahemla. Apparently only in Zeniff's colony, and then only once, did the Nephite monarchy degenerate into


\(^5\) Ibid.
a full-fledged tyranny. Even if Nephi had foreseen Noah's reign he
would not have been forced to conclude that there was a defect in the
type of government--only that even a superior institution can be
abused and distorted. No doubt Nephi understood, as Joseph Smith
taught, that under the Melchizedek Priesthood righteous men were
designed to be "both Prophets, Priests, and kings."6 It was Mosiah's
recognition of new and peculiar dangers in light of Aaron's refusal to
be king, not a belated realization of the system's general inferiority,
which eventually led to the establishment of a system of judges.

**Powers and Responsibilities**

**of the King**

Initially the nation was small, and it is doubtlessly true that
"the government was . . . more patriarchal than monarchical in its
character."7 Unfortunately, details of political affairs in the early
monarchy are meager. As Roberts concluded, "What the nature of this
kingly government was, what secondary officers existed in it, and
what means were employed for the administration of its laws cannot
be learned from the Nephite record."8 But though many particulars

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6 *Manuscript History of the Church*, July 23, 1843, located in Church Historian's Office (microfilm copy).


of governmental administration during this period may be missing, it is possible to learn something of the general powers and duties of the king himself.

**Religious Leadership.** The outstanding feature of Nephi's reign was the fact that he was first and foremost a prophet, and in fact presided politically by virtue of his prophetic office. It was as the authorized spiritual head of his people, rather than as their political leader, that he ordained Jacob and Joseph to be priests and teachers over the land. (2 Ne. 5:26; 6:2.) Jarom indicated that Nephi's successors to the Nephite throne were likewise "mighty men in the faith of the Lord," (Jarom 7), but the record does not indicate whether they were also in fact the supreme ecclesiastical authorities in the land or whether they were subordinate to a prophet who retained overall political and religious authority, as was the case with David and Samuel.

Though it is by no means impossible that Jacob was the unnamed individual referred to in his writings as "second Nephi," (Jacob 1:11), it is more probable that the kingly post was filled by another person entirely, operating under Jacob's authority. At least Jacob's immediate descendants seem not to have been kings, for both Jarom and Abinadom indicated that the large plates of Nephi were being kept by the kings, who appear clearly to have been individuals other than themselves. (Omni 11; Jarom 14.)
Whether or not later kings held the post of supreme religious authority, they were evidently great spiritual leaders in their own right. Jarom stated that "they taught the people the ways of the Lord" (Jarom 7), which, in light of Jacob's assertion that "no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him" (Jacob 4:8), suggests that the kings enjoyed direct personal revelation, presumably in connection with their political as well as their religious duties. In general, Nephite monarchs seem to have been more successful than their Old World counterparts in maintaining the essentials of theocratic rule.

Though we are told that "the laws of the land were exceedingly strict" (Jarom 5), it appears that the peace, prosperity, and good order of the Nephite community was more dependent on spirited preaching than effective law enforcement. When the Nephites first fell into general moral laxity and a perversion of the system of plural marriage, it was Jacob in his priestly functions, not as king or legislator, who took it upon himself to correct the situation. (Jacob 2.)

Jarom likewise specifically attributed the nation's military success and domestic tranquility to successful preaching, whether by kings, prophets, priests, or teachers, rather than to mere military preparedness or effective legislation. (Jarom 7, 10-12.)

Kings as Teachers. The governmental philosophy of the Nephite kings seems to have been the same as Joseph Smith's: teach
the people correct principles and let them govern themselves.\textsuperscript{9} Nephi had been designated by the Lord to be "a ruler and a teacher," but he seemingly preferred the role of teacher to that of ruler, in temporal as well as spiritual matters. He related, "I did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance." (2 Ne. 5:15.)

Nephi's statement, "I . . . did cause my people to be industrious, and to labor with their hands" (2 Ne. 5:17), may cause some to wonder if some sort of compulsion was not involved. But here again Nephi resorted only to the force of example and persuasion. By force Nephi might have caused his people to be "busy," but never "industrious," a term denoting voluntary devotion, not an unwilling response to an order.

Protector. Jacob indicated that the people looked upon Nephi "as a king, or a protector," and depended upon him for safety. (2 Ne. 6:2, italics added.) The two terms--"king" and "protector"--seem to have been nearly synonymous to the early Nephites, and it appears that the king's primary duties, aside from his functions of religious leadership and general instruction of the people, were in the realm of defense. Thus Nephi stated, "I . . . did take the sword of Laban, and after the

\textsuperscript{9}Millennial Star, XIII, 339.
manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us."
(2 Ne. 5:14.) At the end of Nephi's reign, Jacob recorded that the people had loved Nephi exceedingly, "he having been a great protector for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence."
(Jacob 1:10.) Jarom's allusion to the strictness of the laws of the land suggests that their rulers were as diligent in protecting the people from internal enemies as from external aggression.

**Historian.** A further duty of the king was to keep a detailed written record of his reign and the wars and civil affairs of the people during the same period. (1 Ne. 9:4.) It appears that in some cases the king personally authored the record of his administration and in other cases delegated this function to an official scribe. (Jarom 14.)

**Promoter of the General Welfare.** The people's love for Nephi was based on the fact that not only had he protected them from their enemies, but he had "labored in all his days for their welfare."
(Jacob 1:10.) This labor on their behalf seems to have been in the form of personal and often physical exertion. No reference is made to social legislation or royal edicts designed to promote the welfare of society. Instead, Nephi assumed the leadership in matters of industry, agriculture, mining, and architecture by virtue of his example and force of character.
Appointment of Successor. Another right of the king was to appoint a successor. We find Nephi, before his death, like David of old, anointing "a man to be a king and a ruler over his people . . . according to the reign of the kings." (Jacob 1:9.) We are not told whether this man was Nephi's son or someone else, though it is likely he was indeed a son. The later practice in Zarahemla of conferring the kingdom only upon the actual descendants of Nephi (Mosiah 25:13) tends to corroborate this view, in spite of Jacob's rather impersonal reference to the new king simply as "a man." Whatever his given name, he became known to the Nephites as "second Nephi," with his successor in turn being called "third Nephi." "Nephi" thus became a title for later monarchs as a symbol of the esteem of the people for their first king, much as the titles "Pharaoh" and "Tsar" were used in Egypt and Russia, respectively.

Limitations on the King

Though it is true, as indicated by B. H. Roberts, that "there is no indication anywhere of the existence of cabinets or parliaments, or of the division of political authority into executive, legislative or judicial coordinate branches" in the Nephite government,¹⁰ this does not imply that the power of the king was absolute. As expressed by Sjodahl:

¹⁰ Roberts, op. cit., III, 151.
The "kings" in this choice land of promise were not to be kings in the sense of the Greek basileus or the Roman rex; still less in the sense of the despot of the middle ages. They were to be the representatives of God, and exercise the functions of their office as his stewards... The rulers in this country were to hold a position similar to that of Samuel in Israel, anciently, or of Moses.11

As was the case in ancient Israel, the Nephite government "was a theocracy; they had God to make their laws and men chosen by Him to administer them."12 The administrator, in turn, could function only within the bounds of the laws laid down by the Lord. If the power of the king was not limited by legal or organizational factors, it was certainly limited by the king himself and by his recognition of the moral restrictions upon his power. Nephi expressly stated that he exercised his governmental powers "according to the commandments of God."

(2 Ne. 5:19.)

Furthermore, Nephite kings considered themselves bound by the popular will. This is more apparent in the second dynasty than in the first, though it was evidently the pattern even in the beginning. The Nephite nation originated with the voluntary acceptance of Nephi's leadership by a portion of his kinsfolk. Later Nephi formally accepted the role of king by popular demand. The name of their land and the name


12 HC, V, 64.
of their nation were both suggested by the people and agreed to by Nephi. (2 Ne. 5:8-9.) Again, it was the expressed desire of the masses which led to the adoption of the dynastic title "Nephi" for the second, third, and succeeding monarchs. (Jacob 1:11.) Nephi's demonstrated concern for freedom (2 Ne. 10:23) as well as for the welfare of his people (Jacob 1:10) suggests that he likely sought popular ratification of all major decisions of his administration.

**Later Years of the First Dynasty**

Of Nephi's successors in the land of Nephi we know almost nothing, beyond the facts of their dynastic title, their general righteousness, and their apparent overall perpetuation of the governmental ideals and standards formulated by Nephi. We find that one of these later kings had the given name of Mormon (Mos. 18:4), but no information is provided concerning the time or nature of his reign. Even less is known about other individual monarchs.

By the time of Amaleki, the Nephite nation had experienced such a general moral decline that the Lord led Mosiah and as many as would follow him out of the land of Nephi and into the wilderness, eventually guiding them to a new home in the land of Zarahemla. Whether the reigning king was among the apostates left behind or whether Mosiah himself was the king is not specified. Through the days of the religious historian Abinadam, kings were at least faithful in the maintenance of the royal history (Omni 11), whatever their other
deviations from the ideal may have been. No mention is made of any
degeneration of the Nephite government into a tyranny such as occurred
under Noah and such as might have been expected if the king were as
corrupt as the general populace seems to have been. If Mosiah was not
the king when he left the land of Nephi, the question arises as to how
he happened to get the large plates of Nephi, which obviously accom-
panied him to Zarahemla. (Words of Mormon 3.) The fact that no account
is given of a reenactment of the Nephi-Laban episode suggests that
Mosiah may have had easy access to the records. If he was not the
king, it is possible that Mosiah, as a descendant of Nephi (Mos. 25:13),
was a member of the royal household, and as such had access to the
royal treasury.

On the other hand, the historian seems to treat Mosiah's
appointment as king in Zarahemla as a new honor for him rather than as
the mere acquisition of new subjects by an already reigning monarch.
He is introduced not as "king Mosiah," but as Mosiah, who was
made king over the land of Zarahemla." (Omni 12.) The Nephite
record is so sketchy at this point that no final conclusions are possible
concerning Mosiah's position in the land of Nephi. What is certain is
that his ascent to the throne in Zarahemla signaled the end of an era
in Nephite history and the beginning of another in a new location, with
new circumstances, and with a fundamentally different citizenry.
GOVERNMENT AMONG THE MULEKITES

When Mosiah led a small colony of Nephites northward from the land of Nephi, he discovered a populous nation known simply as "the people of Zarahemla." (Omni 14.) Almost nothing is known of the governmental structure or policies of these people prior to their union with the Nephites. According to Roberts:

Government of some sort must have subsisted among them, for when found by the Nephites in the valley of the Sidon they lived in association--chiefly in the great city of Zarahemla--a thing inconceivable apart from government of some sort.¹³

We find that the people of Zarahemla traced their origin to a small colony of refugees from Jerusalem who crossed the ocean with divine assistance (Hel. 6:10) and arrived in the New World shortly after Lehi's party. The group included one Mulek, the only surviving son of King Zedekiah, who somehow had escaped the slaughter at the hands of the king of Babylon which had claimed his brothers. (2 Kings 25:7.) In all likelihood the colony established a monarchy in the New World, with Mulek naturally assuming the kingship by reason of his royal birth. The fact that the land was named after him (Hel. 6:10) and that Mulek's name was used by a later Nephite historian to refer to the entire colony (Ibid,) is further evidence of Mulek's leadership. When discovered by Mosiah, the Mulekite

¹³Roberts, op. cit., II, 225.
nation was ruled by Zarahemla, a descendant of Mulek and presumably
the rightful heir to the throne.

The Book of Mormon states that Mulek and his group were led
by the Lord to the New World, but it is conjectural whether or not
Mulek was aware of such assistance and whether he sought or
received divine inspiration in his kingly role. At any rate, it is
plain that Mulek's successors to the throne, though possibly
upright and moral by worldly standards, were neither in theory nor fact
guided by the Almighty. Amaleki related, "They had brought no records
with them; and they denied the being of their Creator." (Omni 17.)
Obviously, Mulekite laws would for this same reason have differed
from those of the Nephites, since Nephite law was based on the law
of Moses, as recorded on the brass plates of Laban. Probably the

14As Ariel L. Crowley points out, since Zedekiah himself died
at the age of thirty-one, Mulek could not have been more than twelve
or thirteen at the time of his father's death, and in all probability
was a mere infant when his older brothers were slaughtered by the order
of Nebuchadnezzar. Numerous biblical passages distinguish between
"sons" and "little ones" (e.g., Num. 16:27; 2 Sam. 15:22; 2 Chron.
31:18; Esth. 3:13; Deut. 20:13-14), so that the historian's note that the
Chaldean army "slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes" (Jer. 41:10)
does not preclude the possibility that Mulek, as an infant, could have
been an exception. Dr. Crowley further quotes from both Josephus and
Jeremiah to show that at least some of Zedekiah's women and children
did indeed escape from the Babylonians, among which, no doubt, was
the youthful Mulek. In the oceanic migration of Mulek and his party
to the New World, and in their subsequent establishment of the
so-called Mulekite civilization, Crowley sees the fulfillment of
the prophecy found in Isaiah 60:22 that "a little one shall become a
thousand, and a small one a strong nation." (Ariel L. Crowley, "The
Escape of Mulek," The Improvement Era LVIII (May, 1955), pp. 324-
326.)
Mulekites, in general, enjoyed fewer civil and political liberties than the Nephites. If "the Spirit of God . . . is also the Spirit of freedom" (Alma 61:15), it would stand to reason that a people without the Spirit of God and the benefit of his direction would be less free than a nation so favored.

The Mulekites had evidently had a stormy history prior to their discovery by Mosiah. We read of "many wars and serious contentions" (Omni 17) having taken place among them from time to time. At the time of Mosiah's arrival, however, they appear to have been a surprisingly peaceful and friendly nation. We are told that they "did rejoice exceedingly" to meet their distant and previously unknown cousins from the land of Nephi. (Omni 14.) Recognizing the superiority of the Nephite culture, they willingly learned the Nephite language and adopted the Nephite religion. Perhaps most surprising of all, in spite of their substantial numerical superiority, the people of Zarahemla voluntarily accepted Nephite rule, endorsed Mosiah as their king, and were thenceforth numbered with the Nephites. (Omni 17, 19; Mos. 25:2, 13.) It is difficult to assess the extent to which this almost eager abdication by the people of Zarahemla reflected their admiration for Mosiah as an individual, their recognition of general Nephite cultural eminence, their specific esteem for Nephite governmental ideals, their awareness of the weaknesses of their own system, or a combination of these factors.
THE MONARCHY IN ZARAHEMLA

A superficial reading of the Book of Mormon could lead one to suppose that in Zarahemla the Nephite monarchy reached its zenith, enjoying hitherto unrealized greatness and glory and affording its subjects greater freedom, peace, and prosperity than had ever previously been their lot. Reynolds stated:

We must go back to the days of the antediluvian patriarchs to find the peers of these three kings (the two Mosiahs and Benjamin) when monarchs ruled by right divine, and men were prophets, priests and kings by virtue of heaven's gifts and God's will.15

In actuality, the main difference between the two Nephite dynasties is that we have a clearer and more complete record of the one than the other. As shall be seen, the kings in Zarahemla, like their predecessors in the land of Nephi, were religious as well as political leaders, and government in each case was as much theocratic as monarchal. Kings in each land saw their role primarily as teachers, protectors, and servants of the people, rather than as masters or rulers. The principle of popular consent was faithfully observed in Zarahemla as well as in Nephi, and under both governments the people enjoyed as much personal freedom, peace, and prosperity as was in the power and province of government to provide.

Prophets and Kings

As was the case with Nephi, each of the three Nephite kings in Zarahemla was the supreme ecclesiastical authority of his day, and in keeping with theocratic procedures derived his governmental powers from his prophetic office. Although Amaleki was the keeper of the religious history of his people, he was not their highest spiritual leader. It was Mosiah, not Amaleki, whom the Lord inspired to lead the righteous minority out of the land of Nephi. (Omni 12.) Again, when the people of Zarahemla produced a large stone with strange engravings, it was Mosiah, now the king, who interpreted the engravings "with the gift and power of God." (Omni 20.)

Before Mosiah died he "consecrated" Benjamin, his son, to succeed him as prophet, priest, and king. (Mos. 2:11.) The people acknowledged that in reality Benjamin had been appointed by the Lord himself, with Mosiah serving only as the inspired intermediary. (Mos. 2:4.) According to Mormon, Benjamin "was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness." (Words of Mormon 17.) Though he bore the title ably and performed the administrative duties of king, Benjamin seemingly regarded his responsibilities as king as but an appurtenance to his greater and more inclusive calling as the prophet. Certainly his famous farewell speech to his people, which presumably would emphasize whatever he deemed most important, dealt almost entirely with religion, not politics. And his most
significant and impressive accomplishment is unquestionably not his military success against the Lamanites but his delivery of a sermon so powerful and inspiring that not one accountable soul in the entire audience declined to enter into "a covenant with God to keep his commandments." (Mos. 6:1-2) Among Benjamin's last recorded acts were assuring that a proper record was made of the names of all those who entered the covenant and appointing "priests to teach the people, that thereby they might hear and know the commandments of God." (Mos. 6:3.)

Mosiah, in turn, after being duly consecrated and instructed by King Benjamin, did "according to that which his father had done in all things." (Mos. 6:3, 7.) He, too, was acknowledged as the prophet, seer, and revelator among his people, and seemingly was the only one who had power to translate the ancient Jaredite writings. When increasing population and additional challenges, both religious and political, made a division of responsibilities advisable, we read that "king Mosiah granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church." (Mos. 25:19.) It should be stressed that this delegation of ecclesiastical authority to Alma did not constitute abdication. The fact that Alma approached Mosiah for a decision concerning the proper punishment for unrepentant sinners suggests that Alma understood Mosiah still possessed ultimate religious authority, not that Alma misunderstood the distinction between sin and
crime. Mosiah's refusal to pass judgment, in turn, was not due to a recognized lack of authority but to a desire to force Alma to assume the burden of the responsibility which he had been delegated. Mosiah still had priests of his own even after conferring authority on Alma (Mos. 27:1), and his interest in the church and spiritual welfare of his people continued unabated. And when the powers of a seer were needed to translate the sacred record of the Jaredites, it was not Alma but his superior, Mosiah, who was called upon to perform the task. (Mos. 28:12-17.)

Exercising dual leadership over both religious and temporal matters, the last three Nephite prophet-kings intermingled the two functions to a degree which would shock modern-day advocates of separation of church and state. They recognized that, as the Doctrine and Covenants indicates (D&C 29:34), there is no essential distinction between the temporal and spiritual, and that a nation's temporal welfare and its spiritual well-being are inseparably connected. Remembering Lehi's warning that national liberty and prosperity ultimately depended on the righteousness of the people (2 Ne. 1:7, 20), they would heartily have agreed with John Taylor's comment that "the highest folly that disgraces the United States is that truth and holiness, which combined and practiced compose religion, should not be mixed with power and policy, which is the essence of government."16

16 *Times and Seasons*, V, 552.
King Benjamin thus achieved peace in the land only "with the assistance of the holy prophets who were among his people." (Words of Mormon 16.) Mosiah II consulted with his priests when confronted with a serious question of national policy. The theocratic nature of their reign is also apparent when it is seen that the laws enforced by the three kings were those which had been "given . . . by the hand of the Lord." (Mos. 29:25.) It is recorded that all three received direct revelation from God in connection with their royal functions. (Omni 12-13, 20; Mosiah 2:31; 3:2; 28:6.) Seemingly they maintained throughout their lives the divinely instituted pattern of government which Saul, David, and Solomon had upheld in the beginning of their reigns.

The King as a Teacher

The Book of Mormon contains more references to the teaching role of the Nephite kings than to any of their other official duties. Benjamin regarded his teaching responsibilities so highly that he mentioned them first when announcing his retirement. "I can no longer be your teacher, nor your king," he informed his people. (Mos. 2:29.)

The teachings of the kings were primarily, though not exclusively, religious in nature. Mosiah I, for instance, as his son, Benjamin, reminded his listeners, had taught the people the commandments of God to the point that they had been prospered and kept from
falling into the hands of their enemies. In a more secular capacity Mosiah also took charge of teaching the Nephite language to the newly discovered people of Zarehemla, and his translation of the stone with the account of Coriantumr and his people was presumably at least partly for didactic purposes.

As a teacher, Benjamin followed in his father's footsteps. After everything had been done by legal and military means which could be done to secure peace in the kingdom, Benjamin found it necessary to labor as a teacher, "with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul," before his objective was achieved. (Words of Mormon 18.) He taught his sons both the language and the prophecies of his fathers, "that thereby they might become men of understanding." (Mos. 1:2.) With equal fidelity, throughout his reign, Benjamin taught his people "to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men." (Mos. 2:4.) In a last effort to make sure everyone knew where he stood—to rid his garments of their blood, as he put it—he assembled his people and delivered one of the most memorable sermons in recorded history, the message of which was given to him by an angel of God. It is a tribute to the quality of Benjamin's reign that he is better known for his teachings than for any other aspect of his administration. Not the least of his teachings were those conveyed by his own example. Indeed it was his practical application of his own maxims which gave his message such power. "Behold," he addressed his hearers, "if I, whom
ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another?" (Mos. 2:18.) The people unanimously agreed that they should.

Mosiah II continued the tradition, delivering the commandments of God to the people as his father had commissioned him. The Nephite record tells of a great assembly called by Mosiah, patterned after the earlier one convened by his father. There, with Alma's assistance, he taught his people concerning the experiences of their recently arrived brethren from Limhi's colony and Alma's city of Helam and their miraculous deliverance from bondage. Subsequently he translated the intriguing twenty-four gold plates which had been discovered by the people of Limhi and taught their contents to his people. As Benjamin had done, Mosiah set an example of service and industry for his people. At the end of his administration he could report, without hesitation or exaggeration, "I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed, to teach you the commandments of God, and to establish peace throughout the land." (Mos. 29:14.)

National Defense

The kings in Zarahemla assumed the same responsibility to be "protectors" of their people as had their predecessors of the first dynasty. The reign of Mosiah I seems to have been singularly free from wars and contentions, but more than once Benjamin, during his
reign, was forced to defend his people against a Lamanite invasion. Like Nephi before him, Benjamin fought "with the strength of his own arm, with the sword of Laban." (Omni 24; W. of M. 13-14.) Mosiah II, once again, was blessed with a comparatively peaceful tenure. It appears that a large part of the credit for this national tranquility must go to Mosiah himself. We are informed that he had not "delighted in the shedding of blood; 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." (Mos. 29:40.)

Much of the work of the kings in their role of "protector" of the people was done in a preventive capacity. With confidence that their preservation was attributable to God's power, they recognized the prime necessity of teaching the people to keep his commandments for the sake of national security, if for no other reason. Benjamin promised his people that if they would thus be obedient to the Lord, their enemies would have no power over them. (Mos. 2:31.)

Legislative Duties

In general, Nephite kings were no more involved in producing new legislation than their Israelite counterparts. As was seen in Chapter 3 of this work, the law given to Moses was a political as well as a religious document, and since the Nephites "did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things according to the law of Moses" (2 Ne. 5:10), it can
be concluded that the Nephite civil and criminal code in early times was essentially identical to that of their Israelite forebears. This law "given to us by our fathers" (Mos. 29:15) was long considered adequate. But Mosiah II was given legislative responsibilities by the Lord comparable to those given to Moses centuries earlier. The law of Mosiah, as it came to be known, will be discussed in detail in later chapters of this thesis.

Law Enforcement

Nephite kings recognized that effective preaching and national righteousness were their only permanent guarantees of peace and national security, but they by no means neglected their duty of enforcing the established law. Benjamin rigorously punished the agitators who fomented strife and contention within his realm. In his old age he reminded his subjects that he had not permitted them to "murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor ... commit any manner of wickedness." (Mos. 2:13.) His son, Mosiah, was just as determined that there be "no stealing, nor plundering, nor murdering, nor any manner of iniquity" during his day, and he faithfully prosecuted offenders according to established legal procedures. (Mos. 29:14-15.)

Servant of the People

In marked contrast to the typical oriental monarch, the two Mosiahs and Benjamin considered themselves not masters but servants of their people. In this sense, according to Erastus Snow, they "were
kings more in name than in fact; they were only patriarchs or fathers among their people." 17 It was said that the people "belonged" to King Benjamin (Mos. 1:1), having been given to him by the Lord (Mos. 1:10), but Benjamin made clear that they were his only to serve—not to dominate. His people were his "friends," his "brethren," and his "kindred." (Mos. 4:4.) He, in turn, was "their trusted and presiding servant." 18 He recounted to his people how he had labored with his own hands for his support. Though it was within his power to levy taxes, had he chosen to do so, he went out of his way to avoid being a burden to anyone. Rather than seek gold or silver or riches of any kind from his people, he chose to spend his life serving them—not lackadaisically, but "with all the might, mind, and strength" which the Lord had granted him. (Mos. 2:11.) Reynolds observed, "Recorded history scarcely affords such another instance of kingly humility and regard for the welfare of his people." 19 Mosiah had a similar tribute to pay his father: "If ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people, . . . then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you." (Mos. 29:13.)

17 J.D., XXIII, 90.


19 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 80.
Mosiah evidenced the same attitude during his reign. Like his father, he tilled the earth and, as we have seen, did "according to that which his father had done in all things." (Mos. 6:7.) The people responded with a love for their king seldom seen in the relations of subjects with their monarchs. We are told:

They did wax strong in love towards Mosiah; 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, yea, for that lucre which doth corrupt the soul; ... therefore they did esteem him, yea, exceedingly, beyond measure.  

Historian

The kings in the second dynasty continued to keep a written record of their administrations, on the large plates of Nephi. In addition, they became the custodians of the now completed small plates, formerly kept by Jacob and his descendants, as well as the plates of brass, the Liahona, and other sacred relics. (Mos. 1:16.) In his old age, shortly before the change to a system of rule by judges, King Mosiah turned both records and relics over to Alma II, with instructions to "keep and preserve them, and also keep a record of the people, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem." (Mos. 28:20.)

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20 Mos. 29:40.
Role of the People

Like the author of the United States Declaration of Independence, and like their forerunners, Nephite kings in the land of Zarahemla felt legitimate governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." None appointed himself to office; all were plainly ratified, if not nominated by their constituents. To begin with, Mosiah I "was appointed" to be king by the newly combined Nephite-Mulekite nation. (Omni 19.) His successor, Benjamin, stated: "I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and ... suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people." (Mos. 2:11; italics added.) Though the role of the people was limited to sustaining a previously determined proposal of the retiring king, a negative vote by the majority would presumably have been respected. Popular consent was deemed so important by Benjamin that he assembled the entire nation to announce his appointment of his son, Mosiah, and the assembled multitude was given an opportunity to manifest its approval of Benjamin's action. (Mos. 5:2.)

Mosiah II, for his part, responded to persistent public pressure to send a search party down to look for Zeniff's colony and was later persuaded by the same means to translate the Jaredite record. When his sons unanimously declined to accept the kingdom, Mosiah invited recommendations for a substitute. When he conceived the idea of eliminating the monarchy altogether, he presented his idea as tactfully and logically as possible, hoping for favorable public
reaction. "Let us be wise and consider these things," he proposed.
(Mos. 29:8.) After Mosiah's well-reasoned discourse, pointing out all
the potential dangers of a monarchy, the people voluntarily "relinquished
their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man
should have an equal chance throughout all the land." (Mos. 29:38.)
Regarding Mosiah's approach Sorenson observed, "He does not say,
'Now from today on we are going to have judges and whether you like it
or not that is the way it is going to be.' That is foreign to the Book of
Mormon and to Mesoamerica."21

Not only the proposed change in the governmental structure
but Mosiah's entire legislative package was submitted for public
ratification. "Therefore," Alma related, "they were obliged to abide
by the laws which he had made." (Alma 1:1.) The inference is that the
people would not have had the same moral obligation to obey laws they
had not approved or rulers they had not sustained.

Succession in the Monarchy

Whether by law, custom, or accident, the Nephite kingdom
was "conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi."
(Mos. 25:13.) It was held that the oldest son of a reigning king had
the legal right to succeed his father on the throne, subject to the

Leadership Week Lectures (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1955),
p. 60.
popular will, but it appears that another son could be chosen if for
some reason the oldest was unavailable or unworthy to serve. The
unavailability of a recognized heir to the kingship was viewed as a
political crisis. The dangers inherent in choosing a king outside
of the established royal family were so acute, especially in view of
the possibility that the legal heir might later wish to claim his original
prerogative, that Mosiah thought it better not to take the risk.

No explanation is given of why Mosiah, Benjamin, and
Mosiah II were not called by the dynastic name of Nephi, according to
the custom which had prevailed in the days of Jacob. Cannon commented:

If a change of dynasty did occur, this custom may have been
changed, though scarcely for that cause alone, as Nephi was
still the revered founder of the nation; it may be that the dynastic
name was omitted and their own names mentioned, for the purpose
of better distinguishing them. When the record which was kept
by the kings upon the other plates of Nephi shall be brought forth,
we shall have knowledge respecting the history of the Nephites,
covering this period of upwards of four centuries, that will be of
inestimable value.22

The coronation of a new king seems to have been an occasion
for great celebration and considerable ritual, as recorded in Mosiah
1-6. Nibley has discerned some thirty-six separate features of the
coronation ceremony, corresponding in minute detail to similar rites
"in every country of the ancient world."23 This long unnoticed


23Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon (2d ed.;
correspondence between customs in the Old World and the New World constitutes, in Nibley's opinion, "the most convincing evidence yet brought forth for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon." 24

ZENIFF'S COLONY

Not many years after the union between Mosiah's group and the people of Zarahemla, a certain number desired to return to the land of Nephi "to possess the land of their inheritance." (Omni 27.) After an abortive initial attempt, a second party, led by Zeniff, succeeded in establishing a colony in their former homeland. During the ensuing eighty years the group experienced a stormy history under three kings whose combined reigns illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of monarchical rule.

Zeniff's Reign

For roughly forty years the fledgling colony lived under the benign rule of Zeniff, who naturally enough patterned his regime after previous Nephite monarchies both in the land of Nephi and in Zarahemla. Though "over-zealous" and rather gullible (Mos. 7:21), Zeniff was basically a God-fearing man who had a genuine concern for the welfare of his people. Like Nephite monarchs elsewhere, he "was made a king by the voice of the people" (Mos. 7:9), and presided

over both their religious institutions (Mos. 11:5) and their political life.

When attacked by the Lamanites, the people called upon Zeniff for protection, and he responded by arming them with all manner of weapons and leading them personally into battle. Such was the worthiness of both Zeniff and his people that they went forth "in the strength of the Lord," calling upon him for deliverance, and were rewarded with a resounding victory over their foe. (Mos. 9:17–18.) Following the conflict, Zeniff showed his humility and attitude toward public service by personally helping with the disagreeable task of burying the dead. In times of peace he motivated his people to be industrious in their agricultural and manufacturing pursuits, and under his leadership they enjoyed a prolonged period of peace and prosperity. In his old age, according to established procedure, Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon one of his sons, by the name of Noah. And thus began the darkest period in the entire five hundred year history of the Nephite monarchy.

Noah's Reign

Noah's reign illustrates the absolute power of a king to rule without regard either to moral restrictions or popular opinion, if he so desired. Noah was everything his father was not. He deposed the priests who had been consecrated by his father and consecrated new ones, such as would support him in his immorality and tyranny. In
complete disregard for previously recognized law he took many wives and concubines to himself, and by his example encouraged his people likewise to "commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness."
(Mos. 11:2.) He took the unprecedented step of levying a twenty percent tax on the property of his subjects, with which he supported himself, his priests, his wives and concubines, and built many elegant and spacious buildings, including a richly adorned palace for himself. The historian rather understated the matter when he wrote of Noah, "Thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom." (Mos. 11:4.)

Noah was careful to maintain the form of his father's regime while disregarding the substance. He and his priests pretended to uphold the law of Moses but deliberately broke its most solemn prohibitions. After arresting Abinadi, Noah staged a show trial on his behalf, but had determined to execute him before the trial ever began. (Mos. 11:28; 12:17-19; 17:1, 5-8.) Freedom of speech thus became a thing of the past, and as Alma soon discovered, freedom of religious worship had suffered a similar fate, though the king was careful publicly to base his persecution of Alma on the grounds that Alma "was stirring up the people to rebellion against him." (Mos. 18:31-33.)

Noah maintained military defenses more out of fear for his own life than concern for the welfare of his people. (Mos. 19:8.) Whereas Nephi, Benjamin, and Zeniff had personally led their armies into battle, Noah sent his forces against the Lamanites, content to
watch the fray from a safe distance. Rather than risk his life in
defense of his country, he chose to flee when the battle became heated,
leaving even women and children to the mercy of the Lamanites. Con-
trary to the sentiments of Mosiah II, he and his supporters "did delight
in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren." (Mos. 11:19;
29:40.) Rather than trust in God and give credit for victory to him,
Noah and his people "were lifted up in the pride of their hearts" and
"did boast in their own strength." (Mos. 11:19.)

No hint of respect for the popular voice is seen in Noah's reign. Instead, even against the keenest desires of his people, he
commanded the men to leave their families behind and flee with him
into the wilderness when the Lamanite armies began to overtake them.
When the men who obeyed this command determined to return to the
land of Nephi in search of their wives and children, the king stoutly
forbade them to do so. It was here that Noah finally discovered, as
he nearly had done earlier in a confrontation with Gideon atop the tower,
that there is a limit to the power even of an absolute despot--the limit
of the endurance of his oppressed people. Eventually the time came
when the desire for freedom was stronger than the fear of death, and
a general and spontaneous uprising consigned Noah to the fiery fate
he had earlier decreed for Abinadi.

Never before had the Nephite monarchy degenerated into a
comparable state of tyranny and degradation. Perhaps it never would
again. But the Nephites now knew it could happen. Mosiah delivered
his classic discourse on the disadvantages of rule by kings in the light of actual experience within recent memory. His arguments thus provide a summary statement on the nature of Noah's reign:

'Behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!
Yea, remember king Noah, his wickedness and his abominations, and also the wickedness and abominations of his people. Behold what great destruction did come upon them; and also because of their iniquities they were brought into bondage.
And behold, now I say unto you, ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood.
For behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him; and he teareth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him; and he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God;
And he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people, yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever doth not obey his laws he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel against him he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can he will destroy them; and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness.
And he also unfolded unto them all the disadvantages they labored under, by having an unrighteous king to rule over them;
Yea, all his iniquities and abominations, and all the wars, and contentions, and bloodshed, and the stealing, and the plundering, and the committing of whoredoms, and all manner of iniquities which cannot be enumerated. 25

Limhi's Reign

Noah proved to be one of history's most notable exceptions to the adage, "Like father, like son." Not only was his father a righteous man, but so was his son, Limhi, who succeeded him on the throne. Though evidently not of the same spiritual stature as Nephi

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25Mos. 29:17, 18, 21-23, 35-36.
or the kings in Zarahemla (we have no record of specific revelations or visions having been granted to him), Limhi was nonetheless willing to enter "into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments." (Mos. 21:31-32.) Again the principle of popular consent was respected, Limhi "having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people." (Mos. 19:26.) Recognizing his responsibility as a teacher, he called a great assembly for the purpose of instructing and encouraging his people and affording Ammon an opportunity to rehearse to them the history of their kinf-olds in Zarahemla and the teachings of King Benjamin. Such was his concern for the advice and approval of his subjects that he went so far as to call another assembly of the entire nation shortly thereafter "that they might have the voice of the people concerning the matter" of how best to escape from Lamanite bondage. (Mos. 22:1.)

In the field of national defense, Limhi performed all the customarily expected functions of a king. In view of his nation's numerical weakness, he sent an expedition of forty-three men in search of additional reinforcements from their brethren in Zarahemla. In battle, he fought alongside his people, as his grandfather had done. Toward the conquered and wounded Lamanite king he exhibited commendable mercy, despite the urgings of his advisors.

On the other hand, suspected lawbreakers seem to have been sternly and summarily punished, sometimes with a surprising lack of concern for the actual guilt or innocence of the suspect. It was
apparently Limhi's curiosity, not his concern for justice, which caused him to have Ammon brought before him for questioning. Otherwise, Limhi indicated, he would have had Ammon executed immediately and without formalities on the assumption that he was one of Noah's former priests who had kidnapped the Lamanite maidens in Shemlon and thus provoked an international crisis.

Whatever his shortcomings in the judicial field, Limhi, in general, proved to be a capable ruler with the interests of his people at heart. He was evidently an exception to the general rule that Nephite kings were first and foremost prophets and ecclesiastical leaders, for the record informs us that "there was none in the land that had authority from God." (Mos. 22:33.) But Limhi did, apparently, perform at least some of the functions normally considered the province of the priest. For example, he called a mass meeting of his people, not at the royal palace, but at the temple. (Mos. 7:17.) On another occasion, because of the large number of widows in the land, he commanded that the men "should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger." (Mos. 21:17.) Whether this commandment had the force of a national tax or was merely a religious injunction is not certain, but the latter seems more probable. The language of the decree suggests that the transaction was to take place directly between those who had and the widows who had not, without governmental mediation. No penalty is mentioned for
those who might have chosen to disregard the request. The humble and prayerful state of the people at the time indicates that compliance was likely voluntary and complete without a need for further action on the part of the king.

It is a tribute to Limhi's greatness and humility that following the reunion of his people with their kinsmen in Zarahemla, he sought for no position or honor for himself but willingly became one of Mosiah's subjects. Such was his gratitude for the blessing of deliverance from Lamanite bondage that he would willingly have become a slave to the Nephites, had it been necessary, though, as he discovered, slavery had been outlawed by King Mosiah. (Alma 27:9.) Instead, Limhi was granted the expressed desire of his heart, baptism at the hands of Alma, and presumably lived out the remainder of his days as an ordinary citizen, or possibly as a minor official, in the land of Zarahemla.

ALMA'S CITY OF HELAM

The Book of Mormon recounts that Abinadi's preaching produced at least one direct convert--Alma, a priest of King Noah, who was forced to flee from the king's wrath following his conversion. Secluding himself in the land of Mormon, he launched a religious crusade through which in time he built up a considerable following. After baptizing his newly won adherents, he organized them into the "church of Christ," with a priest ordained to minister to the needs of each fifty members.
Following their discovery by King Noah's armies, they fled into the wilderness and founded a city of their own in the land of Helam.

Helam is remembered better for the government it didn't have than for the one it had. Initially the people approached Alma with the request that he become their king. Alma respectfully declined, delivering a speech on political theory rivaling that of King Mosiah a few years later. With the memory of King Noah's oppression fresh on his mind, he told them:

Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king.

Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king.

But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord...

And now I say unto you, ye have been oppressed by king Noah, and have been in bondage to him and his priests, and have been brought into iniquity by them; therefore ye were bound with the bands of iniquity.

And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you.

And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.  

There is no specific mention of what type of rule Alma may have substituted for the proposed monarchy. Their church organization likely proved sufficient for most of their needs, since the community

26Mos. 23:7-9, 12-14.
was small and composed solely of church members. Alma taught his people "that every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contentions among them." (Mos. 23:15.) If his counsel was heeded, no law enforcement agencies or magistrates were necessary, and the small size of the community made establishment of any kind of military force impractical. In short, Alma's people seem to have enjoyed an ideal and purely theocratic form of society wherein the people were taught correct principles and in large measure governed themselves.

SUMMARY

With few exceptions, monarchy proved to be an efficient, fair, and popular form of government for the Nephite nation during its first five hundred years. Kings were prophets and, as such, were generally religious leaders as well as political figures, and directed in both civil and spiritual matters in keeping with the highest standards of morality and the revealed will of God. In both the first and second dynasties, as well as in Zeniff's colony, each ruler came to the throne by popular consent and normally granted his subjects a substantial voice in governmental affairs. Almost invariably they labored as servants and teachers of the people rather than as tyrants. They took the lead in defending their people against foes, both foreign and domestic, and enforced the established law with justice and impartiality. It was widely held that if an eternal succession of similarly enlightened
rulers could be assured, monarchy would be the best possible form of government.

But through bitter experience the nation found that it was difficult to guarantee the permanency of such a happy state. The destruction, moral as well as national, which resulted from Noah's reign caused the Nephites to take a long hard look at the institution of monarchy itself. Under Mosiah's inspired leadership they determined, rather than risk a repetition of Noah's brand of despotism, to establish an altogether new form of rule, so far as Nephite history was concerned—a system of judges appointed by the people themselves.
Chapter 5

THE REIGN OF THE JUDGES

The passing of the monarchy and the advent of the republic was one of the two most momentous events in the first five hundred years of Nephite history, rivaling and perhaps even surpassing in importance the earlier merger of Mosiah's colony with the Mulekite nation. In keeping with the Israelite tradition of using politically significant events as chronological landmarks, the Nephites from this point on no longer measured time according to the number of years since Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, but according to the interval since the establishment of the reign of the judges. Though, as Roberts observed, "it is difficult to determine with precision the entire character of the constitution of the Nephite democracy,"\(^1\) this chapter will summarize what is known concerning the origin, structure, and operation of this early American brand of democracy.

REASONS FOR THE CHANGE

The sweeping governmental changes which occurred at the end of Mosiah's reign did not result from any belated conclusion that

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\(^1\)B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, II (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., \(\text{c. 1926}\)), 212.

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monarchy was inferior to democracy. On the contrary, Nephite prophets had for centuries ruled as kings with divine sanction and popular approval. Even after plans were laid for the inauguration of the system of judges, King Mosiah continued to rule his people until his death. He obviously felt no urgency to make the transition. In fact, he made clear that he considered monarchy to be the superior form of government, provided a succession of worthy kings could be assured. Only an increasing fear that such a happy state could not be perpetuated, coupled with specific instructions from the Lord on the subject, convinced Mosiah of the need for a change.

The catalyst which precipitated Mosiah's decision was the desire of his four sons to go on a preaching mission to the Lamanites rather than accept the responsibility of the government. The king well remembered the degeneracy and rebelliousness of his sons prior to their conversion and feared they might revert to such a state again, in spite of their professed conversion. He also foresaw the crisis which would occur should the rightful heir reconsider his abdication after another was already seated on the throne. As Mosiah pointed out to his people,

If there should be another appointed in his stead, behold I fear there would rise contentions among you. And who knoweth but what my son, to whom the kingdom doth belong, should turn to be angry and draw away a part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood and perverting the way of the Lord, yea, and destroy the souls of many people.

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2Mos. 29:7.
A second factor weighing heavily on Mosiah's mind was the southern colony's recent tragic experience with King Noah. As Mosiah was well aware, one wicked king can have an incredible amount of influence for evil upon his countrymen, and it is almost impossible to remove such a king once his power is established.

A third consideration in the proposed constitutional revision was the desirability of involving the entire citizenry in the governmental processes, making each person fully responsible for his own actions and granting to each equal enjoyment of the rights and privileges of government. Although they had previously had the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the appointments and proposals of the king, the people as a whole seem to have had little responsibility for nominating their governmental leaders, initiating policy, or sharing directly in the administration of the law. This was now to change. After "unfolding unto them all the trials and troubles of a righteous king," Mosiah told his people "that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part." (Mos. 29:33-34.) Mosiah observed that under normal circumstances the majority is usually right. "Therefore," he directed; "this shali ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people." (Mos. 29:26.) Should the time ever come when the majority should choose iniquity, the remedy would not be found in further changing the governmental structure. Rather, Mosiah taught, "then is the time that the judgments of God will
come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land." (Mos. 29:27.) Upon hearing Mosiah's full argument, the people relinquished their desires for a king, "and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins" (Mos. 29:38), rather than be unduly influenced or coerced either for good or ill by an entrenched hereditary ruler. In short, the record tells us that "they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them." (Mos. 29:39.)

As compelling as the above-mentioned reasons were, Mosiah did not move to revise the national constitution on the basis of human wisdom alone. Though we have no details of the Lord's revelation on the subject, we are told specifically that the Nephite laws, including, presumably, those relating to the new governmental structure, were those "which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people." (Hel. 4:22.)

Even in view of the foregoing considerations, it is doubtful that the transition to a new governmental system could have been greeted so enthusiastically or accomplished so smoothly had not the Nephites already been familiar with the divinely established system of judges as it operated in ancient Israel. As Nibley pointed out, when Mosiah suggested the appointment of judges,

Everyone seems to know exactly what he means, for in his speech, which is given in full, he does not have to explain the system to his hearers at all, and they adopt his suggestions quite readily and without any of the confusion and jamming that
always goes with a shift from one type of government to a wholly
different one. If Mosiah and his officers "newly arrange the
affairs of the people," it is certainly along familiar lines. 3

Nibley concluded that "the extreme prominence of judges
and judgment seats in the Book of Mormon . . . is a direct and
authentic heritage of the Old World in Lehi's day." 4 The people's
familiarity with the idea of rule by judges, together with their reverence
for both the outgoing king and the incoming chief judge, resulted in a
remarkably harmonious transfer of power. As Reynolds noted:

When he /Mosiah/ passed away no fierce convulsions wrecked
the ship of state, the political atmosphere was calm, the people
joyfully assumed their new responsibilities, and the first of the
judges succeeded the last of the kings without causing one
disturbing wave on the placid water of the national life. 5

THEOCRATIC ELEMENTS

Under the reign of the judges, the chief ecclesiastical leader
and the supreme civil authority were no longer automatically the same
individual. The people were free to nominate and elect anyone they
chose. But the fact that they so often voluntarily elected the chief
high priest or someone of comparable spiritual qualifications to serve

3Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon (2d ed.;

4Ibid., p. 84.

5George Reynolds, The Story of the Book of Mormon
(Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), p. 123.
as chief judge bears witness to the reverence with which they still viewed the institution of theocratic monarchy. We are told that it became "the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains (save it were in their times of wickedness) some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy." (3 Ne. 3:19.) The same custom extended to their civil officers, as well. Thus, their first chief judge was Alma the Younger, who had already succeeded his father as chief high priest. When the pressures of the two offices became too intense to permit one man to do justice to both, Alma nominated a successor, Nephihah, who similarly "filled the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God." (Alma 50:37.) Subsequent Nephite history saw such other spiritual giants on the judgment seat as Helaman and his son, Nephi, both of whom served simultaneously as chief judge and chief high priest, and Lachoneus, described by the record as "a great prophet" (3 Ne. 3:19), whose words and prophecies were "so great and marvelous ... that they did cause fear to come upon all the people." (3 Ne. 3:16.) Only in times of unusual wickedness did the nation break with this tradition of elevating inspired men to their highest political office.

Even when the chief high priest was not the chief judge, his counsel was often sought and his opinions respected. After Alma's resignation from the judgment seat the Nephites more than once looked to him for direction in their military campaigns. (Alma 16:5-6; 43:23.) Helaman, as chief high priest, responded to a national emergency by
personally leading an army of two thousand youths into battle. Yet, despite his exalted ecclesiastical station he did not arrogate political or military authority to himself, but willingly accepted orders from Antipus and looked to the constituted civil and military leaders for provisions and reinforcements for his little band. In terms of his contribution to the eventual peace and stability of the nation, however, the record concludes, Helaman was "no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni," the military commander-in-chief. (Alma 48:19.)

In the judicial field, as Sperry suggested, "it appears that even during the days of the judges, religious authorities had certain civil powers and carried out judgments against offenders." The specification that "no lawyer nor judge nor high priest . . . could have power to condemn any one to death save their condemnation was signed by the governor of the land" (3 Ne. 6:22) suggests that under certain conditions, and subject to the ratification of the governor, a high priest could indeed invoke the death penalty. Whether such a prerogative arose out of the religious office or whether it applied only to those high priests who were simultaneously civil judges cannot be proven. What is clear is that there was throughout the republic a high degree of cooperation and interaction between civil and religious leaders. The case of Korihor furnishes a notable example. Though "the law could have no hold upon

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him" (Alma 30:12) because of his professed sincerity of belief, Korihor was arraigned before a tribunal consisting of the local high priest and the local chief judge in the land of Gideon. Feeling incompetent to pass final judgment in the case, the local authorities sent Korihor on to Zarahemla to be examined by their national counterparts, Alma and Nephihah. No one suggested that the presence of either at the hearing was in any way improper. The chief judge was as much involved as the chief high priest in lecturing Korihor and in calling upon the nation to reject his teachings and repent of their sins.

A further example of the interrelationship of the secular and spiritual among the Nephites is Moroni, who sought and received divine revelation concerning the conduct of his office of chief captain. And his son and military successor, Moroniah, preached side by side with Nephi and Lehi, realizing the impossibility of achieving additional military victories without a national spiritual reformation. Speaking of the Nephite political organization, John L. Sorenson concluded:

Control, authority, power were in the hands primarily of priests... It was not what we would call a patriarchal form nor a national nor a bureaucratic form of government; it was rather a theocratic form of government operating through local geographical units without any significant control body as its head... Law was developed and there were courts, in all probability, but under religious auspices. Priests were the judges, and they were also the lawyers. At least they held the general title and power of priest, even though they might have the special function and
title of lawyer or judge. Religion was central as the organizing force in their social and political life.7

Even in times of wickedness the tradition of cooperation between church and state persisted, with corrupt priests siding with equally corrupt lawyers and judges against Alma and Amulek in Ammonihah, against Alma and his sons among the Zoramites, and against Nephi in Zarahemla. In such times of wickedness, the voice of the true prophets generally went unheeded, but the prophets never relinquished their right nor abandoned their responsibility of continuing to preach on political, as well as religious, subjects. In fact, Nephi's speaking out concerning the corruptness of their law was the main charge leveled against him by his accusers. Nephite prophets asserted as did Brigham Young that the Lord's servants "are authorized to counsel and dictate in the greatest and what might be deemed the most trifling matters, to instruct, direct, and guide His Saints."8 Popular rejection of a prophet did not destroy the validity of his message. Although Alma in Ammonihah no longer had his former governmental authority, which fact his hearers were quick to point out, and though he had no civil power to enforce his commands, his prophetic authority to deliver the Lord's message, even concerning such seemingly temporal matters as the activities of lawyers and judges, was undiminished. As Brigham


8JD, XII, 245.
Young put it, with regard to a comparable situation in his day, detractors "could not destroy the appointment of the Prophet of God, they could only destroy their own authority, cut the thread that bound them to the Prophet of God, and sink themselves to hell." The people of Ammonihah could reject the message of Alma on the grounds that he was no longer their chief judge, but they could not escape the verdict of the Great Judge. Within a short time "every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness." (Alma 16:9.)

The Nephites recognized that their newly formed republic, while short of the heavenly ideal, was nonetheless the form of government best suited to conditions existing among them in the century before the coming of Christ. In this, their attitude was much the same as that of Latter-day Saints toward the United States Constitution. Church members fully accept the document as having been authored by "wise men . . . raised up unto this very purpose." (D&C 101:80.) According to the Doctrine and Covenants, "as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil." (D&C 98:7.) Nonetheless, Orson Pratt taught, it is inferior to the perfect and theocratic form of government which will eventually prevail. He said:

Will the government of the United States continue forever? No, it is not sufficiently perfect; and notwithstanding it has been

\[9\text{Millennial Star, XXVI, 487.}\]
sanctioned by the Lord at a time when it was suited to the circumstances of the people, yet the day will come . . . when the United States government, and all others, will be uprooted, and the kingdoms of this world will be united in one, and the kingdom of our God will govern the whole earth.  

In much the same way, the Nephites were aware that rule by judges was only the second best governmental system. As Mosiah had said, "it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man." (Mos. 29:12.) Recognizing the danger of perpetuating the monarchy under then-existing conditions, yet they looked forward to the eventual coming of their "heavenly King" (Mos. 2:19), of whom Isaiah had prophesied that "the government shall be upon his shoulder." (Is. 9:6; 2 Ne. 19:6.) Some one hundred thirty-six years after the inauguration of the reign of the judges, the long-anticipated event occurred, and for nearly two hundred years the nation apparently lived again under the ideal and theocratic form of rule their ancestors had known.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The new constitution called for a chief judge, or governor, with jurisdiction over the entire nation and lesser judges of various ranks in the outlying towns and regions. At least four levels of authority are distinguishable. In addition to the chief judge of the entire land, each major subdivision of the country had a "chief judge." For example, when Alma and Amulek were imprisoned in Ammonihah, "the chief judge

10ID, III, 71.
of the land" came to participate personally in their harrassment.

(Alma 14:14.) Further down the scale in Ammonihah were other "chief
rulers," one of whom, Antionah, was mentioned by name. (Alma 12:20.)
Finally, there were the lesser judges, of which there appear to have
been "many" in Ammonihah alone. (Alma 14:18.) No details are given
concerning the titles or functions of other governmental officials, with
the exception of the law enforcement personnel, the military leaders
(whose organization will be discussed in a later chapter), and the
nondescript "officers" vaguely alluded to in 3 Nephi 6:11. It is evident,
as stated by Reynolds and Sjodahl, that "no civil council or parliament
divided with the Chief Executive, who was the Chief Judge, the
authority to make war or conclude peace, to decide the terms of
treaties, or to frame any enactment for the regulation of public affairs."11

Such governmental powers as existed, whether legislative, executive, or
judicial, reposed in the hands of the judges and of the people as a whole.

Concerning the Book of Mormon account of the reign of the
judges, B. H. Roberts commented:

While it outlines a government based upon the central
principle of democracy--government by the people--yet there
is nothing modern in that republic. The principle of representa-
tion no where appears; a division of the political power into
co-ordinate and independent departments no where appears;
there is no indication of a federation even, much less any of

11 George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, Commentary on
the Book of Mormon, ed. Philip C. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret
those modern refinements which distinguish modern federated republics from more ancient federated republics. ¹²

Should such modern refinements appear in the governments described by the Book of Mormon, they, in Roberts' view, "would be prejudicial to its claims of being an ancient record." ¹³

POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE JUDGE

The primary function of the judges, as the name would imply, was not to legislate but to judge. Judicial decisions were to be rendered "according to the law which had been given them" by their fathers, which was acknowledged as correct. (Mos. 29:25, 39.) It is true enough that the position carried with it "power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given" (Alma 4:16), and indeed certain regulations or modifications of the law were made as the need arose (Alma 62:42), but in general the chief judge resisted the temptation to make or to permit any sweeping changes. (Alma 51:2.) Since the people viewed their national constitution, or the laws of Mosiah, as having been handed down from on high (Hel. 4:22), wholesale revision of the law, though legally permissible, would be tantamount to apostasy. Thus, the author of the Book of Helaman lamented the apostate condition of the Nephites of 30 B.C. by observing, "They had altered and trampled under their feet the laws

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¹² Roberts, op. cit., III, 153. ¹³ Ibid., p. 149.
of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded him to give unto the people." (Hel. 4:22.)

The oath of office of the chief judge succinctly summarized his duties:

To judge righteously, and to keep the peace and freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime. 14

Neither the chief judge nor the lesser judges, at least the God-fearing among them, seem to have felt any responsibility or pretended to have any authority to regiment the lives of their people beyond the level necessary to the defense of the nation and the protection of the people from foes, foreign and domestic. Pahoran specifically denied seeking for power of any kind other than to retain his office that he "might preserve the rights and the liberty" of his people. (Alma 61:9.) Even if governmental involvement in such areas as social welfare had been deemed desirable, the size and scattered condition of the nation would have made it impractical, at least on a nationwide basis.

The power of the chief judge seems to have been seriously limited, even in the capital city of Zarahemla, unless the majority of the common citizens supported his views. The ultimatum delivered by the unbelievers to their more religious countrymen shortly before

14Alma 50:39.
the birth of Christ provides a good example. A date was set apart on which the believers in Samuel's prophecies were to be executed en masse unless the predicted sign should be given. And Lachoneus, the chief judge, seems to have been powerless to do anything about it, notwithstanding his being a "just man" and a "great prophet." (3 Ne. 3:12, 19.) The same laws which safeguarded the country against the tyranny of a corrupt despot also prevented a virtuous ruler from compelling a recalcitrant majority to follow his example. The state was equipped to deal with isolated crime, but not with mass criminality. The latter was held to be the province of the prophets, whose preaching was seen as the only force with the potential to reclaim a deviant nation.

**Judicial Procedures**

The procedure whereby civil cases were resolved is detailed in Alma 11:2--(1) a complaint was brought before the judge against the offender; (2) the judge, in turn, dispatched officers to bring the accused before the court; (3) judgment was rendered "according to the law and evidences which were brought against him," and (4) the convicted offender "was compelled to pay what he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber." The procedure in criminal cases was apparently similar. When necessary, the judge deputized officials to apprehend suspected law breakers (Hel. 2:10), but on many occasions the people themselves seem to have assumed the responsibility for bringing transgressors before the judge,
rather than depend on a separate law enforcement apparatus. Thus, it was "the people of the church" (Alma 1:10) who apprehended Nehor and "the people of Ammon" who brought Korihor to trial.

The Nephites, even in times of apostasy, recognized that a man could not properly be convicted without tangible evidence of his guilt. Hence the accusers of Alma and Amulek spared no effort to uncover evidence of some "crime" which they could make appear or witness against them." (Alma 10:13.) A confession (or apparent confession) was considered excellent evidence, and every attempt was made to get Alma and Amulek to contradict themselves, just as Nephi's captors cross-examined him for the same purpose a century later. (Alma 10:13; Hel. 9:19.) Though straightforward interrogation of the accused was a recognized and approved investigative procedure (Alma 30:22), legal harrassment of the sort which concentrated on "cunning devices" (Alma 10:13) and taking "advantage of one because of his words" (2 Ne. 28:8) appears in the Book of Mormon only in times and places of spiritual degeneracy and was probably not typical of the judicial system as a whole.

Another institution mentioned only in times of apostasy was that of lawyers, such as were appointed by the people of Ammonihah to administer the law at their trials. It is not clear whether these lawyers were an accepted and established part of Nephite society in general, or whether their existence was invariably an accompaniment of spiritual decline. Since they were paid according to their employ,
lawyers naturally tended to "stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness, that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them." (Alma 11:20.) Since judges were also paid according to time spent, many of them succumbed to the same temptation. Such tactics led Amulek to warn the Ammonihahites that the foundation for their destruction was being laid in the unrighteousness of their lawyers and judges. (Alma 10:27.) The only time lawyers other than those in Ammonihah are specifically mentioned is in 3 Nephi 6, during another time of extreme national depravity. There is no indication that trials among the Nephites ever took the form of a debate between opposing attorneys representing both the prosecution and the defense. Rather, such lawyers as existed seem to have been prosecuting attorneys in the employ of the state, whose sole mission it was to bring forth evidences of the guilt of the accused. While there is no reason to doubt that such lawyers could well have performed a valuable function in the prosecution of wrongdoers during normal times as well, the fact remains that the only ones specifically mentioned seem more devoted to the perpetuation of crime than the preservation of law and order.

Minor and routine cases were presumably tried by the various "lesser judges," but some matters seem to have been considered so important that a local chief judge or even the chief judge of all the land
had original jurisdiction. Judgment in routine civil and criminal cases seems to have been rendered solely by the judge, which is not surprising when it is remembered that trial by jury is a comparatively modern innovation. The Nephite system did have built in safeguards against isolated judicial corruption or error, however. As Mosiah told his people:

And now if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge.

If your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a small number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people. Mosiah's language implies that in cases of appeal it was technically the previous judge, not the original defendant, who was on trial, though presumably the conviction of a lower judge resulted in a reversal of his judgment against the defendant. We are given no information as to what disciplinary measures may have been taken against a judge thus convicted of improper conduct. Common sense would suggest that mere errors in judgment or misinterpretation of the law, unless flagrant and repeated, would carry no penalty, whereas intentional misapplication of the law would result at least in removal from office. The people as a whole apparently constituted the court of

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15 Examples include Nehor's arraignment before Alma for the murder of Gideon (Alma 1:10) and Alma's and Amulek's appearance before the chief judge in Ammonihah to answer to charges of reviling against the law and the public officials of the land. (Alma 14:4.)

16 Mosiah 29:28-29.
last resort, so far as earthly tribunals were concerned, for the otherwise "supreme court" was directed to judge an offending appellate judge "according to the voice of the people" (Mos. 29:29), who, presumably, through a referendum could overturn an improper decision. If even then a righteous verdict was not obtained, there was one recourse left. As Mosiah had warned, "If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you." (Mos. 29:27.)

Military Responsibilities

In the early days of the republic, the chief judge personally led the Nephite armies into battle, and the record suggests that by so doing he was only fulfilling his recognized duty. The record states: "Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore, he went up with his people . . . at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle." (Alma 2:16, italics added.) Not content to watch the conflict from a safe vantage point, Alma engaged in hand to hand combat with both the rebel Amlici and the Lamanite king, killing the former and driving away the latter. In later years Nephite military fortunes were placed in the hands of a chief captain, or commander, "who was appointed by the chief judges and the voice of the people" and was duly authorized to prosecute affairs of war and peace as he deemed best. (Alma 45:34.) Likely this was due to the increasing complexity of the position of chief judge and the need for a capable military
commander who could devote his full time to the matter of national defense. But the appointment of a subordinate to run the military did not mean that the chief judge felt any less personal responsibility for the safety of his people. When the protracted war with the Lamanites detailed in Alma 43-62 took a sudden turn for the worse, the chief judge, Pahoran, fought readily alongside of Moroni, the chief captain, until peace was once again restored.

FINANCES AND TAXATION

Whereas King Benjamin had labored with his hands so as not to depend on the people for his support, the office of chief judge seems to have been a full time position with an established salary. Both Alma and Nephi, each of whom served simultaneously as chief judge and chief high priest, found that the demands of the judgeship left so little time for the more important responsibilities of the high priest that they eventually resigned from the governmental post. Lesser judges were also remunerated for their services, though their official duties seem in most cases to have required only a portion of their time and attention. Consequently, they each received wages "according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged." (Alma 11:1.) The standard rate of pay was a senine of gold or a senum of silver per day, either of which was worth "a measure of barley." (Alma 11:3, 7.) We have no way of ascertaining the exact size of "a measure of barley," but it is obvious, as Roberts
concluded, "that it was no very great amount."¹⁷ "Indeed," he continued, "in all that is said upon the subject of compensation for public service in the state, it is manifest that the Nephite government was administered on the strictest lines of economy."¹⁸

Taxes are nowhere mentioned specifically during this period. In fact, taxes as such are spoken of in the Book of Mormon only in connection with unjust monarchs. But even the modest salary accorded the judges required some source of public funds, not to mention the substantial amounts of provisions and weapons which were needed by the army. Whatever taxation was employed was undoubtedly carried out equitably, in keeping with Mosiah's edict that "the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part." (Mos. 29:34.) But the amount of taxation, the basis on which it was levied, and the methods of collection must for now remain a mystery.

REGIONALISM

As had been the case with ancient Israel, the Nephite republic was characterized by an extreme decentralization of power. In the days of the monarchy the nation seemingly had been smaller and more cohesive. Benjamin, for example, found no insuperable problems in assembling his entire nation to hear his last great sermon. Even

¹⁷Roberts, op. cit., p. 214. ¹⁸Ibid.
though the multitude was so great some could not hear Benjamin's message first hand, it is clear that overpopulation was not one of the nation's more pressing problems. As the years passed, a moderate population growth and ever-expanding borders, with no corresponding improvement in transportation or communication, made increased local independence inevitable. A classic example is the case once again of Alma and Amulek in Ammonihah. There the local chief judge imprisoned and persecuted the two missionaries and massacred their converts with no demonstrable concern for what anyone in Zarahemla thought about it. The rulers in Ammonihah had their own body of law, which they interpreted in their own way, and which totally nullified the constitutional guarantees of freedom of belief and ignored the stipulation that all death sentences must be sanctioned by the governor of the land.

The same kind of local autonomy was found among the Zoramites, whose rulers forcibly evicted the new converts in their midst. The provision that a disputed decision of a given judge could

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19Even in 74 B.C., the Nephite population was nothing very impressive in terms of numbers. We are told that the descendants of the priests of King Noah (who joined with the Lamanites) were nearly as numerous as the entire Nephite nation. Furthermore, the record indicates that these descendants resulted from the union of an unspecified number of apostate priests and twenty-four Lamanite women between fifty and seventy years earlier. Even with a phenomenal birth rate the total number of descendants of these apostate priests by 74 B.C., and consequently the total Nephite population, must have been far short of the Nephite numbers in 385 A.D. when over two million died in a single battle.
be appealed to a higher authority seems to have broken down. As Mosiah had indicated, the democratic system popularly called "the reign of the judges" would work only when the majority favored that which was right.

The short-lived conflict between the lands of Morianton and Lehi further illustrates the regional nature of the Nephite government. The confrontation arose over a boundary dispute between the two adjoining lands. There is no mention of any appeal to the national government to adjudicate the matter. Rather, when Moroni was called in, it was simply to help defend the people of the land of Lehi against the aggression of Morianton, not to resolve the original question of the boundaries. That was recognized as being a matter for the two lands to work out between themselves. After Morianton's military adventures were ended and his army defeated, his followers were restored to their own land "and a union took place between them and the people of Lehi." (Alma 50:36.) There is no mention of Nephihah's becoming involved at all. The whole matter was resolved and the treaty concluded on a local level.

In times of all-out war, the nation would generally pull together to defend itself from the common enemy, but even then the war effort was often hampered by regional tendencies. Moroni wrote to Pahoran complaining about the lack of concern the people in Zarahemla felt for the welfare of those who were down on the front lines fighting the Lamanites. Though many of those in Zarahemla who resisted
induction into the army were outright traitors to the nation, in league with the Lamanites, others were very likely simply reluctant to get involved in a seemingly far away conflict which posed no immediate threat to their own community. With regard to the basically regional interests of the Nephite citizenry, John L. Sorenson concluded:

Each local city or region or land cared for its own, and within those each village cared for its own. They had small horizons. Remember Alma and his people in the land of Helam. In about one year they established "a city" yet nobody else even knew they were there. (Mos. 23.) Must have been a pretty empty land; they must not have had much communication. They didn't see anyone, and no one saw them. We could go on and give many other examples of the same thing. Over and over again we get the message. People were interested in their local affairs.20

Hugh Nibley viewed this regional and hierarchical organization of Nephite society as an evidence of the Near Eastern cultural background of the ancient Americans. In his An Approach to the Book of Mormon he wrote:

For example, the capital city of each region had daughter cities depending on it, as in the Near East; in time of war from local strong places one could flee to fortified towns, and from them to more important fortified cities, and so on, until in the case of a national emergency the entire society would take refuge in the main center of the land. In peacetime the system was reflected in local, regional and national assemblies; politically we find a corresponding hierarchy of judges, from the local petty judges (who made so much trouble) on up to "the chief judge over all the land"; in religion such a hierarchy runs from local priests to the chief high priest over all the land, and even in the sects and churches Alma and Moroni appointed various priests to function under them at various levels. In this world of "island"

20John L. Sorenson, "Nephite Social Structure" (lecture to the Salt Lake City chapter, University Archaeological Society, Feb., 1964; Xerox copy of dittoed manuscript in Brigham Young University library), p. 4.
societies, isolated from each other often by immense stretches of wilderness, we find the same system everywhere faithfully reproduced, and it is identical with that which was flourishing in the Near East in the time that Lehi left Jerusalem.21

DEMOCRATIC FEATURES

Everything of major importance in the Nephite republic was either initiated or ratified by the people as a whole. To begin with, the new constitution and set of laws proposed by Mosiah were adopted only after the entire citizenry had been convinced of the wisdom of the change and had relinquished their desires for a king. "Every man," we are informed, "expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins." (Mos. 29:38.) It was precisely because these laws "were acknowledged by the people" that the people "were obliged to abide by the laws which he [Mosiah] had made." (Alma 1:1.)

It was recognized that the people possessed the legal, if not the moral, right to change the laws from time to time, as well. In fact, the role of the people in making and amending their own laws was so substantial that Nephi referred to their legal code as "the law which had been given by the people" (3 Ne. 6:26), in spite of the fact that it had been formulated in its original form by Mosiah. It was the misuse of this legislative power which caused Nephi such grave concern in later years. "For as their laws and their governments were

established by the voice of the people," we are told, "and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted." (Hel. 5:2.)

Once the proposed system of judges itself had been accepted, the people assembled in bodies throughout the land to participate in the election of their new officers. Not only the chief judge but the lesser officials, as well, were installed by popular vote. (Alma 60:1.) Even when a judge was accorded the privilege of choosing subordinate officers or a successor to himself, his nominations required confirmation by the electorate. We read that Alma gave Nephihah "power according to the voice of the people" (Alma 4:16) to succeed him as chief judge. Moroni was appointed chief captain not only by the chief judges, but also by "the voice of the people." (Alma 46:34.) Even the lawyers, as public officials rather than private practitioners, were selected by popular vote. (Alma 10:24.)

As noted by Reynolds and Sjodahl, "the manner of conducting elections is not clearly defined . . . . It is quite possible that the methods were entirely dissimilar to any known at modern elections." Active campaigning for office by several interested candidates seems to have been rare, but permissible. When three of Pahoran's sons contended for the judgment seat following their father's death, they

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22 Reynolds and Sjodahl, op. cit., III, 11-12.
were apparently doing something highly unusual. Helaman viewed
the situation as a "serious difficulty" or "serious contention," which
caused "three divisions among the people." (Hel. 1:1-5.) But none
of the contestants was criticized for thus aspiring to office. In fact,
when the newly elected chief judge, Pahoran II, was assassinated,
one of the other candidates, Pacumeni, was appointed in his place
with no suggestion that his previous opposition to Pahoran was in
any way improper. And the record makes clear that Paanchi, the third
candidate for the chief judgeship, was executed not for running for
office but for attempting to take over the government in spite of the
popular verdict.

Following Pacumeni's death, according to Helaman, "there
began to be a contention again among the people concerning who
should fill the judgment seat." (Hel. 2:1.) This does not necessarily
mean that several candidates sprang up, each attempting to convince
the populace of the superiority of his own qualifications. It could
refer simply to an initial disagreement among various respectable
segments of the population over whom to draft for the office. But
neither does the record exclude the possibility of there having been
another full-fledged political campaign of the type waged two years
previously.

Though Nephite officers generally seem to have held office
for life, they were by no means immune to the popular will once elected,
for the law of Mosiah seems to have provided for the recall of an
unpopular official or even the abolition of the office itself by a simple majority vote. The advent of Amlici was alarming to the people of the church, not because of the danger of his forcibly overthrowing the government, but because he threatened to corner enough votes to depose Alma and install himself as king through perfectly legal means. However much the incumbents detested Amlici and opposed his designs, "they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people" (Alma 2:3), so a special election was called to decide the issue. As it turned out, "the voice of the people came against Amlici" (Alma 2:7), but had the verdict been otherwise, it appears that Alma would have been legally obligated to turn over the government to his rival. Pahoran faced a similar crisis during his administration. The issues were familiar—a group of so-called "kingmen" attempted to abolish the free government and establish a monarchy with one of their number as king. Again there was a distinct danger that the reigning chief judge might be evicted—not for malfeasance but simply for lack of public support. As it turned out, however, the voting again favored the incumbent, much to the joy and relief of his followers. (Alma 51:7.)

Voting took place by the people assembling themselves "together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judge." (Mos. 29:39.) In cases where two or more candidates were running, the people in favor of each candidate apparently met separately. After the "voices" were
cast, "they were laid before the judges" (Alma 2:6), who announced the verdict. Just what form the "casting of voices" took, and how they were subsequently "laid before the judges" is not specified. The term "voices" would suggest a viva-voce type of balloting, which would be satisfactory enough when a candidate faced no opposition, and the mere expression of popular consent was all that was needed. In cases of a closer race, such as that between Pahoran, Pacumeni, and Paanchi, some more precise system was doubtlessly required. Perhaps it was only in such cases as this that the exact totals of the various groups were formally laid before the judges for final tabulation.

On two occasions Nephite chief judges resigned from office and turned the reins of government over to a successor of their own choosing. Alma appointed Nephihah, "according to the voice of the people" (Alma 4:16), and fifty years later Nephi selected Cezoram, presumably offering the same opportunity to the people to express their approval. With respect to Alma's nomination of Nephihah, Reynolds and Sjodahl stated, "Whether this was simply a courtesy extended to him by the people on account of their great love for his person and respect for his judgment, or whether it was a provision of the law is not plain."

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 13.}\]
Another noteworthy aspect of the Nephite republic was the tendency of the people to replace a recently deceased chief judge with his son. Joseph Fielding Smith stated that the "judges were chosen in a measure by the people, and in part by hereditary right." This selection according to "hereditary right" seems not to have been an inflexible constitutional necessity but was likely either a custom based on the ancient and revered tradition of monarchy or a recognition of the even more basic principle of election in the flesh, or foreordination, whereby as in ancient Israel certain families had acknowledged hereditary rights to political and religious authority, subject to their worthiness. It is a fact that six of the twelve known chief judges


25 As Joseph Smith noted, the world has long quarreled over the doctrine of election, "but they do not know anything about it." (HC, VI, 252.) Abraham, however, makes clear that even "before the foundations of the earth" it was established that specific lineages, and in particular the firstborn within those lineages, should be heirs to certain rights and privileges, including priesthood authority, which would be denied to others. (P. of G. P., Abraham 1:2-4, 26-27, 31.) This was no arbitrary or capricious display of favoritism by the Lord, but a divine provision whereby those "noble and great ones" among the pre-mortal intelligences who were elected, or chosen, to be the Lord's "rulers" in mortality would be sent to those families and under those circumstances whereby they could be best prepared and trained for their mortal missions. (Ibid., 3:22-23.) No predestination was involved, in the usual sense of the word, since those thus elected were free to accept or reject their preassigned mission in mortality. In ancient Israel the firstborn male child in each family, provided he was worthy, received a birthright entitling him to family or tribal leadership and a double portion of his father's property. It was originally designated that priesthood rights and responsibilities should be his as well (Ex. 13:2), which priesthood, as was pointed out in Chapter 2,
were sons of a previous chief judge. Nephihah, for example, was succeeded by his son, Pahoran. Upon Pahoran's death the only applicants for the judgeship were Pahoran's three sons. After the death of the first, Pahoran II, we are told that Pacumeni's subsequent appointment "was according to his right." (Hel. 1:13.) It is not specified whether this "right" arose because Pacumeni was the runner-up to Pahoran II in the original balloting or because he was the next in age of Pahoran's sons. It appears that the Nephites generally tended to keep the chief judgeship in the same family, provided the recently departed judge had a son who was both worthy and available. Following Pacumeni's death, however, the judicial office went outside of the family entirely, to Helaman, there being "no one to fill the judgment seat" (Hel. 2:1), in spite of the fact that Pahoran had "many" sons other than the three who had originally sought the post. By the same token, Alma had found no compelling reasons to appoint one of his own sons as his successor when he abdicated. Conceivably, the available remaining sons of both Pahoran and Alma were either considered unqualified for the office or, like the sons of Mosiah, they had ambi-

included political as well as religious authority when the theocratic system was fully established. Since the Nephites preserved other aspects of the Israelite culture, it is likely that they also retained an awareness of the principle of pre-mortal election and the consequent hereditary rights of certain individuals, and frequently reflected this awareness in their choice of chief judge.
tions outside of the political realm. It is just as likely, however, in view of the fact that the nation deviated from the practice of appointing the son of an outgoing chief judge as often as they followed it, that the practice itself, during the reign of the judges, was rooted only in an unbinding custom, albeit a custom which illustrated the nation's enduring reverence for the divinely sanctioned patriarchal system practiced by their forefathers.

Important questions of national policy were sometimes decided by popular vote at the invitation of the chief judge. A notable example involved the decision regarding the admission of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi as Nephite citizens. Rather than make the decision on his own authority, the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout the land requesting a formal expression of public opinion. Only after the people had approved the measure were the converted Lamanites settled in the land of Jershon with the promise of protection against attacks by their former compatriots.

When a referendum was not called for by the government on some issue of popular concern, the people could express their wishes through means of the petition. A few isolated petitions could be ignored by the chief judge, as when Pahoran disregarded the initial requests of the kingmen that the law be altered so as to recreate the monarchy. But when it became clear that there was a substantial number who felt the same way, Pahoran felt compelled to put the issue to a nationwide vote. Acting on the same principle, when he wished additional
emergency powers for himself to cope with a wartime crisis, Moroni sought to bolster his case by sending his petition to the governor "with the voice of the people." (Alma 51:15.)

Even in the judicial field the people were involved. It was not a police force but "the people" who brought Nehor before Alma and who, in Ammonihah, bound Alma and Amulek and hauled them before the chief judge. In certain serious cases even the verdict of the court seems to have depended on the decision of the people as a whole. At least in the case of Paanchi the would-be usurper was "tried according to the voice of the people, and condemned unto death." (Hel. 1:8.) Very likely practical considerations made similar participation of the people in all Nephite trials unfeasible.

It is evident that the Nephite system of judges was a highly democratic and remarkably successful form of government during the one hundred and twenty years it was in existence. According to Durham, the system reveals the authoritarian-democratic conflict in harmonious relationship; and shows the disposition in Mormon thought to grant full liberty to the individual while recognizing a doctrine of conformity with higher law as an "eternal" solution to an exceedingly complex problem.26

Eventually, however, the danger warned against by Mosiah proved the downfall of the Nephite republic. "They who chose evil

were more numerous than they who chose good" (Hel. 5:2), and the
government which for years had been one of the most high-principled
in history degenerated with popular acquiescence into one of the most
corrupt, with "Gadianton robbers filling the judgment-seats--having
usurped the power and authority of the land." (Hel. 7:4.) The means
whereby this was accomplished, and the nature of the so-called
"secret combination" which brought it about will be examined in
detail in Chapter 10.
Chapter 6

NEPHITE LAWS, RIGHTS OF CITIZENS, AND DOMESTIC POLICIES

Reynolds and Sjodahl suggested that "the existence of wise, just and liberal laws, administered in righteousness," such as was the case with the Nephites, is "the rule by which we can judge of the true greatness of a nation and of the happiness and prosperity of its citizens."¹ As it stands, the statement is probably an oversimplification. As the Nephites themselves discovered, political laws, in and of themselves, cannot guarantee the happiness and prosperity of a nation if other ingredients are missing. Nor is the existence of an enlightened legal code any guarantee that the laws will perpetually be administered equitably, nor that the laws themselves will not be altered by later generations.

It would perhaps be more accurate to suggest that the existence and enforcement of wise and equitable laws is a necessary but not a sufficient component of national felicity, or that they are "a rule," but not necessarily "the rule" by which a nation's greatness and prosperity, or at least its potential for the same can be assessed. Whatever the

total reasons may have been for the later decline and fall of the Nephite civilization, the laws originally bequeathed to it by inspired legislators were unquestionably not at fault. But neither were the laws themselves, once the ideals behind those laws had been abandoned, able to prevent the Nephites' headlong plunge into oblivion.

The following chapter will detail the origin, nature, and limitations of these "wise, just, and liberal laws" which caused Reynolds and Sjodahl so to admire the Nephite culture.

**ORIGINS: THE LAWS OF MOSES AND MOSIAH**

Initially, the Nephites produced little or no legislation of their own, but adhered strictly to the law of Moses as their guide in both temporal and spiritual matters. (2 Ne. 5:10.) Since the Mosaic law consisted of a comprehensive civil and criminal code as well as moral and religious prescriptions, little else was needed in the early days of the nation. With the passing of time, however, it was deemed necessary to amplify, modify, and clarify some of the more secular aspects of the law to better suit the peculiar and changed circumstances of the Nephites in the New World.

The most sweeping changes occurred during the days of Mosiah, the last Nephite king, whose influence on the nation's legal code was so profound that in his honor the law was thereafter referred to as "the law of Mosiah." (Alma 11:1; Hel. 4:22.) Reynolds ranked Mosiah among the most eminent law-makers this world has produced.
"We regard him in some respects, " he wrote, "as the Moses, in others the Alfred the Great, of his age and nation." Mosiah's chief contribution, however, seems to have been the establishment of a new governmental structure and the codification of laws regarding such things as weights and measures, not the wholesale revision of the Mosaic laws of justice and equity. Mosiah proposed that even after the new national constitution should go into effect, the newly-appointed judges should judge the people according to the laws which had been given them by their fathers--in other words, the law of Moses--which was deemed to be "correct," having been "given them by the hand of the Lord." (Mos. 29:25.) As stated by Roberts, "The body of the law that obtained under the reign of the kings went over into the jurisprudence of the republic."  

Within the framework of the laws laid down by Moses and Mosiah, and subject to ratification by the people, chief judges had the power to enact additional laws "according to the laws which had been given." (Alma 4:16.) It appears, however, that this power was seldom used by the more upright chief executives. With the exception of the "regulations" which were made concerning the law during the days of Pahoran, following a thirteen-year war with the Lamanites,  

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there is no mention of any mass legislative efforts in the last five hundred years of Nephite history other than in times or in places of spiritual decadence. Then and only then was there an observable and persistent tendency to overhaul and corrupt the entire legal framework of the nation.

As has already been observed, not only the chief judges but the people as a whole, during the days of the republic, wielded broad law-making powers. Though a reigning chief judge might propose new legislation or temporarily block a popular initiative, in the final analysis it was the people who determined what the law should be. Nephi stated simply, "Their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people," (Hel. 5:2), and Alma went so far as to suggest that the laws were respected as legitimate precisely because they had been accepted and "acknowledged by the people." (Alma 1:1.) Presumably, laws prescribed by an arbitrary or despotic ruler without popular consent would not have been regarded as being morally binding upon his constituents. Abinadi, for example, felt no obligation whatever to honor Noah's arbitrary law prohibiting his preaching concerning the coming of Christ.

RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF CITIZENS

Among the most striking of the Nephite laws were those guaranteeing the basic rights and personal freedoms of the people. Both freedom and equality were oft-treated themes of their prophets,
and a prominent chief judge went so far as to equate "the Spirit of God" with "the Spirit of freedom." (Alma 61:15.) It is not surprising, then, that both under the monarchy and under the republic slavery was forbidden. Religious freedom was likewise strictly protected. "If a man desired to serve God," Alma tells us, "it was his privilege; ... but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him." (Alma 30:9.) Not only freedom of belief but freedom of speech was guaranteed, so long as the speaker preached what he personally believed to be true. The Nephites evidently believed, as did Joseph Smith, that "every man has a natural, and, in our country, a constitutional right to be a false prophet, as well as a true prophet." 4 Since the notorious anti-Christ, Korihor, professed a sincere belief in his teachings, "the law could have no hold upon him" (Alma 30:12), for, we are informed, "it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds." (Alma 30:7.) The same principle applied in the case of an earlier anti-Christ, Nehor, whose rage at being defeated in a verbal encounter with Gideon led him to murder his antagonist. As expressed by Evan A. Fry:

While Nehor had been preaching this heresy no one even tried to stop him. He was exercising his free moral will and agency; he had a right to enjoy freedom of speech, even if the majority of the people did believe him wrong. He was never called to account for his heresy. But now that heresy had led him into murder, and

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4HC, VI, 304.
that was another matter. A law had been broken, and a man's life ruthlessly taken in passion. Nehor was brought before Alma, the chief judge, and sentenced to death according to their law—not for his heresy, but for his murder.5

Nephi was not exaggerating when he observed that the nation "had formed their laws according to equity and justice." (3 Ne. 6:4.)

As noted by George Q. Cannon, "They enjoyed the largest liberty consistent with the preservation of good order."6

The political rights enjoyed by the people have already been discussed: the right to appoint or at least concur in the appointment of their own public officials, the right of petition, and the privilege of having a voice in public policy. During normal times anyone accused of a crime also had the right to a formal trial before sentencing took place, and the right to appeal a disputed decision to a higher court. Although Limhi indicated that only his curiosity had prevented him from summarily executing Ammon and his brethren as suspected priests of King Noah, such haste and informality was not typical of Nephite rulers. Perhaps the apostate priests had already been tried and condemned in absentia, making only their apprehension and identification necessary before the sentence could be carried out. During times of extreme national emergency the normal guarantees of a speedy and


formal trial could be suspended if the national security required it.

Thus the leaders of the rebel kingmen who were not slain in battle with Moroni "were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period." (Alma 51:19.) Presumably their trials were to be held as soon as the public safety permitted.

Not the least of the rights and freedoms enjoyed by the Nephite populace was the freedom from excessive taxation and regimentation. We are told that the nation's love for Mosiah was based to a large degree on the fact that "he had not exacted riches of them," but "had granted unto his people that they should be delivered from all manner of bondage." (Mos. 29:40.) His announced intent in proposing rule by judges rather than kings was that "this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike" (Mos. 29:32), with such obligations and burdens of government as were inherently necessary designed to "come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part." (Mos. 29:34.) Just as all were considered alike unto God, "black and white, bond and free, male and female" (2 Ne. 26:33), so were they viewed in the eyes of the law established under his inspiration.

CRIMINAL LAWS AND PUNISHMENTS

Laws

As might be expected, there were specific laws in the Nephite code prohibiting murder, kidnapping, slavery, stealing, robbery,
plunder, armed rebellion, treason, persecution, and wilful non-payment of debt. Similar laws are found on the books of almost all civilized nations. More at variance with modern-day practice were their laws against adultery, which was punishable by the civil law. As in ancient Israel, there was a recognized distinction between illicit sexual relations involving a married person or persons and those between two single individuals. Reprehensible as were both offenses from a moral standpoint, they do not seem to have carried the same earthly penalty. Whereas Alma tells us that if a man "committed adultery," meaning, presumably, marital infidelity, "he was ... punished" (Alma 30:10), his own son, Corianton, received only a sermon following his apparent affair with the harlot Isabel. Polygamy was also proscribed, though no legal action seems to have been taken against the numerous flagrant offenders of Jacob's day. It is not plain whether this failure to prosecute was due to the comparative weakness of the law enforcement apparatus in view of the great number of violators, or whether consideration was given to the pretense that these were duly contracted marriages entered into as a result of an honest misinterpretation of the history of David and Solomon, not simple cases of adultery in admitted defiance of the law. At any rate, Jacob warned of the unbending requirements of divine justice, in an eternal sense, regardless of the temporal punishment or lack of it here and now.

Lying was another punishable offense among the Nephites, if it could be proven that the act was intentional. This was admittedly
a difficult provision to enforce, for a liar could often escape prosecution by pretending to teach according to his belief. It is possible that the "false Christs" and "false prophets, and false preachers and teachers" who were "punished according to their crimes" (W. of M. 15-16) in King Benjamin's day were convicted under this statute, but it is more likely that the crimes for which they were punished were not their false preaching and teaching but other unspecified crimes such as treason, religious persecution, or even murder, as had been the case with Nehor. It is evident that the Nephites and even the Lamanites put a particularly high premium on telling the truth when it involved the taking of a formal oath. Nephi's experience with Zoram is a classic example. When Zoram first discovered Nephi's identity and Nephi seized Zoram, both had cause for concern. Nephi feared that Zoram would return to Jerusalem, spread word of Laban's death and the flight of Nephi's group, and organize a search party to pursue them. Zoram, on the other hand, feared for his own life, or at least for his freedom. But as soon as Nephi assured Zoram, with an oath, that he would be a free man on the same footing with everyone else if he would go down into the desert with them, and as soon as Zoram responded with a similar oath indicating his intentions to accompany them, the fears of both men immediately ceased. The same phenomenon occurred when Moroni finally persuaded Zerahemnah to enter into a covenant of peace. Until the formal covenant was made, neither warrior trusted the other. But once Zerahemnah promised never to wage war
on the Nephites again, Moroni stopped worrying about him and allowed him to depart into his own land in peace. And Zerahemnah, intractible Lamanite warrior though he was, kept his promise and never again posed a threat to the Nephites. This near universal respect for the sanctity of an oath apparently extended to a similar regard for veracity in general, with legal penalties prescribed for those who violated the principle.

The Book of Mormon, of course, makes no claim to being a legal history of the Nephites, and it is likely that there were a great number of laws recognized and enforced by the nation which were never mentioned in their religious history. There is no reason to suppose that the Nephite code was any less comprehensive in scope than that observed by their Israelite forebears, nor that it was at variance with it in any essential way.

Punishments

Jarom tells us that "the laws of the land were exceedingly strict" (Jar. 5), and the general Nephite practice was to put the law in force "upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible." (Alma 1:32.) Judgment was swift and severe against those guilty of gross offenses. Death was the penalty for murder and other crimes of comparable magnitude. Among those so considered were treason, armed rebellion, and kidnapping, at least when the kidnapping precipitated an international crisis such as occurred following the
abduction of twenty-four Lamanite daughters by the fugitive priests of King Noah. Accomplices to a capital crime were deemed to be as guilty as the actual perpetrators. Thus many of Kishkumen's co-conspirators in the murder of Pahoran were apprehended and condemned to death, although Kishkumen himself, who had actually wielded the murder weapon, escaped. It is not specified whether the death penalty was also invoked for such additional offenses as adultery, as was the case in ancient Israel. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to expect that here, too, the Nephites "did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord... according to the law of Moses."

(2 Ne. 5:10.)

The Nephite attitude toward capital punishment stemmed partly from pragmatic considerations and partly from a sense of divine obligation. Alma viewed execution as a deterrent to crime. "Now," he asked, "if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?"

(Alma 42:19.) But beyond the practical value of the death penalty was its importance as a means of satisfying the demands of divine justice. Alma explained to Nehor, "Thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance." (Alma 1:13.)

For those guilty of less serious crimes, the law was surprisingly lenient, with the emphasis on restitution to the injured party
and the rehabilitation of the criminal rather than on mere punishment for punishment's sake. Refusal to pay a legitimate debt was punished simply by compelling the debtor to pay what he owed—no more and no less. If even following a court injunction the accused refused to pay, he faced the prospect either of being forcibly stripped or of being "cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber." (Alma 11:2.) Alma's language suggests that the punishment for conventional "thieves and robbers" was likewise either forced restitution or exile. Exile seems to have been a common method of dealing with undesirables both in Israel and in ancient America. It had the advantage of being cheaper for the state than confinement in prison, and in most cases was probably more pleasant for the offender. Imprisonment, though standard practice among the Lamanites and among Nephite apostates, seems to have been used very rarely and then only temporarily among the main body of the Nephites during their times of righteousness. King Benjamin, for example, was proud of the fact that he had not suffered his people to be confined in dungeons. (Mos. 2:13.) It became a practical necessity during warfare to lock up both Lamanite prisoners of war and domestic insurgents, but in each case the historian almost apologizes for the fact that it was done.

A classic example of Nephite liberality is the treatment accorded a group of captured Gadianton robbers. Those who had not

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7Ex. 30:33, 38; Lev. 7:20-21; Alma 30:31; Hel. 1:33.
been slain in battle were cast into prison just long enough to have the gospel preached to them. Those who were receptive to the gospel message and were willing to covenant to change their ways were set at liberty. Not only was there no additional penalty assessed, but many of the repentant robbers were even granted "lands, according to their numbers, that they might have with their labors wherewith to subsist upon." (3 Ne. 6:3.) On the other hand, those who refused such a covenant but persisted in their threatenings and murderous attitude "were condemned and punished according to the law" (3 Ne. 5:5), presumably by execution.

The reformed Lamanite nation of 24 B.C. took a similar stand, hunting down the Gadianton robbers among them and "destroying" them by converting them to the gospel. (Hel. 6:37.) The reason why capital punishment was not demanded for the murderers among them is not stated. Several mitigating factors could have applied. Perhaps their killing had been done in pitched battles in the line of duty to their group rather than as premeditated individual actions. Perhaps their limited understanding of right and wrong, due to the oft-repeated traditions of their band and their lack of religious training, was a factor. In some cases the "murders" may have been only spiritual, rather than physical, in nature, as was true of Alma before his conversion. (Alma 36:14.) But even in the case of physical murder the Book of Mormon testifies that while "it is not easy . . . to obtain forgiveness" (Alma 39:6), it is possible under certain conditions.
The Lamanite converts of Ammon and his brethren specifically thanked God that he had forgiven them of their "many sins and murders" (Alma 24:10) which they had committed, and had taken away the guilt from their hearts. Very likely those same circumstances which made murder forgiveable from a religious standpoint also made it pardonable in the eyes of the law, upon conditions of genuine repentance.

The entire Nephite policy toward criminals is reminiscent of Joseph Smith's proposal for prison reform as expressed in his presidential campaign platform. He urged:

Petition your state legislatures to pardon every convict in their several penitentiaries: blessing them as they go, and saying to them in the name of the Lord, go thy way and sin no more. Advise your legislators when they make laws for larceny, burglary or any felony, to make the penalty applicable to work upon roads, public works, or any place where the culprit can be taught more wisdom and more virtue; and become more enlightened. Rigor and seclusion will never do as much to reform the propensities of man, as reason and friendship. Murder only can claim confinement or death. Let the penitentiaries be turned into seminaries of learning, where intelligence, like the angels of heaven, would banish such fragments of barbarism: Imprisonment for debt is a meaner practice than the savage tolerates with all his ferocity. "Amor vincit omnia." Love conquers all.\(^8\)

The Prophet's liberal attitudes toward convicted law-breakers may well have been shaped in part by his familiarity with the comparably enlightened Nephite penal practice. Summarizing the general Nephite policy toward laws and punishments, Reynolds and Sjodahl observed:

Though the laws were strict, they were mercifully and equitably administered, which gave much greater stability to the government and respect for the law than if they had been adjudged loosely, and with partiality towards classes or persons. It has been wisely observed that it is not the severity of the law but the sureness of the punishment that deters the evil doer, and in this respect the Nephite nation had cause for thankfulness. All men were alike before the law, there were no privileged classes as in Rome, or in feudal Europe in later years. Mosiah says, Whosoever has committed iniquity, him have I punished according to the law which has been given to us by our fathers. 9

Handling of Religious Offenses

Though church and state were interwoven to a remarkable degree, there was always a recognizable line between crimes against the state, which were punishable by the civil authorities, and sins against the church, which were not. As serious from a religious standpoint as was the apostasy of the rising generation during the early days of Alma's service as high priest, their "divers iniquities" were not grounds for criminal charges against them. Instead, at the Lord's direction, Alma convened a church tribunal and excommunicated those who refused to confess their sins and repent satisfactorily. Not many years later his son and successor, Alma the Younger, was obliged to repeat the process and blot out the names of another group of unrepentant sinners, "that they were remembered no more among the people of God." (Al. 1:24.) Though national leaders might openly preach religion and teach its principles, they never attempted to compel

9 Reynolds and Sjodahl, op. cit., II, 296.
obedience through the use of force nor to punish religious transgression by other than religious sanctions.

DOMESTIC POLICIES, PROJECTS, AND REGULATIONS

Weights and Measures

Since the principal functions of both kings and judges were the maintenance of domestic order and tranquility and the protection of the nation against foreign foes, little is said in the Book of Mormon about governmental regulation in other areas. During the first five hundred years of the nation's life even the values of the various weights and measures and currency were established by custom rather than by government edict. This resulted in the constant alteration of "their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation," (Alma 11:4), with probable variations in every region. Reynolds pointed out:

This state of affairs frequently prevails in young communities, and is an evidence that the growth of Nephite civilization was much the same as in the nations of the eastern hemisphere. As the population of a nation increases, its powers of government consolidating and its commerce developing, these various and conflicting standards of exchange give rise to much unnecessary confusion, many perplexing difficulties and frequent misunderstandings and complications, which hamper trade and commerce, retard material progress, and delay the unification of the nation. It thus becomes the work of the far-seeing statesman or wise ruler to bring all these various local rates to one national standard, recognized as legal and equitable in all parts of the realm.¹⁰

¹⁰Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 360-361.
This standardization Mosiah accomplished for the Nephites, eliminating the confusing and inequitable spectacle which had prevailed to that point. Not only did he fix the value of the various coins, weights, and measures in relation to other measures or denominations of the same commodity, but he set the exact price of a measure of grain and stipulated the daily salary of the judges. There is no evidence that this form of wage and price control extended into other areas of the economy. Likely the simple steps specifically attributed to Mosiah were sufficient to ensure the basic economic stability of the nation.

Public Works

In contrast to the Lamanites, the Nephites were a highly civilized, industrious people, with a sizable urban population. The economy was both specialized and diversified, with shipping, mining, commerce, construction, and crafts of all sorts complementing a highly developed agricultural base. In all likelihood at least a minimal amount of governmental regulation was required to ensure the harmonious functioning and interrelationship of these various elements and to prevent either the individual consumer or the public as a whole from being victimized by an unscrupulous entrepreneur.

It is possible that the government was also directly involved in the financing and construction of the "many highways . . . and many roads" (3 Ne. 6:8) which led from place to place throughout the land, and in the construction of such public buildings as may have existed. But the principal function of government in the economic area seems
to have been to stimulate and encourage construction, commerce, and similar enterprises rather than actually own or rigidly control these means of production and distribution. As has been noted, Nephi "did teach," not compel, his people "to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance." (2 Ne. 5:15.) There is no evidence that this concept of government as a stimulator rather than a manipulator of the economy ever changed.

**Miscellaneous Governmental Regulations and Provisions**

There was a notable concern for conservation of the environment even in Nephite times. As the population grew and the people began to migrate to the land northward, they discovered a serious shortage of timber. Rather than further deplete the supply by cutting down what few trees there were for lumber, they purposely lived in tents or built houses of cement or imported lumber, suffering "whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land that it should grow up." (Hel. 3:9.) This practice could well have arisen from an official governmental decree rather than merely a voluntary and universal ecological concern, but again the record is silent as to precisely what role, if any, the government played in this type of conservation effort.

Expeditions for purposes of exploration do seem frequently to have required either the authorization or the financing of the government.
Otherwise, there would have been no point in Mosiah's subjects wearying him with their teasings until he finally granted that sixteen strong men might go down to the land of Lehi-Nephi to inquire concerning their brethren who had gone to recolonize the land some eighty years before. Likewise, when forty-three of King Limhi's subjects left the land of Nephi in search of Zarahemla, it was as envoys of the government, not merely as private citizens that they took their journey.

A further observable function of government among the Nephites was to correlate the distribution of land to oppressed minorities within the nation and to worthy immigrants from among the Lamanites. The actual granting of the land to the newcomers, however, was a voluntary action on the part of the previous owners rather than an inflexible requirement of the law. When the people of Ammon applied for admission to Nephite territory, the chief judge put the matter to a vote of the people. It was they who responded with the suggestion that the land of Jershon be given up to their Lamanite brethren, and that the Nephite armies guarantee their safety in return for a portion of their substance to assist in maintaining the armies. A similar solution was found when Alma's Zoramite converts were expelled by their unrepentant rulers. This time the people of Ammon were on the giving end of the favor, and were more than happy to feed and clothe the outcast Zoramites and settle them beside themselves in the land of Jershon, without compulsion of any sort from the chief judge or anyone else. Later, other reformed Lamanite prisoners of war were welcomed into
into Jershon in the same way and allowed to become a free people
as Nephite citizens.

PUBLIC WELFARE

Like its counterpart in ancient Israel, the Nephite civil code
ignored entirely the vast area of public welfare which has become an
increasingly fundamental concern of modern states. This is not to
suggest that Nephite leaders were unsympathetic to the plight of the
poor. Nothing could be further from the truth. Generosity and
compassion for the less fortunate were basic themes of the prophets
throughout the nation's history. But the penalty for persisting in
turning one's back on the poor and needy and withholding one's
substance from them was to "be hewn down and cast into the fire"
of hell, not to be cast into prison or fined by the law of the land.
(Alma 5:55-56.)

The evidence clearly indicates that the Nephites were free to
act for themselves in matters of economics and charity as well as in
the moral realm. There were no confiscatory taxes to prevent Amulek,
for example, from acquiring "much riches" by the hand of his industry
(Alma 10:4), nor to prevent the church members in Alma's day from
becoming "far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their
church." (Alma 1:31.) All too often this freedom was abused, and a
great inequality would develop, with the people being "distinguished
by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning."
(3 Ne. 6:12.) But no responsible voice ever suggested that the situation be remedied by government-sponsored welfare legislation or free public education for all. Rather, it was seemingly only under the administration of the Gadianton robbers that the Nephite government ever officially became involved in a program whereby those who abode by certain conditions and cultivated the favor of those in command would partake of governmental "spoils" of this type. (Hel. 6:38.) In more normal times it was deemed essential that men be as free "to choose the way of everlasting death" through their selfishness as to choose "the way of eternal life" by demonstrating a genuine concern for their fellow beings. (2 Ne. 10:23.) Mormon emphasized that there is no virtue in being compelled to give to the poor. "Behold," he taught, "if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God." (Moro. 7:8.) Were voluntary charity to be replaced with compulsory welfare legislation it might alleviate the physical needs of the poor, but in so doing it would generate a spiritual crisis of major proportions. As Benjamin taught, retaining a daily remission of sins—the basic prerequisite to peace in this life and eternal life hereafter—depended largely on the voluntary imparting of one's substance to the poor, "administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants." (Mos. 4:26.) Confiscatory taxes and redistribution of the wealth by government would
make such voluntary giving, with the resultant spiritual blessings, not only largely unnecessary but, in many cases, impossible.

That government had no direct role in alleviating poverty among the Nephites is clear from the very fact that poverty of such magnitude existed. As enlightened as were the governmental leaders during much of Nephite history, it is inconceivable that such a marked inequality could have long endured had it been the right and responsibility of government forcibly to eliminate it. Instead, there is the constant pleading of the prophets to "think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance" (Jac. 2:17), not merely to be prompt and honest in the payment of taxes destined for the relief of the poor. Even when King Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and children in their midst, there is no suggestion in the record that his command was any more than a moral imperative.

While the civil government as such was not involved in public welfare measures, it is true that charity was generally more than a purely individual matter. One of the basic concerns of the Nephite church as an organized institution was the temporal welfare of its members. Alma, for example,

commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him
that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.\textsuperscript{11}

Not only were church members in particular exhorted to be free with their substance to other church members, but they were generous as well toward their non-member brethren. According to Alma,

In their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.\textsuperscript{12}

The Nephites also understood that basic to the full establishment of a society of free, equal, and prosperous individuals is the spiritual regeneration of the individual members of the society. No theme is more often stressed in the Book of Mormon than the fact that "the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him." (Hel. 12:1.) Part of the reason for the comparative prosperity of the church members was the fact that they did not indulge in the idleness, strife, and extravagance common to their non-member counterparts, and part of the reason was seemingly due to the special providence of the Lord in "rebuking the devourer" for their sakes. (3 Ne. 24:11.) At any rate, when church members were in the minority, we find that they were conspicuously the most prosperous members of the community. In times when the church was established generally throughout the land, the entire nation

\textsuperscript{11}Mos. 18:27.  \textsuperscript{12}Alma 1:30.
prospered, and, as Alma tells us, "there was no inequality among them." (Alma 16:16.)

LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIL LAWS

As vital as the existence of wise, just, and inspired laws was to the peace and well-being of the nation, they were in the final analysis of only secondary importance. William E. Berrett observed:

One of the outstanding social teachings of the Book of Mormon is that all lasting social reforms depend upon the spiritual regeneration of a people. Spiritual leadership is shown to solve a nation's economic and social ills more readily than political leadership. Throughout the majestic sweep of the Book of Alma especially, one is impressed with the fact that there are inherent limitations to all laws and all governments.\(^{13}\)

In times of national crisis arising from extensive wickedness and civil turmoil, the prophets clearly recognized that not legislative reform but national repentance was the needed antidote. Alma, serving as both chief judge and chief high priest during such a period of contention among the people, resigned from his governmental post to go on a full time preaching mission, "seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them." (Alma 4:19.) Nephi, heading both church and state in a later epoch, also realized the futility of attempting to reform a nation through legislation. Since those who chose evil had become more numerous

than those who chose good, and since they were a "stiffnecked people," we are told, "they could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction." (Hel. 5:2-3.) Like Alma, Nephi did the only potentially effective thing he could do under the circumstances: he resigned from the judgment seat and took it upon himself to preach the gospel with his brother Lehi all the remainder of his days.

At best, according to Joseph Smith,

the laws of men may guarantee to a people protection in the honorable pursuits of this life, and the temporal happiness arising from a protection against unjust insults and injuries; and when this is said, all is said, that can be in truth, of the power, extent, and influence of the laws of men, exclusive of the law of God. 14

The laws of men may punish crime, but they cannot compel righteousness. They may incarcerate the body but are powerless to change the heart. As it was in the days of Enos, so was it throughout Nephite history: "There was nothing save it was . . . preaching and prophesying . . . and exceeding great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction." (Enos 23.) Or, as stated by Pearson and Bankhead, "The Book of Mormon shows that we cannot have good government without good religion--namely, the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in this dispensation." 15

14 HC, II, 7.

Chapter 7

NEPHITE MILITARY POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

The authors and compilers of the Book of Mormon knew that they were writing specifically for a latter-day audience and asserted that they had a rather precise foreknowledge of future conditions and events. "I write unto you, Gentiles, and also unto you, house of Israel," Mormon stated, "when the work shall commence that ye shall be about to prepare to return to the land of your inheritance." (Mor. 3:17.) Moroni likewise professed:

Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.
Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.  

Presumably, with this foresight Mormon and Moroni selected for inclusion in the Book of Mormon those items they considered most helpful to their future readers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in light of the peculiar circumstances and challenges they would face. In view of the limited space on the plates, it is significant that such a high proportion of the content of the Book of Mormon is devoted to a detailed account of the wars, military policies, and battlefield

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1Mormon 8:34-35.
successes and failures of the ancient Americans. To many readers it must seem, as it did to Verla Birrell, that indeed "the major portion of the content of the Book of Mormon deals with the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites."² Though Mrs. Birrell somewhat exaggerated the matter, it is true that by actual count more than 100 of the 522 pages in the volume deal specifically and in detail with the subject of war. Reynolds' Concordance reveals that the word "war" itself, with its derivatives, occurs a total of 171 times in the Book of Mormon. There are an additional 147 references to the word "battle" in its various forms and an equal number to the word "contention," while "slay" and "slaughter" occur 284 times and "army" or "armies" a grand total of 294 times!³ The Book of Mormon writers asserted that there definitely would be "wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds of the earth" (1 Ne. 14:15) in the latter days, and were evidently convinced that there were lessons to be learned from their own military history which would benefit later generations facing the same issues and challenges.

Although armies, weapons, and circumstances may vary from one generation to another, the basic moral questions connected with warfare remain unchanged: When, if ever, is a nation justified in


entering a war? Is it true that "all's fair in love and war," or are there certain divine restrictions on what a soldier may properly do even when fighting in a just cause? Is killing an enemy in battle equivalent to murder? Does the Lord take sides in wars, and if so, what must a nation do to secure his help? The Nephites' answers to these and similar questions will be discussed in this chapter, along with a brief analysis of the Nephite military organization and a look at Nephite relationships with the Lamanites other than in a military capacity.

MILITARY ORGANIZATION

As would be expected, the actual organization of the Nephite army varied with the changing size and circumstances of the nation. At first, a very simple organizational structure sufficed. The king personally headed the army and led his troops into battle. Whatever subordinate officers may have existed were not considered noteworthy enough to discuss in the sacred record.

By the time the reign of the judges was established a more extensive organization was required. Alma, as chief of state, was still expected to march "at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle" (Alma 2:16), but now he had at least three levels of subordinate officers to assist him in the tasks of leadership. "Captains, and higher captains, and chief captains" were appointed, according to the number of the troops to be led. (Alma 2:13.) It is impossible
to determine the exact number of these chief captains and lesser captains at any particular point in Nephite history prior to 385 A.D. or to be sure of the size of their commands. It appears that one chief captain, Lehi, was in charge of the troops in the city of Noah, suggesting a kind of geographical division of responsibility. In the last great battle at Cumorah, the organization was according to contingents of ten thousand men each, with twenty-three such divisions with their leaders going down to defeat in a single day. No doubt the exact duties of the various captains and the size of their commands fluctuated according to the circumstances of the time.

Occasionally, in the beginning of the reign of the judges, it occurred that the chief judge was physically unable to lead his armies in a given battle, as was the case when a Lamanite army invaded Nephite territory shortly after Alma had been wounded in an encounter with the Amlicites. In such cases it appears that the army was sufficiently well organized and united that no serious problem arose because of the absence of the usual commander. The provision that the chief executive personally fight on the front lines was likely more a precaution against unwarranted military adventurism than an administrative necessity.

Later in Alma's administration we find a more precise division of responsibility between the civilian and military arms of the government. The judge still retained general authority and responsibility in all areas of national life, including defense, and was assisted in his military leadership by an unspecified number of other civilian
officers and advisors who had been chosen by the people to govern and manage the affairs of the war. (Alma 60:1.) The specific responsibility of personally leading the armies into battle, however, was delegated to a "chief captain over the armies of the Nephites" (Alma 43:17), of whom Moroni was the first. Several factors could account for this change. Alma was by now advancing in years and may not have been physically equal to the hardships and demands of war. Also, with the increasing complexity of the nation, it may have been impractical for one man to attempt personally to supervise both domestic and military affairs. A further possibility in view of the immense numerical superiority of the Lamanite foe and the increasing threat they posed to the Nephites is that it may have been deemed necessary to commit the management of the armies into the hand of an exceptionally competent and well trained military man rather than rely on the chief judge alone, who, whatever his spiritual worthiness and other qualifications, was not necessarily an expert in military strategy. Regardless of the reason or reasons for the change, it appears that from the days of Moroni till the end of the nation it was standard practice for Nephite military fortunes to be entrusted to someone other than the reigning chief judge.

Moroni's selection as chief captain involved his being "appointed by the chief judges and the voice of the people" (Alma 46:34), suggesting that a consensus of the various regional chief judges was obtained before the appointment was presented to the public.
for their ratification. When Moroni retired from active duty, however, he personally selected his son, Moronihah, to be his successor, apparently without feeling obliged to check first with either the chief judge of all the land or his regional counterparts. Apparently the source of the nomination was not so essential as the fact that the people had a voice in the ultimate approval or rejection of the proposed appointee. Mormon's selection, in fact, is attributed only to "the people of Nephi" (Mor. 2:1), with no mention of who may have originally proposed his name for consideration.

There were unwritten qualifications, both physical and spiritual, for the position of chief captain. First and foremost, the captain was expected to be a man of God. In fact, "it was the custom among all the Nephites to appoint for their chief captains (save it were in their times of wickedness) some one that had the spirit of revelation and also prophecy." (3 Ne. 3:19.) Apparently this was true not only of the overall commander but of the subordinate chief captains as well. Thus when the city of Nephihah was lost to the Lamanites during a time of widespread Nephite wickedness and indifference, not one of Moroni's immediate subordinates was accused of participating in the spirit of the times. "All his chief captains," we find, "doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people." (Alma 59:12.)

Youth and physical strength seem to have been additional qualifications for the top military post, since the chief captain was
no armchair general but fought beside his men in the very thick of the battle. Moroni was selected at age twenty-five and was ready for retirement fourteen years later, long before modern generals would even have been appointed. Moroni's son and successor, Moronihah, with a father only thirty-nine years old, couldn't have been much more than a teenager himself at the time of his appointment, though the record is silent as to his precise age. Perhaps most spectacular of all, Mormon at the tender age of fifteen was selected as leader of the entire Nephite army. Not only his youth but his large stature was in his favor, and in spite of the near total degeneracy of the nation in Mormon's day, it is likely that the people recognized and respected his spiritual qualifications as well. In fact, it is entirely possible that they selected him precisely because he was the only one who was spiritually qualified, rather than because he was necessarily the largest, strongest, or most highly skilled of the potential candidates.

Though he himself was selected according to democratic procedures, the chief captain, once appointed, had virtually dictatorial powers "according to his will with the armies of the Nephites, to establish and to exercise authority over them." (Alma 46:34,) The exigencies of battle do not always permit the same democratic niceties as are possible and desirable in times of peace. The term "according to the voice of the people" is conspicuously absent in Moroni's appointments of Lehi, Antipus, and other officers. Nor does Moroni seem to ask anyone's opinion before proceeding to arm his people,
fortify their cities, and prosecute the war according to his own desire.

Though the normal procedure was that the death penalty could not be imposed without the specific authorization of the chief judge, or governor, in each case, Moroni even asked for and obtained power to execute en mass those kingmen who stubbornly refused to take up arms to defend their country. Speaking of the extent of this near absolute power, B. H. Roberts wrote:

This has ever been the means by which republics have sought to remedy one of the chief defects of their system, viz., ineffectiveness of administration—a tardiness in executing the law, or meeting an emergency not technically provided for in the constitution or law. In order to obviate this difficulty democracies have not infrequently adopted the plan of creating trusted leaders dictators; clothing them with all the authority of an absolute monarch during periods of special peril to the government. Thus did the Romans a number of times during the existence of their republic, when occasions arose that required prompt executive action, and by an authority that would be unquestioned. And such, I believe, was the power conferred upon the commander-in-chief of the Nephite armies, when occasion arose for it.4

Moroni's powers were such that he could likely have carried off a successful coup had he been so inclined. Rather than restore Pahoran to the judgment seat following a domestic uprising, Moroni might just as easily have established himself as the new ruler, with enough popular support to make his position secure. Fortunately for the stability of the nation, there is no record of any such military coup or attempted coup in all of Nephite history. The appointment of

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God-fearing men as chief captains undoubtedly was more than a means of assuring the Nephite army of the guidance and blessings of God in their wars. It was also a practical way to guarantee that the enormous power and authority delegated to the militia would not be misused.

"As a rule," Reynolds and Sjodahl concluded, "the Nephite armies were composed of volunteers." Moroni's "title of liberty" campaign is a classic illustration of the Nephite preference for doing everything possible through the principle of attraction rather than compulsion, even in matters of national defense. Faced with the prospect of a civil war at best and the possibility of a war against both the Lamanites and Amalickiah's dissenters at the worst, Moroni rent his coat and fastened a piece of it to the end of a pole, with the motto which was to become the nation's battle cry: "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children." (Alma 46:12.) Marching throughout the countryside with the banner unfurled, he proclaimed: "Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord may bless them." (Alma 46:20.) In response to Moroni's words, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, ready to enter into the proposed covenant.

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Soon Moroni had a volunteer army of sizable proportions, more than adequate to meet the immediate threat posed by Amalickiah.

But purely voluntary means were not always sufficient. When large numbers of kingmen refused voluntarily to aid in the war effort against the Lamanites, Moroni not only prevented their giving aid and comfort to the enemy but actually compelled them "to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defense of their country." (Alma 51:20.) Those who refused were executed on the spot, without benefit of the formal trial they would probably have been accorded in more settled times. Similarly, in his stinging letter to Pahoran, Moroni reminded the chief judge that he had been appointed not just to man a voluntary recruiting office but to use whatever means were necessary "to gather together men, and arm them with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind, and send forth against the Lamanites." (Alma 60:2.) Volunteerism was the ideal, but the Nephite leaders were intensely practical men who realized that the temporary abridgment of the freedom of a few by drafting them into the army was preferable to the defeat and subjugation of the entire nation.

Young men in the physical prime of life were doubtlessly preferred not only as leaders but as soldiers, but if the actions of Zeniff are any indication of Nephite practice in general, almost anyone might be pressed into service when survival itself was at stake. When his small colony was besieged by an attacking Lamanite force,
Zeniff hid the women and children in the wilderness and sent all the men, young and old alike, who could bear arms into battle, placing them in their ranks according to their age, in keeping with Hebrew custom. (Mos. 10:9.) In the final days of the Nephite nation even the women and children no doubt assisted actively with the defense effort, as they did among the Jaredites. (Ether 15:15.) Certainly they shared in the horrors of the war, and perished alongside their husbands and fathers. It would be illogical to assume they did so without exerting whatever resistance they could muster.

Not even the chief judge was considered exempt from military service when the life of the country was threatened. Pahoran readily wielded the sword alongside of Moroni when the war took a turn for the worse, just as his predecessors had regularly done in the days before the burden of the military was delegated to a subordinate chief captain.

Not the least in terms of their importance to the war effort were the prophets and church authorities, who also sought no exemption on account of their office. Helaman provides the classic example in this case. Not only did he lend his moral support to the defense effort, but he personally and voluntarily led an army of two thousand youths into battle. As it turned out, his arrival in the city of Judea may well have been the turning point in the struggle on the western front, and perhaps spelled the ultimate difference between victory and defeat in the entire war. In the tradition of King Benjamin, who had labored with his own hands that he might not be a burden to his people,
the prophets and righteous political leaders throughout Nephite history demonstrated their willingness to assume their share and more of the dangers, hardships, and rigors of national defense.

AUTHORIZED AND UNAUTHORIZED WARS

Few if any moral issues rival in gravity the question of when, if ever, a person is justified in engaging in armed conflict. Taking up arms prematurely, or without the Lord's sanction, could make one guilty of murder, while failure to fight under appropriate circumstances could be tantamount to suicide. In view of the life and death importance of the matter, it is not surprising that Nephite prophets gave both copious and precise instructions to their people as to when they should fight and when they should forbear.

The Doctrine and Covenants indicates that the divine law of war, as practiced by the Nephites, was the same as that given to the Lord's people in the Old World. The Lord himself summarized the basic principles of the law as follows:

This is the law that I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them.

And if any nation, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue;

And if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord;

Then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people.
And I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children's battles, and their children's children's, until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation.  

On both the individual and national level the saints were expected to exercise great patience and restraint in the face of provocations. Should their enemy repent and ask forgiveness after each offense, they were to forgive him seventy times seven. Even if he was not repentant they were expected to forgive him freely the first three times he trespassed against them. But, they were told:

If he trespass against thee the fourth time thou shalt not forgive him, but shalt bring these testimonies before the Lord; and they shall not be blotted out until he repent and reward thee four-fold in all things wherewith he has trespassed against thee.  

And if he do this, thou shalt forgive him with all thine heart; and if he do not this, I the Lord, will avenge thee of thine enemy an hundred-fold.  

This law of the third offense did not mean that the Lord's people were required to submit passively to an armed attack on three separate occasions before they could strike their first blow in self-defense. Under such circumstances there would seldom be a third offense, as the aggressor could easily complete his work of destruction in the first battle. On one occasion, realizing this fact, even as they reviewed the Lord's instructions on war, the Nephites were busy arming themselves and preparing to ambush an attacking Lamanite army, even though as yet no blood had been shed on either side.

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7D&C 98:44-45.
Apparently the Nephites felt either that the law had been satisfied by three or more instances of Lamanite provocations or threatenings short of actual bloodshed, or that the law forbade only retaliation, not self-defense. As Hyrum Andrus observed:

Seldom, if ever, does one nation attack another nation without first manifesting belligerent tendencies of some kind toward the people it intends to attack. Nevertheless, should the first offense be an open act of aggression with the intent to subjugate the innocent nation, the offended nation is not required to wait until it is destroyed before taking up arms. The Nephites seem to have accepted the fact that they were attacked as sufficient reason to take up arms in their own defense. Meanwhile they sued for peace and sought to avert further conflict. 8

The Nephites understood it to be not only their right but their sacred obligation to defend themselves and their families in cases of attack, even if it meant their taking the lives of their assailants in the process. Concerning the Nephite response to a massive and determined Lamanite assault, the record states:

The Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves,

and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.\footnote{Alma 43:45–47.}

Moroni taught the same thing in even stronger language to the dissenters who were impeding the war effort by their refusal to participate. "Except ye do bestir yourselves in the defense of your country and your little ones," he warned, "the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction." (Alma 60:29.)

Even though only one part of the land might be endangered, Nephite leaders viewed it as the responsibility of the entire nation to defend the threatened city or area. It required a national referendum before Ammon's Lamanite converts could be admitted as Nephite citizens, but once the measure was passed there was never any doubt as to whether or not the Ammonites were worthy of protection by their Nephite brethren. When the Lamanite army unleashed a terrifying attack on their former countrymen, the Nephite troops rushed to the defense of the beleaguered newcomers as though they had been lifelong Nephites. (Alma 28:1-3.) The same thing occurred when an apostate Zoramite faction incited the Lamanites to join them in retaliating against the people of Ammon for their refusal to extradite a number of Zoramite converts. Once again, despite the determination of a rebellious minority far from the front lines to sit the conflict out, Nephite political and military leaders, as well as their prophets, realized that an
attack on the Ammonites was an attack on the entire nation, and responded accordingly. (Alma 35.)

In the Nephite view, a man had the right to defend not only his life and those of his loved ones, but his property as well, including that entrusted to his care by another. Thus it was that Ammon felt justified in defending the flocks of the Lamanite king even though it required him to kill several of the would-be robbers and maim others in the process.

Freedom and the right of religious worship were also generally considered worth defending by force if necessary. Prominent among Nephite heroes were the two thousand Ammonite youths under Helaman's leadership who were praised because "they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives." (Alma 56:47.) Deprivation of liberty to them would have been worse than death, for they regarded death as but the gateway to eternal bliss, while life without the privilege of religious worship would have been intolerable.

There were occasions in Nephite history, however, when temporary captivity, with the prospect of an eventual deliverance, was deemed better than resistance in the face of overwhelming odds. For example, when "numerous hosts" of Lamanites threatened the imminent extinction of Limhi's colony, Gideon, "a righteous man" (Alma 1:13), pleaded with King Limhi: "Let us pacify the king, and we fulfill the oath which we have made unto him; for it is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives."
(Mos. 20:22.) Though the resulting bondage was grievous, it did provide the occasion for ample repentance on the part of Limhi's group and their subsequent escape from the Lamanites and reunion with their brethren in Zarahemla. Alma took a similar stand when his little city of Helam was discovered by a Lamanite army. Since he viewed defense against such formidable odds as futile, Alma plead with his people to deliver themselves peacefully into the hands of the Lamanites, from which in due time, like Limhi's group, they would successfully escape without resort to arms. The cases of Alma and Limhi, however, are clearly exceptions to the general rule that life, liberty, and property were to be defended by armed resistance.

Another instance of non-retaliation was the refusal of the people of Ammon to defend themselves against their former brethren following their conversion. The record tells us that rather than take up a sword or cimeter to smite their attackers they would suffer death in its most aggravating and distressing form. Significantly, they were considered neither unpatriotic nor disloyal because of their stand. Rather, they were regarded as "a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord." (Alma 27:30.) But, as Evan Fry noted, theirs "was a special case, and not one which laid down a universal principle of action."10 These were former murderers, who

before their conversion had freely and aggressively wielded the sword against their Nephite brethren. Their repentance for their previous atrocities was so profound, and their difficulty in obtaining forgiveness so great that they vowed never again to stain their swords with the blood of their brethren, lest by so doing they should spiritually pass the point of no return. There was no similarity, however, between the position of the Ammonites and that of the Nephite kingmen who opposed the war effort itself. The kingmen not only refused to fight but did everything they could to hamper those who did. The people of Ammon, on the other hand, did nothing to oppose the military activities of their fellow countrymen. On the contrary, they did everything they could to aid in the defense effort short of actually taking up arms themselves. They supported the Nephite armies with a portion of their substance, and readily sent their own sons into battle when they were of age and the need arose. In fact, they would have disregarded their own oath, had they been permitted to do so.

The Book of Mormon nowhere states that the Ammonites were morally obligated to take their oath of pacifism in the first place, or that it was even wise for them to do so. But once they had taken the oath, they were expected to honor it. When, during a difficult period of military reverses for the Nephites, the people of Ammon were on the verge of breaking their covenant and taking up their weapons in defense of their brethren, Helaman flatly forbade them to do so, not necessarily because he felt that repentant murderers should never fight,
but because he was convinced that it was wrong to break a solemn covenant such as they had entered into, regardless of the merits of the covenant itself. The case of the people of Ammon is unique in Nephite history, and in no way does it change the general rule that the nation resisted aggression by the force of arms and was justified by the Lord in so doing.

Proof that the Lord did not condemn his people for defending themselves is the fact that prophets and military men alike enjoyed divine revelation both during and following their battles. Had they been in serious transgression of the Lord's commands in their military campaigns, this would have been impossible. As the Book of Mormon indicates, "the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples." (Hel. 4:24.)

Neither can the case of Mormon be used to show that conscientious objection was a generally approved or divinely authorized approach to war during normal times. It is true that Mormon, the Nephite commander-in-chief, did at one time resign from his post and "utterly refuse" from that time forth to be a leader of his people because of their wickedness and abominations. (Mor. 3:11.) But this was no private decision on Mormon's part. Lest we misunderstand his reasons for resigning, he specified: "I did even as the Lord commanded me." (Mor. 3:16.) The interval during which Mormon refused to lead his nation was the time during which they launched an aggressive war on the Lamanites, one calculated totally to extermin-
ate their enemies in order to avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren. Up to that point Nephite wars had been purely defensive, and Mormon had led his people willingly, notwithstanding their wickedness. But, he tells us:

When they had sworn by all that had been forbidden them by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that they would go up unto their enemies to battle, and avenge themselves of the blood of their brethren, behold the voice of the Lord came unto me saying:

Vengeance is mine, and I will repay; and because this people repented not after I had delivered them, behold they shall be cut off from the face of the earth.

And it came to pass that I utterly refused to go up against mine enemies; and I did even as the Lord had commanded me; and I did stand as an idle witness to manifest unto the world the things which I saw and heard, according to the manifestations of the Spirit which had testified of things to come.\(^{11}\)

The Nephite offensive was short-lived, as the Lamanite numerical superiority began to have its effect. Without divine intervention in their behalf, the Nephites could gain no power over their enemies, "but began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun." (Mor. 4:18.) Mormon pointedly tells us that "it was because the armies of the Nephites went up unto the Lamanites that they began to be smitten; for were it not for that, the Lamanites could have had no power over them." (Mor. 4:4.) When Mormon resumed the leadership of the army it was because the nation was once again on the defensive, though involuntarily, because of the failure of their campaign against the Lamanites and the consequent advance

\(^{11}\)Mormon 3:14-16.
of the Lamanite armies in the face of the Nephite retreat. Under these circumstances Mormon could again properly participate in the defense effort, even though he knew the futility of hoping for any long-range success without nationwide repentance.

The question of the propriety of aggressive warfare had come up once before in Nephite history, when public sentiment was in favor of launching a surprise preventive attack on the Gadianton robbers. The idea was to defeat them in their wilderness strongholds before they could gain any more strength for the battle they obviously were preparing for against the Nephites. But the response of Gidgiddoni, the chief captain, was unequivocal:

The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands; therefore we will prepare ourselves in the center of our lands, and we will gather all our armies together, and we will not go against them, but we will wait till they shall come against us; therefore as the Lord liveth, if we do this he will deliver them into our hands.12

The Lord's warnings against military aggression did not rule out divinely sanctioned insurrections against corrupt national leaders when lesser methods of gaining redress failed. The revolt against King Noah is a case in point. Gideon is clearly represented as a hero in his efforts to assassinate Noah atop the tower. When a massive popular uprising finally accomplished what Gideon had  

123 Ne. 3:21.
attempted, no one shed any tears for the slain king, including the historian who recounted the event.

Moroni took a similar view toward the recreant public officials in Zarahemla in his own day. There is no greater example of patriotism in the entire Book of Mormon than Moroni, but the Nephite commander did not equate loyalty to country with loyalty to its leaders unless those leaders had the best interests of the country at heart. When internal corruption and personal ambition caused the war effort to bog down, Moroni cited the Lord's admonition that "the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also." (Alma 60:23.) In his classic second epistle to Pahoran, Moroni pointedly told his superior: "Behold, the Lord saith unto me: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them." (Alma 60:33.) In such cases, the long train of abuses inflicted by oppressive leaders was doubtlessly considered the equivalent of the first, second, and third offenses which were to be endured patiently at the hands of an enemy. When domestic leaders continued to disregard the just pleas of their constituents for relief, the Lord seemingly justified revolution as a defensive measure against their illegal misuse of power.

The American Revolution is another example of a divinely countenanced uprising on just those principles. As Nephi had foreseen in vision, the power of God was with the colonists and the wrath of
God was upon their "mother Gentiles," even though the rebels could have averted bloodshed by continuing to suffer in silence the oppression of King George III. (1 Ne., 13:17-18.)

The Nephites also felt it was not inconsistent with the Lord's law on defensive warfare to initiate a counterattack for the purpose of driving back an invading force into its own land or to recover captured territory, even when it had been in enemy hands for a considerable length of time. On several occasions Moroni did just that. (Alma 50:7; 62:38.) Furthermore, it was permissible after initially repelling an aggressor to pursue him into his own land to finish the conflict, as Moroni threatened to do to Ammoron. (Alma 54:12.) Moroni even deemed it proper to exert force to prevent the Nephite dissidents, Morianton and Amalickiah and their followers, from joining with the Lamanites, since the avowed purpose of the merger was to prepare for war against the Nephites. But actually to begin a conflict, for the purpose of destroying or subjugating an enemy, was viewed as quite a different matter, whether the attack was ostensibly for preventive purposes, for revenge, or for the pure pleasure of conquest. The Nephites ignored this distinction only once, but it was once too often. From the time of their first offensive attack on the Lamanites they suffered one defeat after another at the hands of their intended victims until they were totally obliterated as a nation fewer than twenty-five years later.
The prophets taught that in the final analysis the only sure way to know whether or not to engage in a proposed conflict was to ascertain the mind and will of the Lord in the matter. Although the general principles laid down by the Lord regarding warfare were well understood, it was also understood that exceptions to those principles could occur. The Nephites knew that the brass plates contained the Ten Commandments, including the injunction, "Thou shalt not kill," but they also knew that Nephi had been instructed by the Spirit to kill the drunken Laban with his own sword. They knew that unless otherwise modified, the divine law permitted only defensive warfare, but they also had the record of the Lord's command to Moses to take the initiative and utterly destroy the corrupt heathen nations then residing in the promised land. Again, Nephite prophets took the attitude that in general death was better than bondage, though on two occasions righteous leaders decided otherwise, when they had reason to believe that the bondage would not be permanent. Though individual refusal to participate in military service was usually equated with treason, one Nephite prophet not only countenanced the non-combatant status of a sizable segment of the population but actually forbade them to alter their commitment and fight even when they themselves were ready to do so. Depending on the circumstances, national leaders might deserve either to be sustained and defended or deposed by force. The only safe rule, Mormon indicated, was to "lay down your weapons of war . . . and take them not again, save it
be that God shall command you." (Mor. 7:4.) By definition, any war commanded by the Lord would be right, and any forbidden by him would be wrong.

Even in the event of an enemy attack, the people were supposed to bring their testimonies against the aggressors before the Lord, who then would issue a specific command justifying appropriate defensive measures. The Lord's response might be predictable, but it needed to be obtained. The Nephites were taught that unless otherwise directed, they were to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood, if necessary, but that they were never to give an offense, and never to raise the sword against an enemy except to preserve their own lives. They were further taught that by abiding by these basic principles and by keeping the rest of the Lord's commandments, they would be eligible to be informed of any change in his instructions or any details which he wished to convey to them concerning appropriate methods of defense.

As the record explains:

This was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land . . . ; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger.

And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them.13

13Alma 48:15-16.
MILITARY METHODS AND POLICIES

The Book of Mormon reveals that even when the Nephites were fighting at the Lord's bidding, there were certain things they were forbidden to do and others they were specifically required to do if they hoped for success on the battlefield. In the first place, they were expected to go to war reluctantly, not in the sense of fighting half-heartedly, but with genuine regret at being compelled to shed the blood of their brethren. One's attitude was viewed as more important than his actual deeds in determining his innocence or guilt in a matter of this kind. King Noah and his men, who "did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren" (Mos. 11:19), stand out in marked contrast to King Mosiah, who specifically did not. (Mos. 29:40.)

Moroni is held up as an ideal illustration of Christian love and forbearance in a military man. Mormon enthusiastically praised him as follows:

And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery;

Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. . . .

And this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving
his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity.

Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.\textsuperscript{14}

Moroni demonstrated his concern for fairness in war when he and his men surrounded the drunken Lamanite army in the city of Gid and armed the Nephite prisoners within the city. At that point the Nephites could easily have killed the entire Lamanite force with almost no risk to themselves, but Moroni's sense of justice and aversion to bloodshed could not countenance such a one-sided slaughter. The only desire of the Nephites was to preserve their lands, liberty, and church (Alma 43:30), not exterminate their dark-skinned rivals, so Moroni stoutly refused to fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunken state. Rather, he waited until morning and took them all as prisoners of war without the loss of a drop of blood on either side.

The Nephite treatment of their prisoners was equally magnanimous. In the first place, they took only men rather than include women and children as did the Lamanites. Even when they themselves were short on provisions, they recognized their responsibility adequately to feed and protect their captives. It is true that they put their prisoners to work, but only to reduce the number of guards required to

\textsuperscript{14}Alma 48:11-13, 16-17.
watch them, not to punish them for participating in the war. They admittedly used Lamanite prisoners as human guinea pigs to test the purity of their liquors, lest poison should be administered to them in that form. (Alma 55:31-32.) And, too, they were harsh in their treatment of potential escapees, preferring to kill them rather than let them return home to fight again. But in both cases these were strictly defensive measures, not manifestations of a spirit of revenge. It is a tribute to Nephite liberality toward their captives that large numbers of them were desirous of joining the Nephites and becoming a free people rather than return home to the despotism of the Lamanite regime. As many as had such desires to stay were permitted to do so, though no one was compelled thus to change his citizenship against his will.

Repentant or not, prisoners were retained only so long as was necessary to ensure the safety of the nation. As a rule, as soon as the war was over, the vanquished army and any previously captured prisoners of war were allowed to return to their homeland in peace, apparently with no conditions imposed. (Hel. 1:33,) Prisoners who indicated a willingness to enter into a covenant of peace could be released sooner. A notable example of Nephite benevolence is the short-lived conflict with the Lamanite chieftain, Zerahemnah. Once Moroni and Lehi had surrounded Zerahemnah's troops and beheld their terror, Moroni commanded his men to stop the bloodshed. He then extended an offer of peace to Zerahemnah, proposing to let him and his
men go free if they would but deliver up their weapons and covenant never to wage war on the Nephites again. Zerahemnah accepted the first condition but stubbornly rejected the second. He was willing enough to surrender his weapons, and those of his troops, but he refused to take an oath he later intended to break. But Moroni was just as determined not to release the captives without such an oath.

Rather than take unfair advantage of the now disarmed Lamanite army, he returned their weapons to them and proposed to continue the conflict to its bitter end. Nephite military superiority soon took its toll, and even Zerahemnah, after the loss of his scalp, came to realize the hopelessness of the situation and finally accepted Moroni's terms. After surrendering their weapons and agreeing to the covenant of non-aggression, the Lamanite warriors were allowed to depart into the wilderness in peace, with no further punishment inflicted or reparations required.

The mercy which the Nephites showed toward their opponents did not always extend to the leaders of the enemy force, who were considered responsible for initiating the fighting. Just as murderers on the individual level were deemed worthy of death, so were those who fomented armed conflict on the international level. So it was that following a tremendous battle between the Gadianton robbers and the combined Nephite and Lamanite army, most of the captured robbers were imprisoned and efforts made to rehabilitate them, but their leader, Zemnarihah, was condemned and executed without delay. His men
could claim that to a greater or lesser extent they were merely following the orders of their commander, but Zemnarihah himself had no such defense and was accorded no mercy.

This same philosophy apparently permitted Teancum to feel justified in assassinating the Lamanite king, Amalickiah, in his sleep and later doing the same to his successor, Ammoron, in spite of Moroni's refusal to take advantage of the Lamanite army in Gid under similar circumstances. The average Lamanite soldier in Gid was no more responsible for the war than were the Nephites. But with Amalickiah and Ammoron it was another matter. We are told:

Teancum ..., was exceedingly angry with Ammoron, insomuch that he considered that Ammoron, and Amalickiah his brother, had been the cause of this great and lasting war between them and the Lamanites, which had been the cause of so much war and bloodshed, yea, and so much famine.\(^{15}\)

When Teancum died in his last excursion behind enemy lines, his countrymen looked upon him not as a bloodthirsty villain but as a national hero who had "fought valiantly for his country" and had been "a true friend to liberty." (Alma 62:37.) There is never a hint that anyone felt he had somehow exceeded the limits of propriety in his nighttime forays. Had Moroni been of such an opinion, he would almost certainly have disciplined Teancum following his assault on Amalickiah, so that the later attack on Ammoron would never have taken place.

\(^{15}\)Alma 62:35.
In addition to their fighting in a worthy cause and according to the prescribed standards of mercy and forbearance, the Nephites viewed victory as depending on both the providence of the Lord and their own exertion. Neither faith alone nor works alone were sufficient on the battlefield, as the Nephites found out to their sorrow. During a time of great wickedness when they boasted in their own military strength, the Lord left them in their own strength to be driven before the Lamanites until they had lost almost all their lands. But the other extreme, that of relying entirely on the Lord, was just as dangerous. Moroni asked:

Behold, could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain. . . .

Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?\(^\text{16}\)

Despite their trust in the Lord, the righteous Nephites recognized their obligation to arm themselves with the best weapons at their disposal and to employ all the ingenuity, talents, and resources they could muster in their defense. Their philosophy was the same as George Washington's, whom Joseph Smith quoted with favor to the effect that "to be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means

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\(^{16}\text{Alma 60:11, 21.}\)
of preserving the peace."17 Shortly after the arrival of Nephi and his followers in the land of Nephi, they took the sword of Laban and used it as a model to make many other swords as a precaution against a possible attack by their brethren. In succeeding years the Nephites continued to develop newer and more sophisticated means of warfare to help offset the Lamanite numerical superiority. When Moroni led his troops into battle for the first time following his appointment, the Lamanites were terrified to find that their opponents not only "were armed with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner" of offensive weapons of war, but were for the first time prepared "with breastplates and with arm-shields, . . . and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing." (Alma 43:18-19.) The near naked Lamanites were no match for the well-armored Nephites, in spite of their numbers.

Later, after the Lamanites had succeeded in duplicating the Nephite armor, they discovered to their astonishment that the Nephites were still a step ahead of them, having fortified their cities "in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi." (Alma 49:8.) The Nephite defense plan consisted of digging a deep ditch entirely around their cities, except for the place of entrance, with the excavated dirt forming a high inner bank, or ridge. On top of the

ridge, timbers the height of a man were erected, capped by a frame of sturdy pickets. Overlooking the whole were towers with "places of security" from which the defenders could cast down stones and at the same time be safe from the stones and arrows of an attacking force. These preparations gave the Nephites such a tactical advantage that in the battle for the city of Noah more than a thousand Lamanites were slain in their attempt to storm the city, while not one of the Nephites lost his life.

Throughout their grueling fourteen year war with the Lamanites, the Nephites under Moroni utilized every available lull in the fighting to repair and further fortify their cities and prepare themselves for further conflict. They likewise made full use of the tactics of espionage and subterfuge, seeing nothing wrong with such methods as long as they were used strictly for defensive purposes. (Alma 43:30.) But they also recognized that temporally, as well as spiritually, they were ultimately saved by the grace of God, after all they could do. (2 Ne. 25:23.) They knew the Lord's promise: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence" (2 Ne. 1:20), and they saw both in their victories and in their setbacks the fulfillment of that decree. Lest the reader miss the point, Alma summarized it as follows:

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their
idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites. 18

Amulek taught that to a certain extent even a few righteous individuals could serve as a protection to an entire community. He assured the inhabitants of Ammonihah that the only thing saving any of them from destruction was the prayers of the righteous among them, and should they expel the righteous minority from their midst they would no longer have any guarantee of safety. Disregarding Amulek's advice, the Ammonihahites cast out the righteous anyway, and shortly thereafter they were totally annihilated by the Lamanites. The same principle applied to the nation as a whole. We are told that during a period in which "there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi, nevertheless for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared." (Alma 62:40.) Not until the time arrived that "every heart was hardened" (Mor. 4:11) did the Lord allow the entire Nephite nation to be destroyed.

The Lord's assistance to the Nephites took several forms.

More than once it involved revelation in detail of the location, route,

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18 Alma 50:21-22.
and proposed destination of the Lamanite army, with specific instructions as to how to counteract their designs. (Alma 16:5-6; 43:24.)

The ideas for the superior Nephite armor and fortifications undoubtedly involved an element of divine inspiration. Often the Lord's hand was manifest in even more subtle ways, which might be almost imperceptible, even to the beneficiaries, such as augmenting the strength and courage of the individual Nephite soldiers. But if the means were sometimes subtle, the results were marked and even dramatic. On one occasion, as the men of Moroni were about to shrink and flee in the face of a fierce Lamanite attack, Alma tells us:

They cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage.

And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon.

Now the Lamanites were more numerous, yea, by more than double the number of the Nephites; nevertheless, they were driven insomuch that they were gathered together in one body in the valley, upon the bank by the river Sidon. 19

Whatever form the Lord's aid took, the Nephites found they could not get along without it. When a well-prepared Lamanite force invaded the dissension ridden Nephite nation of 35 B.C., they inflicted an immense slaughter on the people of Nephi, which, we are positively assured, "would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them."

19Alma 43:49-51.
(Hel. 4:11.) Moronihah tried in vain to regain the captured territory, but found it as impossible to retake the territory without the Lord's help as it had been to prevent its loss in the first place. Being a righteous man himself, Moronihah realized that there was only one useful thing left for him to try. He joined Nephi and Lehi in a preaching campaign, calling on the people to repent of their sins, until there was sufficient evidence of national repentance to warrant further military efforts. Though the hoped for total reformation didn't materialize, Moronihah and his companions awakened at least a minimal amount of religious feeling in the people, to the extent that Moronihah ventured again to lead his forces from place to place and from city to city until they had regained fully one-half of their property and one-half of all their lands. Had the recent partial repentance not been so ephemeral in nature, the Nephites presumably could have regained the other half of their territory at the same time.

In summary, the Nephite prophets taught that military success depended on both divine providence and human endeavor. At the same time that Moroni asked Alma to inquire of the Lord concerning Lamanite intentions, he sent out spies to ascertain the same information. The Lord could reveal a superior method of defending their cities, but it remained for mortals to translate the design into actual fortifications. And though the Lord had promised to fight his peoples' battles, he depended on them to wield the weapons. Jacob indicated that the people in his day well understood this dual
responsibility in military affairs. He wrote, concerning the Nephite response to the aggressive intentions of the Lamanites: "The people of Nephi did fortify against them with their armies, and with all their might, trusting in the God and rock of their salvation; wherefore, they became as yet, conquerors of their enemies." (Jacob 7:25.)

Jarom likewise attributed the Nephite victories he witnessed to both the Lord and the army. He first explained: "Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood the Lamanites and swept them away out of our lands . . . ." (Jar. 7.) But immediately after acknowledging the Lord's role in their successes, Jarom launched into an account of Nephite technology and its importance in their military triumph. He said:

We multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land, and became exceeding rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin, and all preparations for war.

And thus being prepared to meet the Lamanites, they did not prosper against us. But the word of the Lord was verified, which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land.20

Jarom saw no inconsistency in assigning their victories both to the Lord and to their own military genius. He knew that the Nephites could never have withstood such a numerous foe alone, in spite of their

20Jarom 8-9; italics added.
superior preparations. He also knew that the Lord would not do what the soldiers could and should do for themselves. But working together the Lord and his people represented a power never successfully overcome and never fully understood by the Lamanites, though some among them were forced to acknowledge that "it was the Great Spirit that had always attended the Nephites, and who had ever delivered them out of their hands." (Alma 19:27.) Only when the Nephites lost the protection of this "Great Spirit" through their own unworthiness were the Lamanites able to defeat and eventually destroy them.

NEPHITE VIEW OF WAR, ITS CAUSES AND ITS EFFECTS

The Nephites accepted war as a sometimes necessary evil, but always as an evil, until the time of their final apostasy. Not only did it invariably result in a tragic loss of life on both sides of the conflict, but innocent civilians, including women and children, often perished along with their warrior husbands and fathers. Those who were left as widows and orphans frequently faced hunger as a result of the slaughter of their flocks and herds and the destruction of their fields of grain which lay in the path of the advancing armies. So great were the afflictions of the survivors of the Amlicite war, Alma tells us, "that every soul had cause to mourn." (Alma 4:3.)

The social and spiritual consequences of war could be even more injurious than the physical effects. The fact that extensive reorganization and revitalization of both the church and the civil
government was necessary following a period of warfare implies that many of the niceties of democracy and normal religious activity were sacrificed for a time in the interest of mere survival. (Alma 62:44-47.) Furthermore, we are told pointedly that "because of the exceeding great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened," (Alma 62:41.) Some of these undoubtedly were impelled irrevocably toward atheism, echoing the age old objection that a loving God would not have permitted such suffering to take place.

But despite their horror, wars did have the tendency to humble many of the self-sufficient and bring them to an awareness of their dependance on the Lord. As Alma indicated, "a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance." (Alma 32:13.) More blessed, of course, in Alma's view, were those who humbled themselves without being compelled to be humble, but he obviously felt it was better to be humbled by necessity than not at all.

It was for this reason that the Lord told Nephi: "If it so be that they [the Nephites] rebel against me, they [the Lamanites] shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance." (1 Ne. 2:24.) The prophets testified that the Lord designed to reward his people with peace and prosperity even in this life, as long as they could receive such blessings without losing sight of their eternal objective, but that rather than permit them to miss the incomparably greater glories prepared for the faithful in the world to come, he would
allow them to experience poverty and suffering in their most aggravated forms in hopes of bringing them to repentance. Nephite history is thus one continual cycle of prosperity and pride followed by destruction and general repentance, which in turn brought a renewal of prosperity, and so on. Helaman graphically summarized the experience of his people and the reason for the Lord's permitting wars and afflictions among them as follows:

And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One--yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.21

Though the Lord never caused war, neither did he use his power to prevent its occurrence, whenever the moral level of his people had sagged to the point that only a major catastrophe could reawaken their spiritual sensibilities. The Book of Mormon thus portrays him

21Helaman 12:1-3.
as making use of war much like a kindly physician would use a painful
and serious surgical operation as the last hope of curing a patient
of an even more painful and potentially fatal ailment. In such a
case surgery would be avoided as long as the patient responded
favorably to less drastic treatments. But when the disease advanced
to the stage that regular medicines proved ineffective, the physician
would have no choice but to perform the operation.

No point in the Book of Mormon is emphasized more repeatedly
than the relationship between individual righteousness and national
security. Sufficient rectitude could not only preserve the nation from
destruction, but could usually avert war itself, the Nephites believed.
As noted, the Nephites were ordained to be scourged by the Lamanites
only when they rebelled against the Lord. Otherwise, they were
promised, there should "be none to molest them, nor to take away
the land of their inheritance," nor to prevent their dwelling safely
in the land forever. (2 Ne. 1:9.)

It should not be concluded from this that every Lamanite
attack was necessarily a divine chastisement for Nephite wickedness.
Though Mormon taught that "it is by the wicked that the wicked are
punished" (Mor. 4:5), he did not preclude the possibility of a righteous
nation's defending itself, not to "punish" the aggressor but merely to
avert its own destruction. Were righteousness a total guarantee against
having to fight, it would make little sense for the Lord to have given
such detailed instructions as to when fighting was permissible and
even essential, nor would there have been any need for the elaborate
defense preparations advocated as much by the prophets as by the
military. Most conflicts, however, involve minor offenses, insults,
and misunderstandings on both sides before the actual outbreak of
armed hostilities. National righteousness, including a commitment to
the principles of tolerance, generosity, and forgiveness toward other
nations, could do much to prevent clashes of this type. But without
abridging the freedom of the wicked to "choose the way of everlasting
death" (2 Ne. 10:23), not even God could prevent a wicked and
aggressive nation from waging war on an innocent nation, should it
so desire, with no provocation whatever. It was to meet just such
an eventuality that even in times of righteousness the Nephites armed
and fortified themselves and maintained a constant vigilance against
enemy activity. It was generally only when a righteous group was so
tremendously outnumbered that armed resistance, even with the best
of weapons and fortifications, would have been out of the question, that
the Lord employed dramatic methods of coming to their defense, as he
did in the case of Alma's group by stopping the Lamanite army in its
tracks and preventing their following in pursuit.

Nephite history reveals that it was usually the wicked who
suffered the greatest number of casualties in battle, while the
righteous were largely spared. Amaron recorded that by about 279 B.C.
"the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed," whereas the
Lord had spared the righteous and delivered them out of the hands of
their enemies. (Omni 5-7.) Two hundred years later the same phenomenon was repeated on a smaller scale, the faithful again being "delivered at all times," while thousands of their wicked brethren were either killed or captured. (Alma 50:22.) A too casual reading of the Book of Mormon has led some to conclude from such statements that no truly righteous individuals would be allowed to die in battle, but like the two thousand sons of Ammon would all be miraculously preserved by the Lord's power. A. L. Cook, for example, proclaimed:

We know that God is unchangeable, therefore, if, in this generation we were righteous in the same measure as were the Ammonites we would be exempted from war, or, if compelled to fight, would all be preserved from death. The same miracles of deliverance would be in effect in our day as in their time.22

Those who hold this view fail to note that it was only national survival which was guaranteed on conditions of righteousness, not the preservation of each individual combatant. Although Zeniff and his people, for example, went forth to battle "in the strength of the Lord" and killed 3,043 of the enemy, they still suffered 279 fatalities themselves. (Mos. 9:17-19,) With a kill ratio of more than ten to one, Zeniff could say accurately enough, "God did hear our cries and did answer our prayers" (Ibid.) so far as the total group was concerned, but two hundred seventy-nine of their members were just as dead as though the Lord had ignored their prayers entirely. Apparently this

distinction between the Lord's promises on the national versus the individual level was misunderstood to some extent even in Moroni's day, for he felt compelled to correct the view advocated by some that the death of a soldier was prima facie evidence of his lack of spiritual attunement. He wrote:

Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness? I say unto you, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain; for I say unto you, there are many who have fallen by the sword; and behold it is to your condemnation;

For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked.23

Some of the most notable and revered leaders in Nephite history were slain by their enemies, with no suggestion by their contemporaries that their death was precipitated by their falling out of divine favor. Among this number were Antipus, Teancum, Gideon, and eventually Mormon himself. Many others were wounded, including Alma, Moroni, and everyone of Helaman's two thousand young Ammonite warriors. Though there was apparently a lower death rate among the morally upright troops than among their less worthy comrades, and though in unusual cases an entire army might be spared, there was clearly no assurance that specific individuals would be protected forever, no matter how worthy they were.

What the righteous did have in their favor, even on the individual level, was an inner peace and assurance which eliminated

the mental anguish, suspense, and terror of war, even when the pain, hunger, and physical hardships remained. The "awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked" (Mor. 6:7) was notably absent from the Nephites during much of their history. An outstanding example of tranquility in the face of danger was the Nephite attitude following Amalickiah's assault on the city of Noah. Though temporarily thwarted, Amalickiah was by no means defeated, and the Nephites knew it. As the Lamanite king withdrew to prepare for a future attack "he was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood." (Alma 49:27.)

He immediately began preparations for a tremendous assault which within five years would overrun the entire eastern seaboard. If ever a nation had visible justification for trepidation, it was the outnumbered and threatened Nephites. Nevertheless, in spite of the intensive military preparations on both sides, the record tells us "there was continual peace among them, and exceeding great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God." (Alma 49:30.)

Continuing on the same theme, the historian states: "Behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges." (Alma 50:23.)

Even in the heat of battle the same serenity could prevail.

As Helaman and his little band faced the prospect of contending with
an innumerable Lamanite force near the city of Manti, they poured out
their souls in prayer to God that he might give them the strength
to defend their lands and possessions and deliver themselves out of
the hands of their enemies. Helaman tells us what occurred next:

It came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with
assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did
speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith,
and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him. 24

But Nephite confidence did not depend on their having an
assurance of temporal deliverance. Their faith in the Lord and belief
in immortality enabled them to face even death without fear. Though
they sincerely regretted the temporary loss of their departed companions,
they realized that in reality they mourned for themselves and not for
those who had been slain. As Helaman expressed it, "We may console
ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their
country and of their God, yea, and they are happy." (Alma 56:11.)

In a sense the Nephites grieved more for the Lamanite dead
than for their own. They were genuinely "sorry to be the means of
sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal
world, unprepared to meet their God." (Alma 48:23.) They viewed
this life as the time to prepare to meet God, and considered that those
who died without adequate preparation suffered an irremediable loss.
With the righteous, on the other hand, who were spiritually prepared,

24Alma 58:11.
it was an entirely different matter. Moroni reflected the general Nephite attitude of the time when he wrote: "Ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God." (Alma 60:13.)

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Since the Nephites and the Lamanites were the only two nations on the continent during most of their history, and since their principal contact with each other was on the battlefield, international diplomacy, in the usual sense of the word, was often non-existent. We read of no exchange of ambassadors, for example, or other regular channels of communication. The Book of Mormon does recount enough scattered instances of correspondence and even cooperation between the two peoples, however, to make possible at least some tentative conclusions regarding Nephite practice and policy in the international field.

In the first place, the Nephites refused to be intimidated by the demands of a numerically superior enemy. Rather than relinquish what was rightfully theirs to appease an aggressor, they preferred to stand their ground even though it meant risking a full-scale war. They trusted that the Lord would give them the strength to deal with the enemy, so long as their cause was just. They were no doubt aware of Isaiah's warnings to Israel against fearing Assyria more than the Lord (2 Ne. 20:24), and his condemnation of reliance on military
compacts rather than repentance for safety. (2 Ne. 18:9-12.)

Lachoneus' response to Giddianhi is a good illustration of the Nephite attitude. Giddianhi, head of the powerful secret society of Gadianton, wrote Lachoneus, the chief judge, a threatening and abusive letter demanding Nephite capitulation to his claims to the government as the price for their lives. Describing Lachoneus' response, Nephi states:

Now behold, this Lachoneus, the governor, was a just man, and could not be frightened by the demands and the threatenings of a robber; therefore he did not hearken to the epistle of Giddianhi, the governor of the robbers, but he did cause that his people should cry unto the Lord for strength against the time that the robbers should come down against them.25

To Nephi, had Lachoneus given in to Giddianhi's demands, it would have demonstrated more than his cowardice; it would have reflected on his basic moral integrity as well, since, as he saw it, a just man could not be frightened by the demands and the threatenings of a robber.

The people of Ammon exhibited the same courage and steadfastness when the Zoramites breathed out threatenings against them in an effort to persuade them to cast out the recently converted former Zoramites who had taken refuge in the land of Jershon. Despite the threat of war with the combined Zoramite-Lamanite army, "the people of Ammon did not fear their words." (Alma 35:9.) Nor when the

25 3 Ne. 3:12.
expected war materialized did Moroni feel the need to rush into any hasty agreements with the Lamanite king. Even after Ammoron had accepted Moroni's own proposed terms for an exchange of prisoners, Moroni felt free to change his mind and seek an even more favorable outcome. As might be expected, Nephite leaders seldom, if ever, attempted to negotiate an end to a war by compromise. Rather, with the Lord's help they expected to win the war outright and dictate, rather than negotiate, the terms of peace.

Only rarely does the Book of Mormon detail any kind of formal treaty between the two powers. One of the few was Zeniff's compact with King Laman whereby the Nephite colonists were to be permitted to possess the land of Lehi-Nephi and the land of Shilom without hindrance by the Lamanites. (Mos. 9:6.) As Zeniff found out to his sorrow, he exhibited more zeal than wisdom in trusting the Lamanite king, for Laman's only intent was to lull the Nephites off guard via the treaty so that he might more easily bring them into bondage.

The second agreement with the Lamanites was also made by the offshoot Nephite colony rather than by the main body of the Nephites headquartered in Zarahemla. This time it was more a case of Limhi's accepting conditions of bondage imposed by the Lamanites rather than a treaty between two equals. By the terms of the agreement the Lamanites vowed only that they wouldn't kill the Nephites, while the Nephites pledged to pay fully one half of all their possessions as a tribute to their captors. Even this pact the Lamanites soon violated,
first in spirit by physically abusing and oppressing Limhi's people and later in fact by waging actual war on them, though in their defense it should be noted that they had reason to believe that the Nephites had also broken their part of the agreement by kidnapping twenty-four Lamanite maidens.

The only recorded treaty as such between the main Nephite body and the entire Lamanite nation was arranged during Mormon's time, when the Lamanites gave the Nephites all of the land north of the narrow neck of land in return for all of the land southward. A decade later this treaty was also broken, as the Lamanites launched an invasion across the previously agreed upon border. There is no record of any formal agreement by the entire Lamanite nation which they permanently held inviolate. Zerahemnah's oath of non-aggression comes closest to such specifications, but his pledge bound only himself, not his country.

The seeming absence of other formal and binding treaties does not mean that there were never periods of good feeling and cooperation between the Nephites and Lamanites. Such eras of cooperation were invariably engendered by Lamanite conversion rather than skillful negotiation, however. The most notable of these instances resulted from the preaching of Lehi and Nephi, the sons of Helaman, after Moronihah's efforts to recover the second half of the captured Nephite territory failed. So powerful was their testimony and so great the manifestations of the Lord's Spirit which accompanied them that in
due time the greater part of the entire Lamanite nation was converted.

Realizing the error of their previous course of action, the Lamanites then did voluntarily, as the result of the effect of two Nephite missionaries on them, what the entire Nephite army had been unable to compel them to do. They laid down their weapons of war and yielded up unto the Nephites the lands they had occupied.

Following this mass Lamanite conversion, the two nations for a time were on the best of terms. Travel and trade restrictions were removed and both Nephites and Lamanites were free to go into any part of the land they desired and to "have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire." (Hel. 6:8.) Ultimately those of the Lamanites who had been converted joined forces with the Nephites for protection against the increasing threat of the Gadianton robbers, and from that point on were numbered among the Nephites and were fully assimilated into the Nephite nation.

The same type of union of Nephites and Lamanites under the Nephite banner occurred following the coming of Christ to the Western Hemisphere. There is no mention of any Nephite annexation of foreign territory any place in the Book of Mormon, but on five separate occasions, including the two just mentioned, other peoples were adopted en masse as Nephite citizens in response to their own expressed desires. In addition to the converts of Lehi and Nephi, and those who survived the destructions accompanying the crucifixion of Christ, two other groups of Lamanites were accepted into Nephite citizenship:
the converts of the sons of Mosiah and a sizable body of Lamanite prisoners of war. Perhaps most spectacular of all was the merger between the small colony led by Mosiah and the populous Mulekite civilization, all of whom voluntarily accepted Mosiah's leadership and thenceforth bore the title of Nephites. Never was there any compulsion exerted on those who wished to retain their own national identity, but neither were any who wished the benefits of Nephite citizenship denied the privilege.

The Nephites were expansionists in the same sense Joseph Smith was, and in that sense alone. The Prophet proposed in his campaign document that should he be elected to the Presidency he would exert his influence as chief magistrate to extend the freedom and opportunities of the United States throughout the world. He stated:

> When a neighboring realm petitioned to join the union of the sons of liberty, my voice would be, come; yea come Texas; come Mexico; come Canada; and come all the world--let us be brethren: let us be one great family; and let there be universal peace.26

> Such was the Nephite hope, with respect to their brethren the Lamanites. But as both their faith and experience taught them that "the preaching of the word had a . . . more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword or anything else" (Alma 31:5).

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they placed their hopes of a unity of the two nations in the hands of missionaries, not diplomats. Though more often than not their efforts were in vain, the Nephites never ceased devising means to "reclaim and restore the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth" (Jac. 7:24), which alone could form the basis for a proper union, either politically or spiritually.
Chapter 8

THE LITTLE MILLENNIUM: POLITICAL CONDITIONS AMONG
THE NEPHITES FOLLOWING THE VISIT OF CHRIST

Nowhere is careful extrapolation more essential to an understand-
ing of Book of Mormon politics than in analyzing the political
conditions of the Nephites during the one hundred sixty-seven years
following the appearance of Christ. Almost nothing is said directly
concerning governmental institutions during this period. The silence
of the record on this subject has led some to doubt whether any govern-
ment other than church government even existed.\(^1\) Others have taken
for granted that there were political institutions, but have questioned
the commonly accepted thesis that there was a kind of political
consensus during the Nephite golden age. Sorenson, for example,
mentioned, "What happened during what we call the 'United Order'
period we are not certain, but there is no indication whatever that there
was political unity, only that there was a kind of religious unity."\(^2\)

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A careful reading of the book of Fourth Nephi, however, suggests that the unity which characterized the nation after Christ's coming was more than a religious accord, but extended into the social and political realms as well. We are told that "the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them." (4 Ne. 2.) There is nothing to suggest that only religious contentions and disputations had disappeared. The inference is that there were no contentions and disputations of any kind, including political differences. The record furthermore states, "There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites, but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God." (4 Ne. 17.) But the Lamanites had been a political and social entity, not a religious denomination, so the merger between Nephites, Lamanites, and all other "-ites" was clearly a political union, not merely a manifestation of a kind of spiritual ecumenism.

According to LDS Church authorities, such a political oneness is a natural outgrowth of the spiritual union brought about by the gospel. Brigham Young asserted:

When we see a religion, and one which is claimed to be the religion of Christ, and it will not govern men in their politics, it is a very poor religion, it is very feeble, very faint in its effects, hardly perceptible in the life of a person. The religion that the Lord has revealed from heaven unites the hearts of the people, and when they gather together, no matter where they are from, they are of one heart and one mind.

The religion that heaven unites the hearts of the people and makes them one. You may gather a people together, and no matter
how widely they differ in politics, the Gospel of Jesus Christ will
make them one even if among them were found members of all the
political parties in the country. I do not know how many different
political parties now exist in the country. . . . If members of all
these various organizations were to obey the Gospel and gather
together, the religion of heaven would clear their hearts of all
political rubbish and make them one in voting for principles and
measures, instead of men, and I think that any religion that will
not do this is very feeble in its effects.  

John Taylor likewise taught that it was part of the gospel
program to make us "one in our feelings political" as well as "one in
our feelings religious" and "one in our feelings social." He affirmed,
"All these things are mixed up and intimately connected with the position
we occupy as the Saints of the Most High God in the building up of
His Zion here upon the earth."  

It would be totally inconsistent with
the teachings of Presidents Young and Taylor to suppose that a people
could be as advanced and enlightened spiritually as were the Nephites
during their extended period of peace and righteousness and still have
fundamentally divergent political views.

Nor is it consistent with what is known about the functioning
of the kingdom of God in other dispensations to suppose that the church
organization was all-sufficient following the coming of the Savior to
America. As was discussed in Chapter 2 of this work, the kingdom of
God, when fully developed, includes political as well as religious
authority, a state as well as a church. Though both are ultimately
governed by the priesthood, they are separate organizations, with

3_JD, XIV, 159.  4_JD, XX, 350.
separate functions and a different slate of subordinate officers in each. There is no reason to suppose that the Nephites during their one hundred sixty-seven year era of greatness were an exception to this general rule.

Further evidence is found in the statement that "surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God." (4 Ne. 16.) Since it is a recorded fact that God has at various times in the past set up a theocratic government among his people, when they were spiritually prepared for it, and since it is axiomatic that God "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world" (2 Ne. 26:24), it follows that a people can be happier under a theocracy than they can under any other form of government. But since it is impossible for a people in mortality to be happier than the Nephites were following Christ's visit, it is logical to conclude that the people must have been living under a theocratic regime. Speaking of conditions among the united Nephite-Lamanite civilizations, Joseph Fielding Smith indicated that this indeed was the case, and that their political and religious institutions were two separate entities. He stated: "All of the people became united in one kingdom and one church. Their kingdom was the kingdom of God, a theocracy."  

The omission of the phrase, "Thy kingdom come," in the Nephite version of the Lord's Prayer (3 Ne. 13:9-13) lends further support to the theory that the Nephites were governed politically by the kingdom of God during this period. The apparent implication of the omission is that the Savior had established his full kingdom among the people, in its political as well as spiritual manifestations, so the saints had no need to continue praying for its advent. The old system of rule by judges had already disintegrated into general anarchy and tribal government prior to the coming of Christ, and there is no indication that it was revived either in name or in fact after his appearance. Rather, with the entire populace now converted to the gospel, practicing the law of consecration, and all being "partakers of the heavenly gift" (4 Ne. 3), there was no reason why the Savior should have established anything short of the full-fledged political kingdom of God among them.

Another type of circumstantial evidence that the Nephites lived under a pure theocracy for nearly two hundred years is found in a comparison of conditions preceding and attending Christ's first coming to the Nephites with those associated with his predicted latter-day second coming. So many parallels may be observed that even in the absence of other corroborating evidence, it would appear to be a safe guess that the Nephite political structure during their "little millennium" was similar to the form of divine rule which the scriptures
specifically assert will follow the coming of the King of kings in glory. Among the more obvious parallels are the following:

1. Both comings are preceded by an extreme degree of wickedness. "As it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be also at the coming of the Son of Man." (P. of G. P., Joseph Smith 1:41.) The Book of Mormon indicates that before the appearance of Christ on this hemisphere there was similarly great wickedness among the people, "because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan." (3 Ne. 7:5.)

2. Political chaos is a second feature common to both appearances. Among the Nephites, there was a total breakdown of the central government, with the people divided one against another into a multiplicity of tribes. The Doctrine and Covenants predicts that in the last days the judgments of God will eventually bring about "a full end of all nations." (D&C 87:6.) With the collapse of national governments, the people will undoubtedly group together according to families, neighborhoods, and similar small associations, as they did in Nephite times.

3. Secret combinations were prominent among the Nephites before Christ's coming among them, and Moroni warned that they would be a major problem among the Gentiles in the last days, as well. (Ether 8:21, 24.)

4. Both periods are characterized by wars, including civil wars. Among the Nephites a devastating civil war with the Gadianton robbers ended in the greatest slaughter ever known among the people
of Lehi. Several latter-day authorities have forecast terrifying conflicts yet future which will array state against state, city against city, and even divide families into opposing armed camps. Eventually, the Doctrine and Covenants asserts, the Latter-day Saints will be the only people not at war one with another. (D&C 45:69.)

5. A massive conversion of the Lamanites occurred shortly before the Savior's first coming (Hel. 5; 3 Ne. 2:14-15), and is predicted to occur again on a similar scale in the latter days. (D&C 49:24; 3 Ne. 21:23-24; 2 Ne. 30:5-6.)

6. In each case there was and will be an unusually spectacular outpouring of the Lord's Spirit upon the righteous, as a kind of compensation for the extreme wickedness and difficulties with which they are forced to contend. (Hel. 5:17-19ff; 3 Ne. 7:17-18; Joel 2:28-30; 1 Ne. 14:14.)

7. Great destructions of people and property accompany both appearances. (3 Ne. 8; Mal. 4:1; D&C 88:94.)

8. In each case, the righteous are spared from the death and destruction which overtakes their more wicked counterparts. (3 Ne. 10:12; Mal. 4:2; D&C 88:96-99.)

9. When Christ came to the Nephites, the whole face of the land was changed. (3 Ne. 8:12.) Great geographical changes are also to accompany his second coming. (D&C 133:23-24.)

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6See HC, III, 390-391; JD, XX, 151, 318; VIII, 123.
10. An extended era of peace and righteousness follows the destruction of the wicked in both instances. (4 Ne.; D&C 43:30-33; 101:26-35.)

11. Following both appearances, Jesus visits with his faithful disciples, teaches them, and associates with the people personally. (3 Ne. 26:13; D&C 29:11.)

12. In each case, the period of righteousness is followed by a revival of wickedness and contention. (D&C 29:22-23; 88:111-114; 4 Ne.)

It seems safe to conclude, on the basis of all available evidence, that the subsequent establishment of a political theocracy is another parallel between Christ's coming to America in 34 A.D. and his anticipated future advent. Admittedly, the evidence is circumstantial, but it appears conclusive. While details of the operation of the government during this period are almost totally lacking, it is not unreasonable to suppose that conditions were much as Orson Pratt envisioned:

On this Western hemisphere the kingdom of God was established by the personal appearance of our Lord and Saviour after his resurrection. Twelve disciples were appointed on this land to administer the Gospel, laws, and institutions of that kingdom. They went forth preaching, prophesying, working miracles, receiving revelations, and administering with authority Divine laws, Divine ordinances—calling, appointing, and ordering in every department of the kingdom,—inspired officers holding Divine authority to judge, to execute the laws, to govern in all things according to the mind of the King of heaven, whom they saw, and whose voice they heard, and whom they obeyed in all the affairs of government. This was a theocracy indeed—a national theocracy established in its pure form. And the ancient Israelites of America became universally a favoured and happy people.7

7JD, VII, 213.
Chapter 9

THE LAST DAYS OF THE NEPHITE NATION

In time the golden era of peace, unity, prosperity, and righteousness, which characterized Nephite society for one hundred sixty-seven years following the coming of Christ, gave way to pride, class distinctions, and general moral decay and religious apostasy. The practice of having all things common among them came to an end, and the nation itself was fragmented into Nephites and Lamanites once again, with the division occurring along religious, not racial lines. Under such circumstances it is obvious that the theocratic political government must also have passed away, though we are not told specifically what replaced it. As B. H. Roberts put it:

As to what was done in the matter of government when this period of general righteousness drew to its close, and pride and wickedness hastened the disintegration of the Church, and pushed society headlong into disorders, may not be known, as our present Nephite records on this subject are again silent. We only know that secret organizations sapped the foundations of society; that security of person and property vanished; that anarchy and tribal relations usurped the place of orderly government; and that darkness spread over the land, and gross darkness over the minds of the people.¹

¹B. H. Roberts, New Witnesses for God (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., © 1926), II, 217.
The powerful criminal conspiracy known as the Gadianton robbers was the most prominent feature of later Nephite society, and was the real cause of its ultimate downfall. (Ether 8:21.) But despite the exercise of "power and authority over the disciples of Jesus" (4 Ne. 30), including imprisonment, by their oppressors, it appears that the Nephite government was not formally under the control of the Gadianton band, as had been the case prior to Christ's appearance, for the Nephites found themselves fighting the Gadiantons as well as the Lamanites in open battle. Furthermore, the appointment and later reappointment of such a God-fearing leader as Mormon by "the people of Nephi" (Mormon 2:1) suggests (1) the absence of a formal, monolithic power structure behind the scenes in concerted opposition to Mormon's principles and (2) a remnant of democracy, at least on the level of common consent. This is not to deny the corrupting, debilitating, and divisive effect of the Gadianton band on the nation, even though they failed to capture the top government posts. The nature and effect of this conspiratorial society on the Nephite nation will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

In the closing years of the Nephite nation, Mormon appears to have been not only head of the armies but head of the nation as well, except for the interval of his retirement in protest against the Nephite policy of revenge. Perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that the only government functioning during this period was the
military. A nation fighting for its life in all-out war has little time for
the niceties and complexities of civilian rule. No mention is made
of governors, judges, or subordinate officers other than the commanders
of ten thousand who are enumerated in Mormon 6:11-15.

Mormon appears to have enjoyed broad powers permitting
him to conclude treaties (Mormon 2:28-29) and relocate the entire
Nephite populace (Mor. 3:5) as well as conduct their military affairs.
But despite his theoretical authority, toward the end Mormon experienced
difficulty in enforcing his commands. The final days of the nation were
marked by anarchy and total depravity (Mor. 9:18-20), beginning
in an ambitious but futile war of revenge against the Lamanites and
culminating in a desperate and equally futile struggle for mere
survival.

2Sidney B. Sperry holds this view. See his Book of Mormon
Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), p. 543.
Chapter 10

SECRET COMBINATIONS: THEIR NATURE AND EFFECT

The Book of Mormon indicates that by far the most serious threat to Nephite governmental institutions was not the Lamanite army but a highly organized and well-disciplined conspiratorial group within their own borders. According to Moroni, it was not just wickedness in general but "secret combinations," as he called them, which were the real cause of the downfall of both the Jaredite and the Nephite nations. (Ether 8:21.) Furthermore, both Nephi and Moroni flatly prophesied that similar movements would confront the latter-day Gentiles on the American continent, and that national survival would depend on effectively counteracting the influence of these insidious forces. (2 Ne. 26:22; Ether 8:24.) An investigation of the goals and methods of the secret combinations in ancient America is thus important for two reasons: first, to better understand the Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite societies within which these combinations flourished, and second, to better understand the characteristics of the latter-day conspiracy which according to prophecy is to menace the Gentile readers of the Book of Mormon.
Satanic Origin

Secret combinations among both the Nephites and the Jaredites were totally unlike more conventional forms of crime and rebellion, and they were infinitely more dangerous. But all secret combinations described in the Book of Mormon did evidence a basic similarity to each other, regardless of the time period in which they appeared or the nation in which they operated. The record asserts that this structural and functional sameness arose out of the common satanic origin of the various combinations, with the devil furnishing his willing followers in each age with an account of the identical secret plans, oaths, and covenants utilized by their predecessors.

Latter-day scripture reveals that the world's first secret combination consisted of Satan's compact with Cain and his brethren for the murder of Abel. According to Moses:

Satan said unto Cain: Swear unto me by thy throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not; for if they tell it, they shall surely die; and this that thy father may not know it; and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands.

And Satan sware unto Cain that he would do according to his commands. And all these things were done in secret.

And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness.¹

Cain's secret formula for getting gain was soon discovered by others, and from that time on secret combinations began to spread and find acceptance throughout the inhabited world. When Jared's group was led by the Lord to the Western Hemisphere, they brought with them the record of their fathers, which included such an explicit account of the operation of these secret plans in the Old World that Omer's son, Jared, and Jared's co-conspirator, Akish, were able to duplicate them precisely. Moroni tells us that Akish administered unto his kinsfolk "the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning." (Ether 8:15.) From the days of Akish on, secret combinations were a characteristic feature of Jaredite society, and the suicidal war of extermination which eventually destroyed the entire nation with the exception of Ether and Coriantumr occurred largely because of their influence.

For the first four hundred fifty years of their history, the Nephites managed to escape the plague of secret combinations. In fact, realizing the danger of such groups, Alma specifically commanded his son, Helaman, not to allow the account of the Jaredite oaths and covenants to come into the hands of his people, lest they adopt them and meet the same fate as their earlier practitioners. Nonetheless, in B.C. 52, one Kishkumen murdered Pahoran II as he sat upon the judgment seat, following which "he went unto those that sent him, and they all entered into a covenant, yea, swearing by their everlasting
Maker, that they would tell no man that Kishkumen had murdered Pahoran." (Hel. 1:11.) Kishkumen was soon replaced by an even more cunning and skillful leader by the name of Gadiant, and from this small beginning the secret society of Gadiant grew by leaps and bounds until twenty-five years later it gained control of the entire Nephite government. Most striking of all, Gadiant's group utilized the very oaths and covenants which the Jaredites had used, in spite of the fact that Helaman had been warned to be scrupulously cautious not to let out the account of such practices. But the record totally exonerates Helaman from complicity in the matter and explains how Gadiant came to possess the Jaredite secrets:

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

Yea, that same being who did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel it should not be known unto the world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers from that time forth.

... Yea, it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadiant to still carry on the work of darkness, and of secret murder; and he has brought it forth from the beginning of man even down to this time.

And behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men.²

²Helaman 6:26, 27, 29, 30.
It appears from this statement that Satan had the ability to reveal information and instructions to his earthly associates. Thus, when a prolonged famine brought the Nephites to such a state of repentance that they swept away the Gadianton band from among them until it became extinct, it did not signal the permanent disappearance of the band by any means. Within a very few years other robbers arose who sought out all the secret plans of Gadianton and even assumed the name of the earlier society. Whether they were furnished the details of Gadianton's oaths and covenants by being led to dig them out of the earth where they had been buried, whether they attracted to their number former members of Gadianton's group who were able to reconstruct the secret plans from memory, or whether they were the recipients of a totally new satanic dispensation is not clear, but whichever the case, they certainly had demonic encouragement, and the results were the same.

The second Gadianton band followed in the footsteps of the first until they succeeded in totally destroying the Nephite central government, murdering the chief judge and fragmenting the nation into numerous tribes. When Christ came, the band was again destroyed, and the capital city of the chief conspirators was burned with fire. But this in no way prevented later generations from beginning again "to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton" (4 Ne. 42) according to the identical pattern used before. Nor, according to Moroni, would the total destruction of the Nephite nation and an
intervening fifteen hundred years prevent their latter-day successors on this continent from once again establishing an organization along the same conspiratorial guidelines.

Many have ridiculed the idea of an alleged behind-the-scenes conspiracy with a controlling influence on the lives and destinies of many nations over an extended period of time. Such a conspiracy would indeed be unlikely if it depended on human cunning alone to coordinate the various tentacles designed to reach into all areas of society. But the Book of Mormon never gives that much credit to human genius. Rather, it specifically affirms that secret combinations, past and present, are born in hell, not in earthly assemblages, and are coordinated by "the devil, who is the father of all lies" (Ether 8:25), and who has seldom experienced any long-lasting difficulties in finding like-minded mortals to do his bidding.

Since secret combinations throughout history have had the same malevolent origin, and since they operated in both Jaredite and Nephite society according to the same fundamental principles, they can properly be examined as a unit with respect to their goals, methods, and distinguishing features, which presumably are also to characterize their modern-day counterparts.
GOALS AND METHODS

The Book of Mormon indicates that the objectives of secret combinations from the beginning have been the same: "to help such as sought power to gain power, and to murder, and to plunder, and to lie, and to commit all manner of wickedness and whoredoms" (Ether 8:16), and all of this "contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God." (Hel. 6:23.) To facilitate the realization of their ambitions, secret societies have also traditionally sought the overthrow of the existing government and the establishment of a dictatorship amenable to themselves. (Hel. 7:5; 3 Ne. 6:30; 7:6.) They realized that by thus being "held in office at the head of government" they could "rule and do according to their wills" and more easily "get gain and glory of the world, and . . . commit adultery, and steal, and kill." (Hel. 7:5.)

One of the Gadiantons' most successful techniques in their drive for power was to cultivate the sympathy, tolerance, and even the support of the general public. Giddianhi's appeal to those who stood in his way was, "Unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us--not our slaves, but our brethren and partners of all our substance." (3 Ne. 3:7.) The only time the Nephite government fell under the total control of the Gadiantons was when they did just that--voluntarily
subscribed to the goals and covenants of the conspirators and elevated
them to the top governmental positions. The record states:

The Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning
at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all
the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the
righteous until they had come down to believe in their works
and partake of their spoils, and to join with them in their secret
murders and combinations. ³

Even those who did not formally join the robbers were, in the
main, influenced by them to the extent that those in power were able
to do almost anything they wished without fear of any effective opposi-
tion. When Nephi, for example, spoke out openly against the corrupt
Gadianton regime, he found a flickering of public support, but the
authorities soon succeeded in stirring up the majority to anger against
Nephi and eventually imprisoned him with popular approval.

The second Gadianton band was less successful than the first
in gaining total control of the government, but their influence for evil,
even on those who opposed them politically, was just as marked. We
are told, "They did cause a great contention in the land, insomuch that
the more righteous part of the people had nearly all become wicked." ⁴
(3 Ne. 7:7.) The same was true of the spiritual ancestors of the
Gadiantons in Jaredite times. Whenever organized crime flourished in
Book of Mormon times it was because it was able to achieve respecta-
bility and even win a degree of admiration from the general public.

³Helaman 6:38.
When an aroused citizenry opposed it with righteous indignation, it withered. As Hugh Nibley observed, with regard to secret combinations:

Because they are parasitic, in order to thrive or even survive they must enjoy a measure of cooperation from a willing host. Reports on the Mafia and Cosa Nostra agree that these societies cannot exist without the help of corrupt local officials and a complacent public; they receive financial aid from business men who would never be seen in a casino and yet will lend the owners money because their operations are "legal" and bring money into the community. So it was anciently: "Now the people of Akish were desirous of gain, even as Akish was desirous of power," and so his "wicked and secret society . . . had corrupted the hearts of all the people. . . ." (Ether 9:6, 11.)

In order to win the necessary degree of cooperation from the average Nephite or Jaredite citizen, it was necessary for the secret combinations to hide their real and totally selfish goals behind a facade of public-spiritedness and massive campaign promises. No lie was too enormous or promise too lavish, provided the public would believe it. Despite their secret determination to destroy the people of the Lord (3 Ne. 6:29), leaders of these bands typically affected genuine piety, making their oaths "by their everlasting Maker" (Hel. 1:11) or "the God of heaven" (Ether 8:44), rather than by the devil. They insisted, furthermore, that the works of their society were good, not evil, and had the authority of age and tradition behind them. (3 Ne. 3:9.)

Giddianhi was a notable example. As he explained it, he wasn't attempting to overthrow the lawful government; he was merely working

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to recover the rights and governmental authority which legally belonged to his group in the first place. He expressed real concern for the welfare of Lachoneus and his people and complimented Lachoneus on his firmness in what he believed to be right and his noble spirit in the field of battle. (3 Ne. 3:5.) He promised the Nephites both peace and prosperity if they would only subscribe to his leadership and cease their senseless resistance. (3 Ne. 3:6-8.)

Similar promises of power, authority, and riches for their supporters were used successfully by secret combinations throughout the Book of Mormon. It was by such promises that Gadianton gained the leadership of his band in the first place, and Akish got his secret society started in the same way. (Hel. 2:5; Ether 8:17; 9:11.)

Giddianhi's offer to make his potential converts "partners of all our substance" (3 Ne. 3:7) is reminiscent of modern-day Communist propaganda, and the Gadiantons' seduction of the righteous in 24 B.C. to the point that they "had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils" (Hel. 6:38) suggests that some form of communal program may actually have been undertaken. This utopian promise of a society where all would share equally in a common prosperity seemingly had a particular appeal for the young, many of whom were thus led "by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers." (3 Ne. 1:29.)

In addition to their open propaganda campaign, conspiratorial groups in the Book of Mormon covertly employed more violent measures
to gain their way, particularly when popular opinion was against them. No fewer than five Nephite chief judges were assassinated in office by the Gadianton conspirators, and in the majority of the cases the assassin went not only unpunished but unknown. Central to the success of these combinations was the administration of a solemn oath of secrecy to each member whereby each covenanted to protect the others from the grasp of the law. In addition, they had an agreement that robberies, murders, and the like were to be carried out only against those who were not members of their group. Therefore,

they did have their signs, ... and their secret words ... that they might distinguish a brother who had entered into the covenant, that whatsoever wickedness his brother should do he should not be injured by his brother, nor by those who did belong to his band, who had taken this covenant. 5

Members were generally as scrupulous in abiding by the rules and regulations of their own secret society as they were callous about breaking the laws of the land. It was standard practice that anyone violating his pledges to the group be prosecuted and severely punished, "not according to the laws of their country, but according to the laws of their wickedness, which had been given by Gadianton and Kishkumen." (Hel. 6:24.) The prescribed penalty for informing on a fellow conspirator or for failing to carry out the leader's instructions to the letter was death. (Ether 8:14.)

5 Helaman 6:22.
The strict rules of secrecy employed by the Gadianton robbers made it possible for them to mingle among the people undetected, passing for respectable citizens. (Hel. 1:12.) It was not always in isolated mountain strongholds that the robbers were concentrated. Often, even when they were not in control of the government, they infiltrated "the more settled parts of the land" (Hel. 3:23) in great numbers, where they could maintain the appearance of innocence and carry on their depredations and guerrilla warfare behind the scenes.

On other occasions, when their numerical strength made it feasible, the Gadiantons resorted to full-scale conventional war when threats and intimidation failed to bring about the desired results. The bloodiest war in the first eight hundred years of Nephite history was not between the Nephites and the Lamanites, as might have been expected, but between the combined Nephite and Lamanite armies fighting an immense force of Gadianton robbers. (3 Ne. 4:11.) And in the final Nephite war of extinction, the Nephites had to contend not only with the Lamanites, but with the Gadianton robbers as a separate military entity in league with the Lamanites. (Mor. 2:27-29.)

When in power at the head of the government, the Gadiantons conveniently forgot their guarantees of peace, prosperity, and protection for any but their own members and sympathizers and "did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God." (Hel. 6:39.) Prophets in particular were targets of official abuse, and great effort was
expended to make them appear in the public eye as dangerous fanatics who should be silenced in the interest of the common good. (Hel. 8:5-6; 10:15; Ether 11:22.)

In all of this the Gadianton leaders were careful to preserve the form of popular government while totally disregarding the substance. When Nephi proclaimed against the corruptness of their law, it is doubtful that he was referring to major alterations in the written legal code so much as to changes in the way the law was interpreted and applied. The law still provided for a formal trial for all those accused of crimes, but trials under the Gadiantons became a sheer mockery of justice, whereby the righteous were condemned because of their righteousness and the guilty and wicked went unpunished because of their money. (Hel. 7:5.) Likewise, the written law called for all sentences prescribing capital punishment to be signed by the governor of the land, but in practice this requirement was commonly ignored with impunity by local judges under the Gadianton influence. And while there is no mention of any formal edict abridging the previously recognized right of free speech, corrupt judges nonetheless attempted to try and condemn Nephi for the "crime" of criticizing the administration of the law under the existing regime.

Not only did the members of the various secret combinations in the Book of Mormon work against the interests of the rest of society, but they had no real love for other members of their own group. Despite the fearsome oaths whereby they committed themselves to each other's
protection, they were perfectly willing to take advantage of another member of the group if they could do so without being caught, or if by so doing they could consolidate enough personal power to prevent their being punished. Seantum's murder of his brother, Seezoram, is a case in point. Neither the bonds of their blood relationship nor the bonds of the secret society of Gadianton were sufficient to counteract Seantum's craving to sit in the judgment seat then occupied by his brother. Akish's betrayal of his father-in-law and the subsequent war waged on Akish by his own sons are typical examples of the same thing from the Jaredite period.

In short, secret combinations operated in Book of Mormon times according to the philosophy that the end justifies the means. In their quest for power, wealth, and sinful pleasures, no tactics were considered off-limits, and no laws were considered too sacred to violate. Though they had a profound effect on national politics, the Gadianton robbers and their Jaredite counterparts were not political parties in the usual sense of the term. They had no concern for the health or welfare of the nation and were unwilling to operate within the framework of existing laws and approved procedures to achieve their goals. Their intentions were wholly selfish and revolutionary and totally incompatible with either free governmental institutions or the Judeo-Christian concept of justice and morality. Subscribing voluntarily to the instructions of Satan and utilizing his methods, such combinations were, according to Moroni, "most abominable and wicked
above all, in the sight of God," and specifically forbidden by him
"from the beginning of man." (Ether 8:18-19.)

LATTER-DAY SECRET COMBINATIONS

Regarding the latter-day existence of conspiratorial groups of
the Gadianton mold, Moroni testified that it was not a question of "if,"
but of "when" they would occur. Having seen in vision the Gentiles
among whom the Book of Mormon would come forth, he knew only
too well that the book would appear in a day when the blood of saints
would "cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and the works
of darkness," (Mor. 8:27.) Nephi, who had witnessed a similar vision,
asserted that these latter-day combinations would be "even as in times
of old," (2 Ne. 26:22), with the same oaths, covenants, goals, methods,
and results that were seen in Nephite and Jaredite times. The detailed
description of conspiratorial societies which is found in the Book of
Mormon was doubtlessly intended to serve as a warning to later
generations of the type of threat they would face. Lest anyone mistake
the identity of the group in question, Moroni added this additional
identifying mark of the latter-day conspiracy:

It cometh to pass that whoso buildeth it up seeketh to
overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries; and
it bringeth to pass the destruction of all people, for it is built
up by the devil, who is the father of all lies.6

6Ether 8:25.
It was no mere local collection of gangsters which Moroni foresaw, nor simply a general deterioration of morality, but a determined and well-organized international conspiracy bent on the overthrow of freedom throughout the world. In light of this it is significant that President David O. McKay officially labeled Communism "the greatest satanical threat to peace, prosperity, and the spread of God's work among men that exists on the face of the earth." It would appear that the organization designated by Moroni as most abominable and wicked above all and that singled out by President McKay as the greatest satanical threat to peace and righteousness on earth are one and the same.

Elder Ezra Taft Benson was even more specific in identifying the secret combination foretold by Moroni as modern-day Communism. In an address to the Brigham Young University student body he stated:

Today, the international, criminal, communist conspiracy fits this Book of Mormon description perfectly, for there is a combination of gangsters who lust for power, who have liquidated some seventy million people, brought one-third of the world's population under bondage, and who seek to overthrow the freedom of all nations.


Moroni's greatest concern was not that other nations under the influence of this conspiratorial force would invade the Americas, but that the American Gentiles, like their Nephite predecessors, would fall victims to internal subversion and eventual domination by the conspiracy, with popular support. He warned:

Whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not.

Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be. Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this secret combination which shall be among you; or wo be unto it, because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up.⁹

Commenting on Moroni's warning against upholding secret combinations, Ezra Taft Benson declared:

The crucial question is, "Has our nation upheld communism so that it could get power and gain?" The tragic answer is, "Yes." And so, unless we as a people can soon stop and reverse the disastrous course we are taking, then our nation shall be destroyed. For the sad truth is that communism would be insignificant in our country and the world today were it not for the consistent and persistent help which it is continuing to receive from right within our own government.

I know these are serious charges. There is ample evidence.¹⁰

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It was evidently Moroni's hope that the warning message of the Book of Mormon would enable its readers to escape the destruction and oppression at the hands of secret combinations which had overtaken his own nation, for immediately after his description of such conspiracies and their perils he wrote:

Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.\(^\text{11}\)

According to Nephi, the Lord's people in the last days will indeed escape the full impact of these combinations. "The righteous need not fear," he promised. (1 Ne. 22:17.) But the Lord assured Nephi's brother, Jacob, that this deliverance would not come without divine intervention. He said:

Wherefore, for this cause, that my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh, I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness, and of murders, and of abominations.\(^\text{12}\)

Presumably Moroni was aware of these assurances by Nephi and Jacob, but this in no way caused him to soften his appeal to his readers to exert all their influence to counteract the secret combinations in their midst, rather than wait for the Lord to overthrow them single-handedly. Although both the advent and the ultimate destruction of the latter-day conspiracy were foretold, to Moroni the obligation of

\(^{11}\)Ether 8:26. \(^{12}\)Nephi 10:15.
the saints was the same as if the outcome had been in doubt. In this connection he undoubtedly remembered his father's last epistle and his instructions therein concerning the necessity of continuing to labor for the establishment of righteousness and the elimination of evil regardless of the outlook for success or failure in the endeavor.

As Mormon put it:

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God.  

Chapter 11

THE LAMANITES

It would be as much an oversimplification to treat Lamanite government as a stable, never-changing institution as it would be to suggest the same of the Nephites. Like their fair-skinned brethren, the Lamanites had their periods of barbarism and civilization, of depravity and righteousness, with corresponding fluctuations in their political situation. Since the Book of Mormon deals in greater detail with Lamanite civilization during their times of wickedness, there is a correspondingly clearer picture of their political institutions and policies during such times. This will be examined first, followed by a discussion of the changes which occurred when the nation, or at least its leaders, were converted to the gospel.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

Just as Nephite government began as a monarchy, with Nephi reigning as the first king, so it appears that Lamanite government began in the same way, under Laman. Nephi had expressed some early misgivings about the wisdom of monarchal rule, but it is highly unlikely that the power-hungry Laman had any such reservations. From all
indications, he wielded both the title and the authority of king over his followers from the beginning.

At first, of course, the small size of the nation and their wild, nomadic nature made any sophisticated or bureaucratic governmental structure both unnecessary and impractical. (Enos 20.) But with the passing of time, as the Lamanites became more numerous and civilized in their ways, it became necessary to appoint regional kings, or administrators, subservient to the king of all the land headquartered in the land of Nephi. Eventually there were local kings over the lands of Ishmael, Middoni, Shemlon, Shimlon, Amulon, Helam, and apparently all other lands in the possession of the Lamanites. (Mos. 23:39; 24:1-2; Alma 17:21; 20:4.) These regional kings were "governed" by the king of all the land (Alma 20:26) and forbidden to do anything contrary to his will. (Mos. 23:39.) But, though a national proclamation from the king in the land of Nephi took precedence over any local regulations to the contrary (Alma 22:27; 23:1), the requirements imposed by him were apparently few. So long as the regional authorities supplied their quota of troops for the army and attended the periodic feasts given by the king, they were free to administer the day-to-day affairs of their own regions pretty much as they pleased. (Mos. 23:39.)

The normal pattern of succession to the throne was from father to son, or from brother to brother, but exceptions were not uncommon. Somewhere between the days of Laman, brother of Nephi, and the reign of Lamoni's father, there had apparently been a break in the royal
line, for Lamoni was a descendant of Ishmael, presumably in his patriarchal line, rather than of Laman. (Alma 17:21.) Whether this change of dynasty had occurred because of the lack of an heir in the royal family, because of an unmentioned governmental coup, or for other reasons, cannot be determined. It appears, however, from the Amalickiah incident that the general Lamanite population was relatively unconcerned about the lineage of their king, provided he had visible qualities of leadership and a convincing line. Within a year of his arrival in the land of Nephi, the Nephite dissenter, Amalickiah, had surreptitiously assassinated the reigning king, courted and married the queen, and had himself "acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites" (Alma 47:35), with no evidence of any rival claims to the throne being presented by either friends or relatives of the slain leader. In fact, as George Reynolds pointed out, "it is altogether probable that the slain monarch was also of an apostate family." In substantiation of his theory he reminded his readers:

Seven or eight years previously the Christian Lamanites, with the king at their head, had been ruthlessly driven from their homes by their unbelieving fellow countrymen led by members of the various Nephite apostate orders who had taken up their residence amongst the Lamanites. A leader of one of these sects would naturally work his way to the throne when the rightful king and his family sought refuge in the land of Zarahemla. What makes this idea more probable is that Amalickiah afterwards married the
widowed queen, a thing he was much more likely to do if she were a fair Nephite than a dark-skinned daughter of Laman.\(^1\)

The succession of Amalickiah by his brother, Ammoron, and Ammoron's replacement by his son, Tubaloth, is further evidence that (1) the Lamanites were not particular about the genealogy of their leaders and (2) that they were basically an apathetic people and vulnerable to the influence of a charismatic and resolute newcomer. The ease with which a handful of Amulonites "usurped the power and authority over the Lamanites" in the east wilderness is typical. (Alma 25:5.) The Lamanites themselves would often have preferred to leave the Nephites alone, but for the constant agitation of Nephite apostates in their midst, who were only too happy to provide the leadership for their proposed military campaigns.

On the regional level there is no evidence of any necessary qualifications for public office other than winning the favor of the national king. One regional leader, Lamoni, was the son of the supreme ruler. (Alma 18:9.) Another, Antiomno, was seemingly just a friend. (Alma 20:4.) Still another, Amulon, was a Nephite apostate (Mos. 23:31-39), as was Pachus, who overthrew the legitimate chief judge in Zarahemla and entered into a pact with the Lamanite king whereby he, Pachus, was to be installed as a regional king over the Nephites after they had been conquered by the Lamanites. (Alma 61:8; 62:6.)

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Lamanite governmental organization following the nearly two hundred year era of peace and union with the Nephites was also monarchal, though there is no mention of regional authorities or officers of any kind other than the king during this period. Even the king, in the view of B. H. Roberts, was more of a military chieftain than a conventional monarch, and the only observable function of government during this time was the management of military affairs. The record is so sketchy at this point, however, that it is difficult to formulate any positive conclusions.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE KING

There appear to have been no constitutional restrictions of any kind on the authority of the Lamanite kings. As expressed by Talmage, "The Lamanite rulers exercised autocratic sway and relied upon physical force for their power." The petty rulers were nearly as supreme in their own areas as the overall king was in his larger sphere, being restrained only by the expressed and probably limited instructions of their superior. The Lamanites' application of the title "Rabbah," meaning "powerful or great king" (Alma 18:13), to all their kings, national or regional, is indicative of the authority wielded

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2 Brigham Henry Roberts, New Witnesses for God (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1951), III, 156.

by these rulers and is in marked contrast to the philosophy of the
Nephite monarchs, who viewed their office more as that of presiding
servant than master.

But if there were no formal or constitutional restrictions on the
authority of the king, there were nonetheless practical limitations on
his power. Kings frequently found it necessary to convince the people
of the desirability of a proposed course of action rather than simply
issue an order. When the wounded King Laman came to realize that
his attack on Limhi's people had been a mistake, he was not able to
halt the conflict by merely commanding his men to cease and desist,
but found it necessary to "bow himself down before them, and . . .
plead in behalf of the people of Limhi." (Mos. 20:25.) In the same
way, Amalickiah, even after he became king, wasn't able simply to
command an attack on the Nephites against the wishes of his con-
stituents. Such an action would likely have met with the same resist-
ance and rebellion as did a similar command by his predecessor.
Rather, Amalickiah appointed men to speak from high towers throughout
the land and gradually "hardened the hearts of the Lamanites, and
blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger" (Alma 48:3), to the
point that they willingly followed him into battle. To run seriously
counter to popular opinion was to risk revolution and removal from
office, as Lamoni's father found out following his conversion to
the gospel. (Alma 24:2, 20.)
Unlike their Nephite counterparts, Lamanite kings generally confined their educational activities to propaganda and took no pains to teach their people the arts of civilization or train them in matters or religion, other than in a negative sense. The people therefore "knew nothing concerning the Lord, nor the strength of the Lord" (Mos. 10:11), though they did believe in a vague kind of "Great Spirit" who was quite unconcerned with human behavior and uninvolved in their lives. (Alma 18:5.) Leaders and subjects alike genuinely believed that their fathers had been wronged by their brethren in the wilderness and had been deprived by them of their lawful rights to the government, and they passed this tradition on to their children from generation to generation (Mos. 10:12-17), in informal ways. The only evidence of formal public education among the Lamanites with official sponsorship was the appointment of the brethren of Amulon to teach the Nephite language throughout the land and to train them in the arts of writing and record keeping. (Mos. 24:4-6.)

The principal function of government among the Lamanites throughout their history seems to have been the waging of war. In times of peace there was apparently little regimentation of the people and little contact between them and their government, so long as they were obedient to the orders of the king. Even the people of Limhi, who were supposedly in bondage to the Lamanites, were allowed the freedom to govern their own internal affairs, to receive visitors from Zarahemla,
and even to arm themselves, provided they paid their taxes and didn't create any trouble. If this was true of even the Nephite prisoners, it must have been doubly true of Lamanite citizens. A liberal immigration and naturalization policy also characterized the Lamanite nation. While Nephite spies or missionaries might be dealt with harshly, the door was always open for Nephite dissidents who wished to renounce their former citizenship and join the Lamanites. (Mos. 23:35; Alma 2:24; 43:4.)

Nonetheless, the Lamanites were not free in the sense that the Nephites were, for many of the Lamanites taken prisoners by the Nephites expressed a desire to join the people of Ammon "and become a free people" (Alma 62:27), something they evidently had not previously been. Though the Amalekites had been permitted to build sanctuaries and carry on their traditional forms of worship (Alma 22:7), there was no general religious freedom, particularly where the Nephite religion was concerned. (Alma 43:10; 25:5; Mos. 24:11.) Since Lamanite monarchs believed whatever they did was right (Alma 18:5-6), the administration of justice was both arbitrary and capricious, with Lamoni, for example, preferring to punish the shepherds rather than catch the robbers of his sheep. In the case of other offenders, including Nephite trespassers, it was left to the whim of the king rather than any established law whether "to slay them, or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land, according to his will and pleasure." (Alma 17:20.)
Lamanite monarchs apparently ruled much like the Nephites' King Noah, for their own pleasure and self-aggrandizement rather than the common good. Amalickiah, typically, "did care not for the blood of his people" (Alma 49:10); in fact, he was less concerned for their well-being than were the Nephites. The Lamanite citizens, in turn, had little real love for their king, and were known to leave a wounded king on the battlefield rather than unnecessarily risk their lives to come to his aid. (Mos. 20:13.) The kind of intense patriotism and loyalty to country which characterized the Nephite nation during times of righteousness was apparently totally foreign to the Lamanite experience.

**MILITARY POLICY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Lamanite military organization was much like the Nephites'. They originally were led personally by their king, but with the increasing size of the nation found it advisable to appoint a "chief captain," or "chief leader and commander," over their army subservient to the king. (Alma 43:44.) This chief captain had authority, in turn, to appoint other chief captains (Alma 43:6), the title of which presupposes the existence of at least one other level of lesser captains on the hierarchical scale.

The failure of the first Lamanite chief captain, Zerahemnah, may have convinced the king of the need to maintain closer control over his troops. At any rate, we find both Amalickiah and Ammoron
personally leading the army at the same time they ruled the nation. Ammorphon's son reverted to the practice of appointing a separate leader for the army, but the last mentioned Lamanite king, Aaron, was once again both monarch and military commander. The presence or absence of a separate military leader apparently depended more on the preference of the reigning king than on any fixed policy.

Similarities between the Nephite and Lamanite armies stop at the organizational level, for in their reasons for waging war and their attitudes toward conflict they were poles apart. Whereas the Nephites fought for the preservation of their lives and freedom, the Lamanites openly fought for the extension of their monarchy and power. (Alma 43:45.) While the Nephites refused to strike the first blow, the Lamanites were constantly the aggressors, with no visible remorse of conscience. They "delighted in war and bloodshed," and had an eternal hatred toward the Nephites, continually seeking by the power of their arms to destroy them. (Jacob 7:25.) Rather than observe humanitarian rules of conduct toward women and children, the Lamanites had no hesitancy about taking both as prisoners of war. (Alma 54:2.) On other occasions even this was too humane for their tastes, and they slaughtered women and children along with the men (Hel. 1:27), saving only the Nephite chief captains alive (Alma 56:12), presumably for their potential value as informants or bargaining tools rather than for humanitarian reasons.
In contrast to the Nephites, who appointed compassionate, God-fearing men to be their chief captains, the Lamanites purposely appointed only Nephite apostates to positions of authority in the army, because they "were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves." (Alma 43:6.) This fierce disposition in their leaders was a necessity if the ordinary Lamanites were to be kept stirred up to a sufficient degree of hatred and anger to impel them to leave the peace and comforts of home to fight the Nephites. These Nephite dissenters had the additional advantage of "being the most acquainted with the strength of the Nephites, and their places of resort, and the weakest parts of their cities." (Alma 48:5.) A further probable reason for the appointment of Nephite apostates to positions of authority during the reigns of Amalickiah, Ammoron, and Tubaloth was the desire of these kings, former Nephites themselves, to maintain the dominance of their own group.

Whereas the Nephites relied on the help of the Lord and on superior preparations and technology for safety, the Lamanites depended chiefly on their numerical superiority. They were competent enough at copying Nephite armor and defense systems, but seem to have had little capacity for originating. Consequently, they were generally at least one step behind the Nephites from a technological standpoint, which largely offset their numerical advantage. An even greater weakness, of course, was their total ignorance concerning the Lord and
his strength, which consistently prevented their obtaining any lasting victory over the Nephites so long as the Nephites were righteous.

In their non-military dealings with the Nephites, the Lamanites were as unprincipled as on the battlefield. Though they did have some traditional reverence for a formal oath (Alma 19:20; 44:8; 49:7; Mos. 19:25; 21:3), their concern for integrity did not extend to more conventional promises and treaties, which they freely broke whenever it suited their desires. (Mos. 10:18; 23:36-37; Mor. 2:28-29; 3:1.) Even a solemn oath could be broken if circumstances seemed to warrant it. (Mos. 20:15; Alma 44:8.) The Lamanites, by trickery, brought the Nephites' southern colony, under Limhi, into bondage, and exacted a tribute of fifty percent of all their possessions and fifty percent of their annual income as the price for their lives. Their unremitting goal was to do the same to the entire Nephite nation, peacefully if possible, but by force if necessary. (Alma 43:29; 54:18.) Peaceful co-existence was never part of Lamanite policy, during their periods of wickedness, unless it included the unconditional surrender of the Nephites and the establishment of a unified government under Lamanite control.

GOVERNMENTAL MODIFICATIONS IN PERIODS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

On those rare occasions when the total Lamanite nation, or a sizeable portion thereof, was converted to the gospel, the effects were as noticeable on the political scene as in the personal lives of
the converts. The conversion of Lamoni and his father and thousands of their subjects as a result of the preaching of the sons of Mosiah provides a classic example. Since, as Pahoran noted, "the Spirit of God . . . is also the Spirit of freedom" (Alma 61:15), one of Lamoni's first public acts following his conversion was to assemble his people together and declare unto them "that they were a free people," and "that they might have the liberty of worshiping the Lord their God according to their desires." (Alma 21:21-22.) Lamoni's father, in turn, promised to free his son and his people from the oppression they had previously experienced at his hands (Alma 20:26; 21:21), and sent a decree throughout the nation that no one was to hamper the sons of Mosiah in their missionary labors in any part of the realm. (Alma 23:1-4.)

The formerly militaristic spirit of the Lamanite converts changed one hundred eighty degrees, and rather than delight in bloodshed they now refused even to defend themselves from their bitterly antagonistic fellow countrymen. (Alma 24:6-13.) They opened up a correspondence with the Nephites and soon had such amicable relations with them that they were invited to become Nephites themselves, receiving all the rights and privileges of citizenship, and enjoying the protection of the Nephite army. This offer the former Lamanites readily accepted, and their previously power-hungry rulers submitted gladly to Nephite law, with no apparent concern as to whether or not they would hold any positions of authority in their new homeland.
When almost the entire Lamanite nation was converted by the preaching of Nephi and Lehi a half century later, the results were much the same. The Lamanites laid down their weapons of war, returned the captured Nephite lands, and entered into an extended period of cooperation and good feelings with their Nephite brethren. The same liberality they showed to their former military foes they also displayed toward domestic criminals, such as the Gadianton robbers in their midst. They were determined to eradicate the band itself, rather than support it and build it up as did the Nephites, but they did so by preaching the gospel to the individual members of the group and converting them, not by incarcerating or executing them. Eventually, when a recurrence of the Gadianton band endangered both Nephites and Lamanites, the righteous Lamanites of this era, like the people of Ammon before them, formally joined with the Nephites, took upon themselves the Nephite name, and submitted to their government.

Significantly, during their times of righteousness, until they officially joined the Nephites, the Lamanites apparently made no modifications in their governmental structure as such. Both Lamoni and his father continued to reign as kings following their conversion. There was no suggestion that their new-found religion somehow was incompatible with monarchal rule. Rather, the changes occurred in the way the government was administered and in the rights and privileges accorded the people. Lamanite kings traditionally had
oppressed their people, denied them their freedom, and officially
discouraged religion. But when converted, they were the first to see
that their people enjoyed "their rights, and the privileges of their
church and of their worship, and their freedom and their liberty."
(3 Ne. 2:12.) In their irreligious state, Lamanite kings ruled by the
laws of their own selfish desires. As church members, on the other
hand, they were careful to walk circumspectly before God and to
"observe to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments
according to the law of Moses" (Hel. 15:5), presumably in its political
as well as its religious aspects. At their worst, Lamanite monarchs
were as corrupt and intractable as King Noah, and as destructive
in their influence on their people. But at their best, Lamanite kings
emulated the great prophet-kings of the Nephites, including the
two Mosiahs, Benjamin, and even Nephi himself.
Chapter 12

THE JAREDITES

Though the Jaredite civilization apparently lasted substantially longer than that of the Nephites, its political experience seems to have been less varied, and information concerning its governmental structure is far more scarce. Less than the hundredth part of Ether's national history found its way into Moroni's abridgment (Ether 15:33), and the part that did was not intended as a political treatise. Its announced purpose was simply that the Gentiles might know the decrees of God concerning the land and thereby repent and escape the fate of the Jaredites and Nephites who had previously inhabited the continent. Certain aspects of the Jaredite political order must therefore be left to conjecture, and conclusions in many cases can be only tentative. But in spite of these limitations, enough is said to make possible the observation of both similarities and differences between the Nephite and Jaredite regimes.

As was the case with the Nephites, government among the Jaredites began as a family affair, with Jared and his brother providing the leadership over their respective families and friends. Despite the fact that Mahonri Moriancumr is always referred to in the Book of
Mormon as "the brother of Jared," he is by all odds the most important character in the early years of the nation, and it was he, rather than Jared, who seems to have had the final word in determining the course of action for the group. Though the theory has been proposed by some that Jared may have been the political or patriarchal head and his brother the spiritual leader of the group, the writer feels, as did Reynolds and Sjodahl, that the preponderance of evidence suggests that Mahonri Moriancumr was both "the prophet and leader of the founders of the Jaredite race."¹ Though it was at Jared's bidding, it was his brother who approached the Lord in prayer and to whom the Lord revealed his will concerning their migration to a promised land. It was the brother of Jared who received detailed instructions from the Lord concerning the direction they should travel and the proper design for the construction of their barges. It was with him, not Jared, that the Lord spoke in a cloud in the valley of Nimrod and again for three hours in the place called Moriancumr, and it was to him that the Lord eventually showed his entire pre-mortal body in one of the great theophanies of all time. No one disputes the fact that the brother of Jared was the early spiritual head of his people. But, as was seen in Chapter 2, the rule in ancient societies was that spiritual and political leadership were almost universally interrelated, with the same individual

presiding in both areas. There is no reason to suspect that it was any
different with the Jaredites. In the beginning they evidently operated
as a pure theocracy, "being directed continually by the hand of the
Lord" (Ether 2:6) and being "taught from on high" (Ether 6:17), with
the brother of Jared serving as the revelator of the divine will in both
temporal and spiritual matters for the entire fledgling nation.

When the brother of Jared neared the end of his life, he
proposed to Jared that they call their people together to number them
and entertain any last requests before the two patriarchs descended
into their graves. To their surprise, the people expressed their desire
for a king to rule over them, as had Nephi's followers and ancient
Israel in the days of Samuel. Like both Nephi and Samuel, Jared and
his brother voiced their opposition to such a move, but again like
the Nephite and Israelite prophets, they recognized the right of the
people to decide for themselves concerning their future governmental
structure. They also were no doubt as aware as the Nephite kings
that monarchy and theocracy are not necessarily incompatible, in
spite of the greater likelihood of oppression and captivity under
monarchical rule than under other forms of government.

At the invitation of Jared, the people nominated their own
candidate for the kingly office, selecting Pagag, the firstborn son of
their current leader, in keeping with the patriarchal tradition. But
Pagag, perhaps out of respect for his father's personal aversion to
monarchy, declined the offer. The people besought Mahonri to force
his son to accept the draft, but he refused, and "commanded them that they should constrain no man to be their king." (Ether 6:25.)

The people next selected each of the remaining sons of the brother of Jared in order, and finally the four sons of Jared, but each refused the office with the exception of Orihah, Jared's youngest son, who finally was anointed to be king. Perhaps from this early precedent grew the unique Jaredite custom of having the youngest, rather than the oldest son of a deceased or retiring monarch succeed his father on the throne. Whatever the reason, the procedure seems to have been a firmly established part of the Jaredite culture, and made for extremely long reigns in some cases. (Ether 7:3, 10; 9:14, 21; 10:4, 15, 16, 30; 11:14.) Emer, for example, was on the throne for sixty-two years, and his youngest son, Coriantum, who lived to the age of one hundred forty-two, could easily have reigned as king for more than a century.

In the beginning and at periodic intervals throughout their history, the monarchical system served the nation well. Orihah, we are told, "did execute judgment in righteousness all his days." (Ether 7:1.) The fact that he, as well as subsequent rulers, was "anointed" to be king (Ether 6:27) and the fact that righteous kings personally anointed (rather than simply appointed) their own sons to succeed them (Ether 9:14, 21), suggests that the office included religious authority and responsibilities as well as political power. From all appearances it was intended that the Jaredite government be the same type of
theocratic institution as the Nephite or early Israelite monarchies, with the throne being occupied by prophets who would seek to ascertain the mind and will of God and rule the nation accordingly. In practice, more often than not the Jaredites were governed by ungodly overlords without the slightest concern for the divine will, but even then the appearance of piety was maintained by retaining the outward trappings of theocratic rule. Priests continued to be associated with the throne in an official capacity, and Gilead, one of the most depraved Jaredite leaders of all, was murdered as he sat upon his throne, not by a rival military commander, nor by one of his disgruntled subjects, but by his own high priest. (Ether 14:9; 9:4.)

Democracy, however, is much less in evidence among the Jaredites, following the initial coronation of Orihah by popular demand, than it was among the Nephites. The phrase, "according to the voice of the people," is conspicuously absent from the Book of Ether. The brevity of the record could account in part for the omission, but it is likely that public opinion was in fact rarely consulted, particularly by the more wicked rulers who constituted the bulk of the nation's leaders. At first glance it may appear that Morianton was an exception to the rule, for we find that "he did gain favor in the eyes of the people" to the point that "they did anoint him to be their king." (Ether 10:10.) But on closer inspection it turns out that this public action was largely an empty gesture, for Morianton had already
established himself as king over all the land, and the popular vote was no more than an after-the-fact acquiescence in what had already occurred. It is highly improbable that an expression of public disfavor would have changed Morianton's mind in the least about proceeding with his reign.

We find another Jaredite ruler, Jared, "giving audience to his people" (Ether 9:5), but again it cannot be concluded from this that the people necessarily possessed any kind of veto power over the actions of the king. Of course, as in even the most despotic regime, the people still had one avenue of expression open to them. When conditions became so intolerable that even the prospect of death lost its terror, they could rise up en masse and overthrow the reigning sovereign, as the Jaredites actually did in the case of Riplakish, killing Riplakish himself and driving his descendants out of the land. (Ether 10:8.)

Summarizing the Jaredite political experience in general, Hugh Nibley wrote:

The Jaredites like their Asiatic relatives, and unlike the Nephites, were thoroughgoing monarchists, and their monarchy is the well-known Asiatic despotism lacking none of the trimmings. Where could one find a more perfect thumbnail portrait of the typical Asiatic overlord than in the four verses that describe the reign of Riplakish? (10:5-8.) The lechery and cruelty, the magnificence and the oppression are all there. . . .

Their whole history is the tale of a fierce and unrelenting struggle for power. The book of Ether is a typical ancient chronicle, a military and political history relieved by casual references to the wealth and splendor of kings. You will note that the whole structure of Jaredite history hangs on a succession
of strong men, most of them rather terrible figures. Few annals of
equal brevity are freighted with an equal burden of wickedness.
The pages of Ether are dark with intrigue and violence, strictly
of the Asiatic brand. When a rival for the kingdom is bested, he
goes off by himself in the wilderness and bides his time while
gathering an "army of outcasts." This is done by "drawing off"
men to himself through lavish bestowal of gifts and bribes. The
forces thus won are retained by the taking of terrible oaths. When
the aspirant to the throne finally becomes strong enough to
dispose of his rivals by assassination, revolution, or a pitched
battle, the former bandit and outlaw becomes king and has to
deal in turn with a new crop of rebels and pretenders. . . . It
is a strange, savage picture of nightmare politics that the book of
Ether paints, but it is historically a profoundly true picture. 2

B. H. Roberts agreed that the little which is said concerning
the Jaredite government "is strictly in harmony with the ancient forms
of monarchy. That is, the kings were absolute, the source of all law
and the center of all political power." 3 So far as the record indicates,
Jaredite kings, like other ancient monarchs, single-handedly enacted
laws, passed judgment on offenders, and took measures to protect their
followers from crime and violence. (Ether 7:24–25; 11:2.) But, as
Roberts indicated,

Of the subordinate officers of the kingdom nothing is said;
by what means judicial powers were exercised we are not informed;
what the nature of the military organization was, or what system of
taxation was adopted, we do not know. On all these matters
Moroni's abridgment of the record of Ether is silent. 4

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2Hugh Nibley, Lehi in the Desert and the World of the
Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, c. 1952?), pp. 192–193, 201.

3Brigham Henry Roberts, New Witnesses for God (Salt Lake

4Ibid., II, 150–151.
An unusual feature of the Jaredite system was the practice of imprisoning a political rival or a deposed predecessor, but permitting him such freedom even in captivity that he was able to beget children, raise them to maturity, maintain contact with the rest of the nation, and even plot the overthrow of his captors. In one case, five successive generations of the royal line were born and raised in captivity before the throne was restored to the rightful heir. But sooner or later the captives generally succeeded in gaining the upper hand, whereupon as likely as not they would themselves impose a loose kind of quasi captivity on the dethroned king, whereby he was able to repeat the process. As Nibley observed, "It seems to us a perfectly ridiculous system, yet it is in accordance with the immemorial Asiatic usage."\(^5\)

The usual pattern of war and contention was occasionally broken by an interval of genuine peace and tranquility. As was true of Nephite times, such peace, when it occurred, seems not to have come from skillful negotiation or compromise between antagonists, but as the result of national repentance. The reign of Shule is a prominent example. Shule, a righteous individual himself, executed a law whereby the prophets in the land could preach openly and freely throughout the nation without hindrance. By this means the people

as a whole were brought to repentance and for a time abandoned their belligerent disposition, so that there were no more wars in all the land as long as Shule was on the throne. (Ether 7:23-27.)

But such periods of peace seldom lasted more than a generation before another uprising or civil war displaced the short-lived peace once again. Eventually, the Book of Ether tells us, the entire nation succumbed to the lures of secret combinations and wickedness, and organized government gave way to anarchy and confusion. Civil turmoil became general throughout the land, with "every man with his band fighting for that which he desired." (Ether 13:25.) Finally the entire population, including these roving bands, coalesced around the rival and evenly matched armies of Coriantumr and Shiz, with each faction bent on the annihilation of the other. In their final struggles both sides fought without honor and without mercy, being "drunken with anger, even as a man is drunken with wine." (Ether 15:22.)

As a consequence the Lord totally abandoned both sides, as he did the Nephites centuries later for the same reason, "because of the wilfulness of their hearts, seeking for blood and revenge." (Moroni 9:23.) We are told that "Satan had full power over the hearts of the people; for they were given up unto the hardness of their hearts, and the blindness of their minds that they might be destroyed." (Ether 15:19.) From that point on it was only a matter of time until both the nation and its inhabitants were totally obliterated, with the exception only of Coriantumr and Ether, in a bitter and brutal series of internecine wars.
One of the most salient points of the Book of Ether is that the Jaredite civilization which it describes fell far below its potential for national greatness. The record testifies that Jared and his colony were led by the hand of the Lord to the American Continent, a "land of promise which was choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people." (Ether 2:7.) They were promised that there should be none greater than the nation which would be raised up from their seed on the face of the whole earth. (Ether 1:43.) For a brief time this prediction held true. We read that "never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord." (Ether 10:28.)

But along with the promised blessings came the Lord's solemn warning that "whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off, when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them." (Ether 2:8.) The Jaredites found out to their sorrow that this was no idle threat.

But it is clear that the Jaredites' political structure as such was not among the causes of their downfall. They were as much under a monarchy when they were the most blessed and prosperous people on earth as they were when they were the most degenerate and miserable. Jaredite prophets consequently never called for constitutional reform but for repentance as the cure for their national ills.
In spite of its brevity, the Book of Ether unmistakably teaches the same lesson as does the Nephite record: that changes in a nation's governmental machinery without corresponding changes in the morality of the people will neither save a nation from destruction nor accelerate its demise. Rather, as the Lord told Lehi, the issue was simply this: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence." (2 Ne. 1:20.)
Chapter 13

SUMMARY

No one realized better than the authors and compilers of the Book of Mormon that they were writing for the benefit of future generations rather than their own. Though centuries were to intervene before their book would be unearthed from the dust, yet they knew precisely who their future readers would be and what political, social, and religious conditions would prevail on the land at the time of the book's publication and distribution. They saw in vision the coming of Columbus, the colonization of the Americas, and the revolutionary wars whereby the Gentile settlers would throw off the yoke of oppression imposed by their "mother Gentiles." (1 Ne. 13:12-18.) They foresaw the subsequent development of "a mighty nation among the Gentiles ... upon the face of this land" (1 Ne. 22:7), and that these Gentiles would be "delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations." (1 Ne. 13:19; 2 Ne. 10:12.) They knew the decrees of the Lord that there should be no kings among the Gentiles on the land of promise, but that it should be a land of liberty with a republican form of government similar in principle to the Nephite reign of the judges. (2 Ne. 10:10-14; 3 Ne. 21:4.) They further understood that following the period
of time in which the Gentiles would humble themselves before the Lord and enjoy the presence of his power and blessings (1 Ne. 13:16), they would fall prey to pride and temptation (Mor. 8:36), and like all other nations on earth would eventually "be drunken with iniquity and all manner of abominations." (2 Ne. 27:1.) Having seen his latter-day readers and their circumstances in vision, Moroni didn't speculate but flatly stated that they would face the same dangers which had confronted the Jaredite and Nephite civilizations on the land and which had eventually brought about their destruction.

With their foreknowledge of latter-day conditions, Book of Mormon writers selected their materials and tailored their message accordingly, devoting more than forty percent of the entire book to the brief one hundred twenty year period of Nephite history when the nation lived under a form of government most nearly like that found in the United States and other American republics today. Their hope was evidently that their readers could profit from a knowledge of both the successes and failures of their early predecessors on the continent. Mormon wrote: "This cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God--... that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done." (Ether 2:11.) "Give thanks unto God," he further exhorted his readers, "that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been." (Mor. 9:31.)
Latter-day Saint authorities and writers have agreed with the authors of the Book of Mormon that it is the warning message of the book, not its geography, archaeology, or even its history per se which is of paramount importance. Marion G. Romney called it "a great American book." He said, "It was written in America, by Americans, for Americans. It has peculiar application to America."¹ "A tract for our times,"² Nibley termed it, "as modern as today's newspaper."³ The following pages will attempt to summarize the essential political message of the Book of Mormon, both as directly stated by the authors and as conveyed implicitly in the account of their national history.

The Book of Mormon testifies that when the flood waters receded from off the face of the American continent, "it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord." (Ether 13:2.) Though it is, as the Israelite scriptures suggest, a universal principle that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34), this maxim appears to apply with double force to America. Having deliberately preserved the land for a righteous people, the Lord swore to the brother of Jared "that whoso should possess


this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should
serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the
fulness of his wrath should come upon them." (Ether 2:8.) Elaborating
on the Lord's decree, Moroni explained:

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this
land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall
possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the
fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness
of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.
For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other
lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or
shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. . . .

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall
possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity,
and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve
the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been mani-
 fested by the things which we have written. 4

Lehi expounded on the same theme, asserting that none
should come to the land save they should be brought by the hand of
the Lord. If those whom the Lord so brought should serve him and
keep his commandments, he promised it would be a land of both liberty
and prosperity for them. Otherwise, they would face temporal captivity
and destruction as well as spiritual separation from the presence of the
Lord. (2 Ne. 1:5-7, 20.)

The central message of the entire Book of Mormon is simply
this: that individual and national righteousness is the one sure cure
for the ills of society; that without it neither kings nor judges, armies

4Ether 2:9, 10, 12.
nor fortifications can ensure national prosperity or security. John Taylor, in his classic treatise, The Government of God, emphasized the same point:

In Europe, there has been of late years a great mania for revolutions—a strong desire to establish republican governments; but let me remark here that the form of government will not materially affect the position of the people, nor add to the resources of a country. If a country is rich and prosperous under a monarchy, it will be so under a republic, and vice versa. If poor under one, it will be poor under another. If nations think proper to change their form of government, they of course have a right to do so; but to think that this will ameliorate their condition, and produce happiness, is altogether a mistake. Happiness and peace are the gifts of God, and come from Him.

Every kind of government has its good and evil properties. Rome was unhappy under a kingly government, and also under a republican form. Carthage as a republic was no more happy than many of its monarchical contemporaries; nor was Corinth, Holland, or Venice; and republican Genoa has not manifested anything very much in favor of these principles. France was unhappy under her emperor, she was unhappy under her kings, and is unhappy as a republic. 5

Elder Taylor could well have included the Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite nations of ancient America in his list of examples. Each enjoyed periods of peace, righteousness, and prosperity, and each experienced eras of turmoil, wickedness, and misery, but there is almost no visible correlation between the welfare of the nation and their governmental structure at any given time. In this vein William E. Berrett noted, with regard to the political history of the Book of Mormon peoples:

It is as if we could stand off at a distance and view a vast experiment: two separate nations dwelling upon a continent separate from the rest of the world, isolated so that their experiment socially, politically, and economically might have meaning. We can see certain results of the way they live. We find that these peoples, especially the Nephites, passed through the experience of living under practically every form of government mankind has known. They started out as a theocracy in which the prophet, head of the church, was also the civil head of the government. They had a long period of monarchy. They had a period of democracy. They had a period in which they reverted to tribal forms of government. Yet, out of it all, certain lessons loom large. It did not seem to make much difference what the form of government was. The thing which did make a difference was how righteous the people were. When the people were righteous, any form of government worked. When they were unrighteous, every form of government failed.6

The political implications of the Book of Mormon's emphasis on national righteousness are enormous. One obvious corollary is that a nation's military strength is directly related to its spirituality. Over and over again the Nephite record tells of righteous warriors being strengthened by the Lord in battle, inspired by him in their strategic planning, protected by him from the blows of the adversary, and comforted by him in times of danger or mourning. Invariably, the outnumbered Nephites, with the Lord on their side and fighting in accord with the divinely revealed rules of forbearance and compassion, came off victors in their encounters with the Lamanites, whereas those who boasted in their own strength were left in their own strength to go down to defeat.

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In their times of righteousness the Nephites realized it was folly to "be frightened by the demands and the threatenings of a robber" (3 Ne. 3:12) or of a nation of robbers, so long as they were true to their covenants with the Lord. Their philosophy was the same as Isaiah's, whose words Jacob quoted with favor to his people:

Behold, who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man, who shall die, and of the son of man, who shall be made like unto grass? And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth, and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?  

A further implication of the Lord's promises to Lehi and the brother of Jared is that in the final analysis the preacher contributes more to the stability and safety of the nation than either the legislator or the general. The resignations of both Alma and Nephi from the judgment seat to devote the remainder of their days to preaching are ample evidence of their feelings on this point. Alma testified that "the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just--yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else which had happened unto them." (Alma 31:5.) And Nephi, son of Helaman, recognized that when people reach the point that the majority favor that which is evil, they have reached the point where further legislation or merely stricter enforcement

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72 Ne. 8:12-13.
of the existing laws is futile. Such a people, he realized, "could not be governed by the law nor justice, save it were to their destruction" (Hel. 5:2-3), so he turned the reins of government over to Cezoram and devoted his time to the only thing that in his opinion had any possibility of changing the deteriorating national situation for the better--preaching the word of God.

In keeping with the same philosophy, true Christian charity was seen as the answer for the social and economic inequities which have plagued civilization from the beginning and for which many are quick to suggest political remedies. The Book of Mormon is firm in its condemnation of the inordinate accumulation of money and material goods by one segment of society at the expense of the "poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted." (Mor. 8:37.) It similarly decries the situation whereby some remain in ignorance because of their poverty, while others receive great learning because of their riches. (3 Ne. 6:12.) But never does the book or its prophets suggest a political solution whereby the wealth should be redistributed by forcibly taking from the rich to give to the poor. The true remedy was always the same: for those who had a surplus voluntarily to impart of their substance to the poor, as they were able, for the purpose of "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants." (Mos. 4:26.) Failure to help the needy when able to do so marked one as a hypocrite and rendered his prayers vain, but it never
resulted in his prosecution at the hands of the law. The Book of Mormon peoples clearly regarded the essential role of government as being the defense of the nation from its foreign foes and the protection of the lives and property of its citizens from violence at home. Matters relating to the production and distribution of the wealth, on the other hand, were left in the hands of private individuals, with the prophets constantly faced with the task of persuading the people to think of their brothers like unto themselves.

The Book of Mormon presents the principles of freedom and liberty as being of divine origin (Alma 61:15; 2 Ne. 1:7; 2 Ne. 10:11), and suggests they are even dearer than life itself. (Alma 56:47.) It further asserts that the best rulers are those who do the most to establish, maximize, and defend the freedom of their people. Whereas, as Joseph Smith noted, "it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion," (D&C 121:39), the Book of Mormon maintains that righteous leaders do not seek for dominion at all, but endeavor to free their people from the unjust and unnecessary extensions of governmental power. General Moroni, for example, proclaimed, "I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country." (Alma 60:36.) Pahoran, responding to Moroni's epistle, assured the Nephite chief captain that his feelings were the same: "I, Pahoran, do not seek for power, save only to retain
my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free." (Alma 61:9.) King Benjamin, likewise, was beloved by his people because he preferred to serve, rather than rule, laboring with his own hands in order that his people should not be laden with taxes and that nothing should come upon them which was grievous to be borne. His son, Mosiah, enjoyed the same measure of adulation from his subjects, "for they did not lock 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" (Mos. 29:40), including, presumably, that which he himself might have imposed upon them had he been so inclined.

Righteous rulers in the Book of Mormon almost invariably retired from public office when their advancing years made them less able to do justice to their position, and turned the reins of government over to a successor. The wicked, on the other hand, not only aspired to power in the first place, but stubbornly held onto it until they either died or were deposed.

But domination by a tyrannical ruler never occurred by accident in the Book of Mormon. It always required the tolerance and even the support of a wicked majority before corrupt officials could gain any lasting power. All of this was in fulfillment of Lehi's prophecy that if the inhabitants of the land should serve God according to the commandments which he had given, it should be a land of liberty unto them.
"Wherefore," he promised, "they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity." (2 Ne. 1:7.)

But although freedom and prosperity were both promised consequences of national righteousness, Book of Mormon prophets suggested that neither the routine performance of religious obligations nor a kind of generalized virtue were sufficient by themselves. The righteousness spoken of included works in the political realm, as well as faith, if it was to be an effective guarantee of national well-being. As Moroni argued, to "suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you" was to suppose in vain. (Alma 60:11.) In Pahoran's view, as well, it was necessary not only to uphold virtue but actively to resist evil if the nation's free institutions were to be maintained. (Alma 61:14.) And Nephi's condemnation of those who are at ease in Zion and cry "All is well!" could apply as much to those who are apathetic about the preservation of their liberties as to those who are complacent about their spiritual condition.

Among the recognized political duties of the people was the seeking out of inspired men for public office, in keeping with Alma's injunction that they trust no man to be their teacher nor minister "except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments." (Mos. 23:14.) When other-minded and aspiring demagogues gained political ascendancy, it was the obligation of the righteous either to reform them or remove them. Anger at the government
"because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country" (Alma 59:13) was not inconsistent with Moroni's "perfect understanding" and unshakeable faith and devotion to Christ. (Alma 48:11-13.) Tolerance of such a condition, rather than anger and opposition, would have been the sin. Peaceful means of change, of course, were preferred, but in extreme cases even armed insurrection and revolution were deemed justifiable. The righteous Gideon, for example, had attempted to overthrow the despotic Noah by force of arms, and the Lord specifically commanded Moroni, "If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them." (Alma 60:33.) It was necessary thus to cleanse the "inward vessel," the government, before the nation could expect divine assistance and success in its military endeavors. Above all, eternal vigilance against the specific and unique danger of secret combinations was enjoined by Moroni as the price for national survival. (Ether 8:21-24.)

Even in the face of great and seemingly insurmountable odds, the righteous were expected to continue working for the improvement of society, particularly by preaching the gospel and endeavoring to inculcate those correct principles upon which alone peace, prosperity, and security can be permanently based. Nothing could have looked more hopeless than the efforts of Mormon and Moroni to change the downward course of their nation. Yet Mormon wrote his son:
Notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God.8

Yet Book of Mormon prophets fully realized that politically, as well as religiously, it was by the grace of God they were saved, after all they could do. (2 Ne. 25:23.) Though man's effort was required, only when coupled with divine aid, instruction, and direction could the desired goals be achieved. Nephi expressed the attitude of all Book of Mormon prophets when he warned, "Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm." (2 Ne. 4:34.) The prophets of ancient America were as aware as Joseph Smith that without the Lord's help "man is not able to govern himself, to legislate for himself, to protect himself, to promote his own good, nor the good of the world."9 It was for this reason, the Prophet taught, that "it has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world ... to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hand."10

Nephite prophets were both cognizant of and in harmony with these "designs of Jehovah," and, as the Book of Mormon testifies, a

9 Times and Seasons, III (July 15, 1842), 855.
10 Ibid.
basically theocratic government flourished on the American continent for more than five hundred years before the coming of Christ and for nearly two hundred years afterward. Though the Book of Mormon record is often sketchy with regard to the exact nature of the political institutions of the peoples it describes, the information which is presented reveals that the Nephites, and to a lesser extent the Jaredites, operated in harmony with the theocratic ideals outlined in Chapter 2 of this work, and paralleled the institutions of the ancient Israelites, as seen in Chapter 3. Though the form of government in Israel changed from that of judges to a monarchy, and in the New World reverted from a monarchy to a system of judges, the principal change, in both cases, was theoretically in the means by which the ruler was selected rather than in his recognized powers and duties. In each case the right of the prophet to give ultimate direction in both religious and political affairs was asserted. In both ancient Israel and ancient America the government itself was, or was supposed to be, in the hands of inspired administrators, who would govern the people in accordance with divinely revealed laws and who would seek and receive new revelation to meet new and changing circumstances. The principle of popular consent was preserved in both lands and under both forms of government, and in both cases the principal functions of the governmental leader, whether a king or a judge, were to preserve the peace and liberty of his people and protect them from internal crime and foreign aggression, while fostering a climate in which the religious authorities could lead
the nation to eliminate the evils of poverty, inequality, and greed through acceptance of the gospel and the voluntary adoption of the social and economic principles taught by the church of Christ.

Among both the ancient Israelites and the Nephites and Jaredites this free, popular, theocratic type of rule eventually came to an end. The Israelite monarchy degenerated into tyranny and eventually led to the captivity and dispersion of the nation. In America, the Jaredite monarchy met the same fate, with the nation ultimately obliterating itself through civil war. In the case of the Nephites, it was the corruption of popular government rather than of monarchy which led to their downfall, but the end results were the same.

Though they foresaw the destruction of their own people, prophets in ancient America foretold the day when theocracy would again be established on the land, when the government should be on the shoulders of Christ (2 Ne. 19:6), and "the Holy One of Israel" should "reign in dominion, and might, and power, and great glory." (1 Ne. 22:24.) This was to be no mere spiritual reign, for Nephi asserted, "All these things must come according to the flesh." (1 Ne. 22:27.) It was to help prepare their latter-day readers for such a day, when evil will be done away and Satan will have no power over the hearts of the children of men, that ancient prophets and historians on the American continent compiled the Book of Mormon.
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Books


A STUDY OF NEPHITE, LAMANITE, AND JAREDITE

GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES

AS PORTRAYED IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

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ABSTRACT

Nephite government was essentially theocratic, with both the monarchy and reign of the judges paralleling the similar institutions of the ancient Israelites. Ultimate political authority resided in the prophet. The laws were given by the Lord, and the principle of popular consent was recognized. The role of government was primarily national defense and the punishment of crime, not social reform.

Lamanite government was monarchal and despotic, with notable exceptions when the nation was converted to the gospel. The Jaredites theoretically lived under a theocratic monarchy, but intrigue, tyranny, and oppression were the rule rather than the exception.

In all three cases, righteousness was more important to the well-being and security of the people than the form of government. The greatest danger to free institutions was the rise of secret combinations with public tolerance and support. The authors of the Book of Mormon wrote in part to warn their readers of the dangers of such combinations and to enable them to profit from the political experiences of their predecessors on the American continent.

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