

# Alma's Use of *State* in the Book of Mormon

"The spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace." (Alma 40:12)

Joseph Smith claimed the Book of Mormon was a product of multiple ancient authors. Recent studies of the words and phrases used by the book's various writers have provided evidence of this claim.<sup>1</sup> The following notes on how the word *state*<sup>2</sup> is employed in the Book of Mormon suggest that Alma the Younger can be singled out as a distinct author within the record.

## Statistical Significance

Eleven individuals in the Book of Mormon used the word *state*.<sup>3</sup> Only Alma used the word to any degree of potential statistical significance.<sup>4</sup> However, even though an author's use of a word might potentially qualify for statistical significance, any statistical model that could be employed to determine such significance would necessarily assume normal or similar topic distribution within the Book of Mormon. Because the different writers treated diverse subjects, there is no statistical way to compare the probability of the different authors' use of *state*. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to prove objectively that an author's word usage is statistically significant on the basis of word frequency alone.

Aside from the challenges of this statistical qualification, it is still possible to see Alma as a distinct author in the Book of Mormon. This can be done by examining his use of *state* in contrast with other writers on three fronts: unusual concentrations of the word, resumptive rewording with *state*, and shared topic comparison.

## Unusual Concentrations of the Word *State*

All but two of the eleven writers who used *state* did so infrequently and sporadically. In contrast, the recorded writings of Alma and in one case, Lehi, contain passages that display unusual concentrations of the word *state*. For example, Lehi uses the word four times in three verses when describing Adam and Eve's paradisiacal existence in 2 Nephi 2:21–23. A far more impressive concentration of *state* appears in Alma 40, where Alma is teaching Corianton about the postmortal existence.

Now, concerning the *state* of the soul between death and the resurrection. . . .

. . . the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a *state* of happiness, which is called paradise, a *state* of rest, a *state* of peace. . . .

Now this is the *state* of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a *state* of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this *state*, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

Now, there are some that have understood that this *state* of happiness and this *state* of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection. (Alma 40:11–12, 14–15)

Here in just four verses Alma employs the word nine times. Even more remarkable is the concentration in chapter 41 where in just two verses Alma uses *state* six times:

And now, my son, all men that are in a *state* of nature, or I would say, in a carnal *state*, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God;

therefore, they are in a *state* contrary to the nature of happiness.

And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural *state* and place it in an unnatural *state*, or to place it in a *state* opposite to its nature? (Alma 41:11–12)

In chapter 42 Alma clusters his use of *state* again where it occurs six times in verses 10–13. It is consistent with a work that claims to be written by multiple authors to find one of these authors displaying an unusual usage of a particular word when the other writers do not.

### Resumptive<sup>5</sup> Rewording with *State*

In several instances Alma displays a tendency to with *state*. For example, in discussing the preparatory nature of mortal existence after the fall, Alma writes: “And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God” (Alma 42:4). Resuming this thought six verses later, Alma renames this as a probationary *state*—it “became a *state* for them to prepare; it became a preparatory *state*” (Alma 42:10). Again three verses later he repeats this rewording with “Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary *state*, yea, this preparatory *state*” (Alma 42:13).

Another example of Alma’s tendency to reword with *state* is found approximately one hundred pages earlier. While visiting Gideon, Alma hoped to “find that ye were not in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla” (Alma 7:3). Three verses later Alma defines the dilemma when he resumes the thought with, “I trust that ye are not in a *state* of so much unbelief as were your brethren” (Alma 7:6). After discoursing about the atonement he returns again to this topic and combines the two earlier phrases: “For as I said unto you from the beginning, that I had much desire that ye were not in the *state* of dilemma like your brethren, even so I have found that my desires have been gratified” (Alma 7:18). No other author in the Book of Mormon rewords with *state*—in this Alma stands completely unique.

When only one writer displays this kind of preference for a particular term when restating, especially a nonessential word like *state*, the reasonable reaction is to believe that this writer is distinct within the larger work authored by other individuals.

### Shared Topic Comparison

**As noted above, because of the varied topics that the different writers of the Book of Mormon address, it is difficult to make statistical comparisons of their use of any given word. On the other hand, a comparison is available between those passages where multiple writers address the same topic. One such topic is the concept of agency. It is here that Alma’s preference for *state* distinguishes him most clearly from the other writers of the Book of Mormon.**

Because it is reasonable to expect that any given topic will generate some common language to describe it, it comes as no surprise that each of the four writers who addressed agency—Lehi, Jacob, Alma, and Samuel—all used some form of the words act and choose.<sup>6</sup> Yet when each passage is further analyzed, Alma’s use of *state* again distinguishes him from other Book of Mormon writers.

Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a *state* to act, or being

placed in a *state* to act according to their wills and pleasures. . . .

. . . in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling. (Alma 12:31; 13:3)

It is significant to note that both Lehi and Jacob used *state* elsewhere in their writings, so their capacity to have done so in passages relating to agency is not in question.<sup>7</sup> Further, the presence of *state* is not the only difference between Alma and the others. Lehi, Jacob, and Samuel each include references to the word free when discussing agency.<sup>8</sup> Alma does not.

Of tangential interest, there is marked contrast between Alma and Joseph Smith when their writings about agency are compared.<sup>9</sup> In Doctrine and Covenants 93:30–31, Joseph revealed that “all truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man.” In comparison with Alma’s passage in Alma 12:31, Joseph Smith writes about a sphere in which agency exists, while Alma writes of a *state* of agency; their meanings are the same, but the language is decidedly different. Further, Alma only describes the principle, while Joseph actually names it as agency. In fact, every major passage concerning the agency of man in the Doctrine and Covenants is marked with the words agency, agent, or agents.<sup>10</sup> In direct distinction, the Book of Mormon does not have a single reference to these words. This suggests that the use of *state* in the Book of Mormon was a feature of the original text and not simply introduced by Joseph Smith.

Clearly Alma’s distinction from his Book of Mormon counterparts is shown in the context of agency. He not only displays his preference for *state* uniquely when addressing this topic, but he also elected not to use a key word that the other three authors employed.

### Conclusion

Alma certainly stands distinct from the other authors in the Book of Mormon when his use of *state* is analyzed. Alma’s unique concentration of *state*, his tendency to reword with *state*, and his distinctive treatment of a shared topic involving *state* all point to him as a unique writer within the Book of Mormon. This is perfectly consistent with Joseph’s claims about the Book of Mormon. Also, the differences between the Book of Mormon and the other scriptures produced by Joseph Smith in relation to the use of *state* are also what one would expect to find in the various publications of a prophet who both translated other’s writings and received his own prophetic material.

*Research by Philip A. Allred, originally published in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 5/1 (1996): 140–46.*

### Notes

1. See John W. Welch et al., “Words and Phrases,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 282–85; Roger R. Keller, “Mormon and Moroni as Authors and Abridgers,” in *ibid.*, 269–71; John L. Hilton, “Wordprints and the Book of Mormon,” in *ibid.*, 221–26; and Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” in *ibid.*, 150–53.

2. “The condition of a person or thing, as with respect to circumstances or attributes,” *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1989), s.v. “state.”

3. Abinadi, Alma the Younger, Amulek, Benjamin, Jacob, Lehi, the Lord, Mormon, Moroni, Nephi, and an angelic visitor to Nephi all employed the word *state*; compare Eldin Ricks, *Eldin Ricks’s Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995), 691–92.

4. An author must display at least one use of the word per one thousand total words. Alma is the only author whose use of *state* qualifies in this preliminary way (Alma used *state* 35 times in 19,137 total words, which equals nearly 2 instances per 1,000 words). The idea for this comparative figure is drawn from Roger R. Keller's article entitled "Law and Commandments in the Book of Mormon" (FARMS, 1991).

5. This is not to be equated with epanaleptic repetition, which is specifically employed for digressions within a single sentence; see Larry G. Childs, "Epanalepsis in the Book of Mormon" (FARMS, 1986).

6. See 2 Nephi 2:26–27; 10:23; Alma 12:31; 13:3; and Helaman 14:30–31.

7. See 2 Nephi 2:21–23 and 9:27 respectively.

8. See 2 Nephi 2:26–27 (three times); 2 Nephi 10:23; and Helaman 14:30 (two times).

9. Comparisons between the four major works that Joseph Smith brought forth further suggest multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon. While the Book of Mormon contains the term seventy-seven times (See Ricks, *Thorough Concordance*, 691–92), the books of Abraham and Moses, as well as the entire Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible lack even a single use of *state*. Of interest also, the Doctrine and Covenants contains the word only three times (71:1; 93:38; 130:9) and the Joseph Smith History employs the word only once (Joseph Smith—History 1:29). In addition, Joseph Smith's wording in Joseph Smith—History 1:29, in which he synonymously couples *state* with *standing*, is interesting because the word *standing* only appears twice in the Book of Mormon and neither time with *state*; see Mosiah 4:11 and Alma 13:5.

10. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:35–39; 58:27–28; 93:30–31; and 101:78. Moses 4:3 and 7:32 also contain references to agency and Moses 6:56 refers to agents.