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Apostate religion in the Book of Mormon

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APOSTATE RELIGION IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

A. Keith Thompson

ABSTRACT: Nephite missionaries in the first century BC had significant difficulty preaching the gospel among Nephites and Lamanites who followed Zoramite and Nehorite teaching. Both of these groups built synagogues and other places of worship suggesting that some of their beliefs originated in Israelite practice, but both denied the coming or the necessity of a Messiah. This article explores the nature of Zoramite and Nehorite beliefs, identifies how their beliefs and practices differed from orthodox Nephite teaching, and suggests that some of these religious differences are attributable to cultural and political differences that resonate in the present.

There is a longstanding inference that the Amlicites and the Amalekites of the Book of Mormon are the same people.¹ This inference was developed by Chris Conkling from John L. Sorensen's² 1992 entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* and is strengthened by the more recent textual studies done by Royal Skousen.³ The two peoples are not recognized as the same, Conkling claims, because of inconsistencies in Oliver Cowdery's spelling as scribe, despite Joseph Smith's having spelled out some of the names during the translation process.⁴

My purpose in revisiting this analysis is to search for a better understanding of the religions the Nephites considered apostate in the Book of Mormon. I have previously suggested that Sherem's version of worship according to the Law of Moses may have originated in Josiah's reforms before the departure of Lehi and his group from Jerusalem around 600 BC.⁵ Brant Gardner and Mark Wright suggest that the apostate religion discussed in the Book of Mormon narrative may be partly explained by syncretization with pre-existing religion in ancient Mesoamerica.⁶ In this article, I suggest that the Nehorite religion likely had patriotic Mulekite antecedents which relied upon Davidic genealogy.

The evidence available is limited, which makes this discussion speculative. However, in my previous research I have suggested that the earliest Jewish synagogues likely originated soon after the children of Israel entered their Promised Land under Joshua, during the second millennium BCE. This would predate their Babylonian captivity, during which the Jews were separated from their principal Temple at Jerusalem, despite conventional Jewish scholarship to that effect.⁷ The Book of Mormon says the Nephites, the Zoramites and the Nehorites all worshipped in synagogues, among other places of worship. The presence of altars within some of these New World places of worship⁸ during the first millennium BCE, along with the way guests were generally welcomed and allowed to speak and pray within them, also suggests that these synagogues had Hebrew antecedents, since Christ and Paul did some of their missionary work by invitation in Jewish synagogues.

Zoramite and Nehorite rejection of the Nephite teaching that the Law of Moses necessarily included the redemptive mission of the Son of God as a Messiah is presented in the Book of Mormon as the principal cause of conflict between those two sects and Nephite religion. I seek to define more clearly the origin of that theological difference. I also believe that identifying the Nehorite religion's origins within the Mulekite society may enable a closer understanding of the political and possibly racial tensions in Zarahemla at the time the judicial republic was inaugurated.

I approach this task in four parts. In Part I, I survey the current scholarship that surrounds the Mulekite identity of both the Amlicites and the Amalekites. That survey will include discussion of John Tvedtnes's work on the Jaredite origin of many Nephite place and personal names. I also suggest that Tvedtnes's hypothesis is supported by the parallel work of Skousen on Oliver Cowdery's variable spelling as Joseph Smith's scribe for most of the Book of Mormon translation and Sorenson's suggestions of Jaredite and Mulekite influence on Nephite and Lamanite culture.

In Part II, I will discuss the references to the Amlicites and the Amalekites in the Book of Mormon and inferences other researchers have drawn about their influence on Nephite and Lamanite politics. Though Mulekite/Amlicite/Amalekite politics are not central to Alma₂'s mission to Ammonihah, I will suggest that the close connection between the Nehorite religion and the Mulekite people evident during that mission helps explain the civil conflicts and wars of the Nephites in Zarahemla throughout the book of Alma.

In Part III, I seek to identify the components of the Nehorite religion and to distinguish those from what was Nephite and Zoramite. Again, my purpose is to suggest that the Book of Mormon text we have provides more evidence than we realize about the nature of the politics and religious difficulties the Kings and Judges had to manage at Zarahemla and in its tributary geography.

In Part IV, I endeavor to draw all the evidence together and suggest that while the Mulekites at Zarahemla appear to have welcomed the literate Nephites to Zarahemla when they acceded to the appointment of Mosiah₁ as their King, by the time the third generation had passed, the more numerous indigenous Mulekites had grown tired of the patrician Nephite aristocracy, and they sought a restoration of their own monarchy, despite the best efforts of Mosiah₂ and Alma₂ to manage them. I also suggest that if the Nephites were always an elite minority among the Mulekites, as seems likely, the Mulekite sense of grievance is easy to understand. Indeed, it probably resonated with the Lamanite tradition that the Nephites were usurpers and robbers and the Zoramite teaching that the Nephites had corrupted the true nature of Israelite religion. This is, of course, not the story the Book of Mormon editors tell, but it can help explain the enduring nature of the Nephite difficulties and why their episodes of hypocritical unrighteousness had such devastating political consequences.

I conclude that even if the Nephites had been as true to their faith as the faithful King Benjamin, it still seems unlikely they would have lived out their existence free of political and religious commotion. Understanding the political and religious turmoil that plagued their civilization provides greater context for the words and actions of their prophets, leaders, and missionaries; indeed, it provides relevance and greater understanding of our own days.

Part I: The Mulekite Identity of the Amlicites and the Amalekites

Back in 1973 when he was an MA student, John Tvedtnes wrote a technical paper in which he assumed that the principal tongue of the Nephite/Mulekite peoples was Hebrew, while the Jaredites spoke Akkadian/Sumerian.⁹ He used this analysis to identify the origin of Jaredite names and traced them into Nephite/Mulekite usage.¹⁰ Though readers of the Book of Mormon may infer that — save for Coriantumr¹¹ — there was no physical interaction between the Jaredites and the Mulekites before the latter merged with the Nephites/Lamanites,

Tvedtnes, following Hugh Nibley, believed otherwise. Tvedtnes said simply:

It is obvious that Jaredites of whom we have no record must have intermarried with the Mulekites (probably before the latter merged with the Nephites), preserving both Jaredite names and Jaredite customs.¹²

Nibley justified his belief that Jaredite and Nephite people interacted by noting Mosiah₂'s statement that remnants of the Jaredites had survived the great battle catalogued by Ether.¹³ Nibley also believed the Mulekite and Jaredite cultures had likely overlapped “over many years”¹⁴ and that the overlap enabled the Jaredite civilization to make “a permanent cultural impression on the Nephites through Mulek.”¹⁵ That permanent cultural impression is also apparent in the fact that Alma₂ gave at least two of his three sons names with Jaredite roots.¹⁶

It is well attested that no vowels were used in ancient Hebrew,¹⁷ meaning the names Mulek, Amlici, and Amalek are likely derived from the same root, possibly referring, as does the first part of the name *Melchizedek*, to the royal birth of the person named.¹⁸ Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper develop this point in their discussion of the Hebrew origin and derivation of the name of the Book of Mormon missionary Muloki. They have written:

MULOKI was one of the men who accompanied the sons of Mosiah on their mission to the Lamanites (see Alma 20:2, 21:11). His name suggests that he may have been a Mulekite. Also from the same root are names such as Mulek and Melek, which is the Hebrew word meaning “king”. Mulek is hypocoristic for Hebrew *Mlkyh(w)* (KJV Melchiah and Malchiah), which is attested both in the Bible (see 1 Chronicles 6:40; Ezra 10:25, 31; Nehemiah 3:14, 31; 8:4; 11:12; Jeremiah 21:1, 38:1, 6) and in numerous ancient inscriptions, most of them from the time of Lehi. Indeed, it has been suggested that one of the men bearing this name is the Mulek of the Book of Mormon. He is called “Malchiah the son of Hammelech,” which means “Malchiah, the son of the king” (see Jeremiah 38:6).

Muloki corresponds to the name *Mlky* on a bulla found in the City of David (Jerusalem) and dating from the time of Lehi (footnotes omitted).¹⁹

In his article in the same journal five years later, Conkling uses what he calls “hints in the traditional text that many readers have not noticed”²⁰ and “spelling variations in the original manuscripts of Oliver Cowdery”²¹ to theorize that the Amalekites and the Amlicites are the same people. The “hints in the traditional text” that he finds are the complete disappearance of the Amlicites from the Nephite record after Alma 3:20 — after 43 mentions inside two chapters — and their cultural identity with the Amalekites whose dissent caused such problems for the Nephites between Alma 21:2 and Alma 43:44.²² Though “there are two Amalekis in the record (see Omni 1:12–30; Mosiah 7:6), neither one has any connection with this [Amalekite] group”²³ which is surprising since “we cannot find another instance in this abridged record where a group is introduced without explanation or introduction.”²⁴ Conkling also mentions Sorenson’s speculation that the Amalekites “constituted the Amlicite remnant, ... their new name possibly arising by ‘lamanitization’ of the former.”²⁵

Conkling then discusses the “spelling variations in the original manuscripts of Oliver Cowdery” identified by Skousen in his “long-term Book of Mormon critical text project.”²⁶

[T]he apostate groups in the book of Alma currently spelled *Amlicites* and *Amalekites* are most likely the same group of dissenters, founded by Amlici, and ... the names should be spelled identically.²⁷

[T]hese types of errors in the original and printer’s manuscripts were due to inconsistencies in Oliver Cowdery’s spelling style.²⁸

Conkling’s article demonstrates these inconsistent spellings with photographs of fragments from the original and printer’s manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, showing “Amelicites,” “Amalakites,” “Amaleckites,” and “Amelekites” in the original and how these appear to have been standardized to “Amalekites” in the printer’s version.²⁹ Conkling infers that is likely because the printer was told to standardize spelling but is not completely sure such instruction accounts for the variability of Oliver’s spelling since the names “Amlicites” and “Amalekites” are so different. Conkling concludes that “using the records we have (Cowdery’s handwritten manuscripts), there is little support that the Amlicites and the Amalekites were two separate groups.”³⁰

In his following analysis, Conkling suggests that “Alma structured his narrative record more tightly and carefully than we may previously have realized.”³¹ His introduction of Nehor and Amlici at the beginning of his book introduced “the major threat and problem that Alma had to deal with the rest of his life.”³² Conkling then asks, in effect, what is Alma₂’s message for our day? Perhaps that “dissension, which was dealt with by preaching the word, can lead to apostasy and then to treason, which was dealt with by legal action and war”³³ and always ended with “the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers being thrown into the River Sidon” and carried out “to the depths of the sea.”³⁴

Conkling also identifies several perplexing questions that have resulted from Book of Mormon readers’ not understanding that the Amlicites and the Amalekites were the same people. One of those questions is how the Amlicite/Amalekite people could have become so established among the Lamanites after their initial rebellion in the early years of Alma₂’s reign as chief judge. Evidence of their establishment in Lamanite society is seen, as they were partially responsible for the construction of the city named Jerusalem (Alma 21:1–4) before Aaron ran into trouble with them there at the beginning of his mission.

Conkling suggests two possible answers for this issue. The first is that perhaps Aaron did not preach at this Lamanite/Amalekite city as early in his mission as we suppose. The second is that we misunderstand the Amlicite grievances and subsequent threat without the context of history in the year after the judicial republic was created. This answer appears more plausible and will be the focus of my discussion in this essay. The incidents with Nehor and Amlici did not happen instantly or in isolation. It is likely that there had been conflict in Zarahemla for a long time before the judicial republic was created.³⁵ Like Conkling, I believe the conflicts at the beginning of Alma₂’s reign as chief judge had been building for some time³⁶ and were part of the reason why the sons of Mosiah₂ were not interested in assuming their father’s hereditary throne.

Part II: Amlicite Politics and Religion

Having established the likelihood that the Amlicites and the Amalekites were the same people and that both are remnants of the Mulekites, I propose to simplify further discussion by referring to them solely as Amlicites, save for when there is some benefit in drawing attention to their Mulekite/Amalekite connections.

Conkling says that Alma₂ introduces the Amlicites in the Book of Alma because they constituted a threat to Nephite religion and

civilization for the rest of his life.³⁷ The record of his ministry “begins and ends in the same place, embroiled in problems resulting from the apostasy of Nehor and the Amlicites.”³⁸ Gary L. Sturgess says that “questions of political order and spiritual well-being”³⁹ were intimately connected “among ancient peoples,”⁴⁰ and he points to Noel B. Reynold’s insight that “the doctrine of Christ was central to the political question among the Book of Mormon peoples: ‘Who has the right to rule?’”⁴¹

Reynold’s thesis is that this “right to rule” quarrel was the root cause of the centuries of military and political struggle documented in the Book of Mormon. The Lamanites asserted that the Nephites had usurped the accepted Israelite primogeniture requirement that political leadership was the birthright of the eldest son. Nephite dissenters would “split away to join the Lamanites when they could not win control inside the Nephite system,”⁴² but the doctrine of Christ recorded in the Nephite records continued to be used to justify Nephite political supremacy.⁴³

Val Larsen has speculatively advanced Reynold’s political thesis some distance where the Mulekites and the Amlicites are concerned. To Larsen, the Mulekites were not as submissive in the appointment of Mosiah₁ as their king in Zarahemla, as the book of Omni suggests.⁴⁴ He suggests that the civil wars of King Benjamin’s time as well as the later rebellions of both the Amlicites and the king-men in the Book of Alma are consequences stemming from the Mulekite belief that they were entitled to rule “by virtue of the Davidic covenant.”⁴⁵ That is, since the Mulekites were the descendants of Zedekiah, the last king at Jerusalem, the right to rule reverted to them when Mosiah₂ relinquished the throne in favor of a system of judges. When the Amlicite descendants of the Mulekites failed to gain control through the Nephite political system, they defected to the Lamanites, established a city they unsurprisingly named Jerusalem, and supported Amalackiah in his ascension to the true Lamanite throne.⁴⁶

At this point, the Lamanites, together with all the Nephites who had defected to Lamanite rule (including some claiming Zoramite lineage) and the remnants of the Mulekites, would answer Reynold’s question regarding right to rule in exactly the same way: they would deny the Nephite claim to independence and self-rule. This political division grew even greater after the Anti-Nephi-Lehi converts to Nephite Christianity left the land of Lehi-Nephi for Jershon, because all the Lamanites who remained rejected Nephite Christianity and its justification for Nephite political leadership.

Though Larsen's analysis is speculative, the foundational idea that the Mulekite remnant were never completely happy with Nephite politics and religion is consistent with the observations of Tvedtnes, Sorenson, Reynolds, Conkling, and Sturgess, among others. What I suggest in consequence is that there is a strong connection between Mulekite genealogy and the Nehorite religion. An understanding of that connection provides insight into the nature of Nehorite Judaism: how it was different from Zoramite Judaism and how both disagreed with Nephite Christianity. It is likely, however, that not all those with Mulekite ancestry belonged to the Nehorite Church. Larsen suggests that King Benjamin and his sons may have married into the Mulekite aristocracy⁴⁷ and may have been at least 50% Mulekite themselves. But the combination of religion, ethnicity, and aristocracy made Nephite society and politics more volatile than we may yet have understood. Those multicultural complications echoed and resonated down into their last days.

Part III: Nehorite Religious Belief and Practice

Our greatest insights into Nehorite belief and practice necessarily come by inference, as it was not the purpose of the authors or editors of the Nephite records to detail the beliefs of those they felt had apostatized from true religion. For the same reason, it is easy to understand why the various Book of Mormon contributors did not set out their theological differences, or the foundations of those differences, in a systematic way.⁴⁸ But that does not leave us completely without resource in determining the nature of those differences. The extended account of the mission of Alma₂ and Amulek to the Nehorite city of Ammonihah provides significant background information; the way these missionaries approached their assignment, the theological material they used, and the analogies they drew all suggest points of agreement and difference.

Nehorite Religion at Ammonihah

I have elsewhere suggested that Alma₂ may have chosen to speak about Melchizedek among the Ammonihahites because the story resonated with him.⁴⁹ It is also likely that the angel's direction for Alma₂ to return to Ammonihah after being rejected suggested that God saw the potential for these sinners to repent as did the people of Melchizedek. It seems unlikely, however, that he would have told this story or made these analogies unless the underlying material was familiar to his listeners. But the "Melchizedek material" is not the only material that suggests

the Nehorite religion had Israelite antecedents. When Alma₂ arrived at Ammonihah, he was rejected by the people. Although Ammonihah was a city within the sphere of Nephite sovereignty, they claimed that Alma₂ had no jurisdiction over them because he had relinquished the judgment seat, and the people of Ammonihah were “not of [his] church.”⁵⁰ That expression — their statement that they did not “believe in such foolish traditions”⁵¹ — and the statements in Alma 14, 15, and 16⁵² that the people of Ammonihah were of the order and profession⁵³ of Nehor, imply that Nehorism was an independent form of religion with its own forms of worship and ritual. John Welch suggests that the way the Ammonihahites ultimately rejected Alma₂ and Amulek in Alma 14 followed a formulaic Israelite judicial-religious pattern. Of that rejection, Welch has written:

After the burning of the innocents, the chief judge approached Alma and Amulek and “smote them with his hand upon their cheeks” several times (Alma 14:14, 15, 17, 20). He returned the next day and “smote them again on their cheeks” and many others did the same each one taunting, accusing, and threatening Alma and Amulek (v. 20). Many days later, the chief judge and the accusers again returned, each one smiting the prisoners on the cheek and “saying the same words, even until the last” (vv. 24–25).

It would seem that something formulaic was occurring here. Every judge and witness did and said exactly the same thing, one at a time. Although there is no precedent that absolutely confirms this practice in the ancient world, it appears that the slap on the cheek was used in Ammonihah as a form of ritual indictment.⁵⁴

Welch continued to say that, while “it is a novel thesis that the slap on the cheek had procedural legal significance in this ancient context, there is support for the idea.”⁵⁵

Physical gestures often accompanied the making of serious oaths and the incurring of legal obligations ... [and] it is significant that smiting on the cheek is mentioned four times in the Old Testament in connection with judicial process or legal punishment.⁵⁶

Welch also suggests that the Savior’s admonition that his disciples turn the other cheek when they were smitten infers a slapping ritual with ancient Israelite disciplinary antecedents.⁵⁷

Similar observations might be made about the Israelite practice of spitting in the face of religious teaching deemed offensive or apostate. Once again, scholars have not identified a definitive source or theological reason for this practice,⁵⁸ but its history coincides with the history Welch has provided for ritual smiting. However, spitting seems to have been reserved for the crime of blasphemy, specifically that which asserts the Messianic role of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹

We presume that Alma₂ was the source for the third person abridgement in Alma 8:13, since he had no missionary companion at that time, and it is unlikely that any Ammonihahite records found their way into the Nephite sacred library. The account of the first rejection of Alma₂ at Ammonihah reads:

Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed then and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron.

On this, his first visit to Ammonihah, there is no record of ritual slapping, perhaps because Alma₂ was not brought to trial at that time. However, spitting upon him appears to have formally denounced him as a teacher of false and even blasphemous religion. It would have notified him that there would be greater consequences, including legal consequences, should he return and preach this doctrine again.⁶⁰

Further inferences as to some Israelite genealogy in Nehorite religious practices at Ammonihah may be drawn from

- Ammonihahite observance of the law of two or more witnesses⁶¹
- A tradition which included “the commandments of God”⁶²
- A belief that God would destroy those who do not repent when called to do so by a prophet⁶³
- Amulek’s identification of his mixed Ishmaelite and Nephite ancestry before he spoke⁶⁴
- The belief that it was a crime to criticize their law or civic leaders⁶⁵
- The belief that there was only one God⁶⁶
- The belief that salvation was universal and unrelated to repentance⁶⁷
- The lack of any doctrine of resurrection⁶⁸
- The use of stoning as part of public trial practice⁶⁹

- The suggestion that false religious teachers should save themselves to demonstrate their authority⁷⁰
- Imprisonment of prophets whose messages they did not like.⁷¹

Each of these practices has at least one analogue in other scriptural records of Israelite religious discipline in the Old World.

We also know that the Nehors worshipped in synagogues. That suggests that the Nehors valued some connection with the law of Moses, unless the name *synagogue* had become a generic name for a place of worship among all the children of Lehi. Since the Amulonites were, or became, Nehors, it is legitimate to question how their version of worship according to the law of Moses differed from that preached by Abinadi in the court of King Noah.

Synagogal worship

Because I have discussed the origin and nature of worship in synagogues elsewhere,⁷² I will not revisit that material in detail. The significance for this discussion, however, is that it was not only the Zoramites who built synagogues for their worship.⁷³ The Amalekites and the Amulonites also built synagogues “after the order of the Nehors” at their city of Jerusalem⁷⁴ and elsewhere in Lamanite territory,⁷⁵ and they specifically sought and obtained permission from the Lamanite king to do so.⁷⁶

As discussed above, though the Nephite missionary Aaron may not have gone to Jerusalem as quickly as we infer from the Book of Mormon text, more likely there were Amalekites in Lamanite lands before the unsuccessful Amlicite uprising recounted in Alma 1 and 2. This view appears to be confirmed by the statement in Alma 21:16 that after Aaron and his companions were released from prison

by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon ... they went forth again to declare the word ... whithersoever they were led by the Spirit of the Lord, preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted.⁷⁷

This passage suggests that the Amalekites had synagogues among the Lamanites outside the city of Jerusalem. That seems to be confirmed by Alma₂'s record of the conversation between Aaron and the chief Lamanite King that follows in the next chapter. In that conversation, Aaron asks whether the King believes “that there is a God,” and the King answered:

I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe.⁷⁸

This passage suggests that Amalekites had been defecting to the Lamanites for some time before the events recounted in Alma 1 and 2, and before there were enough Lamanite Amalekites to build their own city. Though this passage in Alma 22 refers to ‘sanctuaries’ rather than ‘synagogues’ as in the previous chapter, its description of the sanctuaries which the Lamanite King approved suggests that they were meant as sacred places of assembly for worship rather than Lamanite places of assembly, as referenced in Alma 21:16 above.

Additionally, Alma 21 and 22 also establish that the Nehors:

- worshipped God
- worshipped in communities
- invited guest preachers according to the familiar post-Babylonian Jewish model
- debated their guest preachers about doctrine
- sincerely believed that they had no need for repentance but that they were righteous
- believed “that God w[ould] save all men”
- believed that the Nephites were foolish to believe “that the Son of God sh[ould] come to redeem mankind from their sins”
- did not believe in the resurrection or in redemption “through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood”
- did not believe that Aaron, his brethren or their Nephite forbears knew anything that lay in the future⁷⁹

Readers familiar with the theology of the antichrists Sherem and Korihor will immediately recognize the doctrinal similarity here. I have written elsewhere that:

Sherem’s doctrine is summarized in just two verses in Jacob 7. Sherem objected to 1) Jacob’s teaching as “the gospel” the “doctrine of Christ,” and 2) Jacob’s supposed perversion of “the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence.”⁸⁰

Both of Sherem's objections are repeated in the Nehorite doctrine contained in Alma 21. The Nehors did not believe that the Nephites could know of things to come, and they did not believe in Christ.

Alma₂'s account of his meetings with Korihor provide us with more detail of Korihor's rhetoric, but there is not a great deal more theology. In summary, Korihor denied that any man could know of the future and that it was foolishness to believe in anything to come, denied that there should be a Christ and that he should redeem human beings from their sins, and added that "every man fared in this life ... according to his own genius" and that "whatsoever a man did was no crime"⁸¹

Additionally, whereas the Nehorites presumably believed in God — since they built their synagogues as places in which to worship him — Korihor denied that he believed there was a God,⁸² though he later recanted his denial.⁸³

Alma₂'s summary of Nehor's trial in the first year of the reign of the judges some sixteen years earlier said that Nehor declared that religious teachers should not have to work but be supported by the people according to their popularity,⁸⁴ and that because the Lord had created all men, he would also redeem them all as well.⁸⁵

This last statement implied, as he also taught, that there was no such thing as sin or crime, a teaching that would be subversive in any society that aspired to follow the rule of law.

Additional information regarding Nehorite beliefs can be discovered when we recall that Alma 21 states, "many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors."⁸⁶ Amulon was the leader of the priests of King Noah who lobbied for Abinadi's death and who thereafter sought Alma₁'s life. Tvedtnes speculated that Zeniff's party, which traveled back to the land of Nephi from Zarahemla (recounted in Omni 1:27–30), may have included some Mulekites. He finds this probable, as Ammon₁, who was assigned by Mosiah₂ to find the missing party, was likely a Mulekite.⁸⁷ If all these speculations are correct, and Amulon was also a Mulekite, then the theological differences between Abinadi and the priests of King Noah confirm what we have already established about Nehorite beliefs. Indeed, they may reveal even more, if my suggestion as to their Nehorite/Mulekite origin is correct.

Amulonite Nehorism — The differences between the theology of Abinadi and the priests of King Noah

We do not know Abinadi's origins,⁸⁸ but his religious teaching became controversial among the Zeniffites during the reign of King Noah.

Though the abridgement of Zeniff's record suggests these return settlers were light on religion,⁸⁹ the fact that they left a record which mentioned afflictions in consequence of their infidelity indicates a level of established religious adherence. Only religiously minded people attribute their difficulties or their deliverance to their god or gods. It is therefore likely there were a variety of reasons why the Zeniffites wanted to return to the land of their first inheritance.⁹⁰ It was not just nostalgia that drove them, but factors regarding climate⁹¹ as well as access to sacred religious sites.

Whether we take the condescending⁹² summary of Lamanite culture in Mosiah 10 at face value or not, it seems fair to accept the assertion that the Zeniffites were more industrious by comparison. For not only did they "repair the walls of the cit[ies] ... of Lehi-Nephi, and ... Shilom,"⁹³ they implemented agriculture and horticulture and built new buildings.⁹⁴ During the reign of King Noah,⁹⁵ that construction work included "a spacious palace"⁹⁶ for the king, the refurbishment of the existing temple with fine wood, copper, brass, and pure gold,⁹⁷ as well as a tower in the refurbished temple complex in the land of Lehi-Nephi and another on a historic hill of sanctuary in the land of Shilom.⁹⁸

Despite Zeniff's assertion that this people did not remember the Lord as they should have, religion and religious buildings appear to have been very important to the Zeniffites. Though the Nephite abridgement of their record implies that Noah's taxation and consumption were avaricious and extravagant,⁹⁹ it is likely these people revered their kings as prophets, seers, and revelators, as was the case in Zarahemla and earlier in the land of Lehi-Nephi.¹⁰⁰ If that were so, then the king's palace was also a religious building and the successful construction of these religious buildings explains why the Zeniffite population was so angry when Abinadi came to declare repentance.

Abinadi was more than just a prophet of impending doom. In the full tradition of Jeremiah, he declared the Lord their God had "seen their abominations, and their wickedness, and their whoredoms; and w[ould] visit them in ... anger."¹⁰¹ If they did not repent, they would be delivered as slaves "into the hands of their enemies."¹⁰² Two years later, he was even more specific about their impending punishments. They would be "smitten on the cheek ... slain" and have their flesh devoured by vultures, dogs and wild beasts.¹⁰³ Their prophet king's life would "be valued ... as a garment in a hot furnace,"¹⁰⁴ while the people would "have burdens lashed upon their backs; and ... be driven like ... dumb ass[es]," at the same time hail, the proverbial east wind and insects would "pester their land ... and devour their grain."¹⁰⁵ More picturesque, but no less

treasonous, was the prophecy that King Noah would be trodden under foot like a dry stalk and blown “upon the face of the land” like “the blossoms of a thistle.”¹⁰⁶ However, save for idolatry and whoredoms,¹⁰⁷ the Book of Mormon record of Abinadi’s preaching is not specific about the sins of King Noah and his people.¹⁰⁸

Welch explains how Abinadi’s trial closely followed “ancient Israelite and subsequent Jewish judicial practices.”¹⁰⁹ Welch’s analysis suggests that Abinadi had charged the king with idolatry and disregard of “the law that prohibited the king from economic excesses and pride.”¹¹⁰ The charges against Abinadi were that he had lied, made false prophecies, blasphemed, and reviled against the king.¹¹¹ Abinadi was said to have lied when he said the people hardened their hearts and committed evil abominations;¹¹² he made false prophecies because what he predicted two years earlier had not yet come to pass;¹¹³ he blasphemed because he said that God himself would come down and perform the atonement;¹¹⁴ and he reviled against the King “with a simile curse ... that Noah’s life would be as a garment in a hot furnace.”¹¹⁵ Welch says that “it was for the offense of reviling that Abinadi was executed,” even though “about twenty-five years” later, “Limhi ... told Ammon ... that Abinadi was executed for allegations of blasphemy, not reviling.”¹¹⁶

In earlier work, I have noted that Abinadi taught both the atonement and the resurrection¹¹⁷ but was judged to have blasphemed because he taught “that God himself should come down among the children of men.”¹¹⁸ This discussion reveals a distinction between Abinadi’s teaching and that of King Noah’s priests, including Amulon, many of whose followers were later described “as being after the order of Nehor.”¹¹⁹ Though the Nehorites said they believed in, taught, and aspired to follow the law of Moses like Sherem before them¹²⁰ and Korihor after them,¹²¹ King Noah and his priests did not believe there would be a Christ. Indeed, after Abinadi completed his discourse, which covers four chapters in the current edition of the Book of Mormon, King Noah simply dismissed Abinadi and directed his execution.¹²² Before Abinadi’s detailed theological discourse and charge that the priests were not leading the King or the people in righteousness, King Noah had more generously opined that Abinadi was mad.¹²³ But Abinadi’s plainness seems to have eliminated the possibility of any leniency, and we know that there was no insanity defense to criminal charges in Israelite jurisprudence.¹²⁴

To summarize, the worship practice of Amulon and the other priests who advised King Noah was focused on the law of Moses;¹²⁵ held that it was the function and ministry of religious teachers and prophets to

uplift the people;¹²⁶ accepted the ten commandments given by God to Moses on Mt Sinai as their law, despite Abinadi's assertion that they did not adequately teach them to their people;¹²⁷ accepted the teachings on the plates of brass as scripture; and they believed salvation came by obedience to the law of Moses.¹²⁸ They also conducted their criminal trials according to established Israelite procedure,¹²⁹ but they did not believe in the redeeming Christ to come, or in the doctrine of resurrection.

What, then, differentiated the Nehorite and Zoramite versions of Israelite worship according to the law of Moses? An examination of Zoramite worship practices allows for better comparison.

Zoramite religious practice in the Book of Mormon

Like Nehorite religious practice, Zoramite religious practice is not set out in a systematic way in the Book of Mormon. The keepers of the Nephite records and their editors sought to promote orthodox Nephite religion, not apostate beliefs. So once again, we must deduce those beliefs from the records in existence. Alma₂'s mission to the Zoramites in the land of Antionum east of Zarahemla, recorded in Alma 31–35, is the most revealing on this subject because it is specific.

At least the following can be reasonably drawn from that account. The Zoramites

- worshipped some idols¹³⁰
- practiced a faith which involved a craft¹³¹
- did not keep the commandments and ordinances according to the law of Moses — at least, according to orthodox Nephite understanding — though their worship in synagogues suggests that they aspired to do so¹³²
- did not practice daily prayer, but had established a set liturgical prayer which they recited individually once each week¹³³
- did not believe it was legitimate to pray other than in a synagogue¹³⁴
- worshipped weekly in synagogues, but their synagogue differed from the pattern familiar to Alma₂ because it featured a raised praying stand called the Rameumptom¹³⁵
- allowed guest preachers in their synagogues¹³⁶
- may not have believed in the need for repentance¹³⁷

The theology behind their set prayer liturgy also appears to have justified the following beliefs:

- that God had elected them alone to be his saved “holy children”¹³⁸
- that everyone who did not belong to their synagogue would perish¹³⁹
- and that there was no harm in either the accumulation or public display of wealth¹⁴⁰

The Zoramites also claimed the specific revealed knowledge, contrary to Nephite orthodoxy, that there should be no Christ,¹⁴¹ or that He would come among men.¹⁴²

While it is not clear what Alma₂ meant when he called the Zoramites “our brethren,”¹⁴³ his similar observation that “many of them are our brethren” in his prayer at the beginning of the mission,¹⁴⁴ implies either that the Zoramites had been members of the orthodox Nephite church until recently or that they were Nephite, as opposed to Mulekite or Lamanite in ancestral origin.¹⁴⁵

To easily compare the differences between Nephite orthodoxy and the Zoramite and Nehorite heresies, a table has been provided below.

Subject	Nephite Orthodoxy	Nehorite Beliefs	Zoramite Beliefs
The need for a Savior	Yes ¹⁴⁶	No ¹⁴⁷	No ¹⁴⁸
The coming of Christ	Yes ¹⁴⁹	No ¹⁵⁰	No ¹⁵¹
The atonement/ redemption	Yes ¹⁵²	No	No
The gift of prophecy	Yes ¹⁵³	No	No
The foundation of salvation	Personal righteousness ¹⁵⁴	No information	Being chosen ¹⁵⁵
The need for repentance	Yes ¹⁵⁶	Perhaps not ¹⁵⁷	Perhaps not ¹⁵⁸
Accountability for sin/crime and final judgment ¹⁵⁹	Yes ¹⁶⁰	No ¹⁶¹	No information
The foundation for temporal prosperity	Obedience to commandments ¹⁶²	Not clear but likely personal achievement ¹⁶³	Personal achievement ¹⁶⁴
The resurrection	Yes ¹⁶⁵	No ¹⁶⁶	No ¹⁶⁷
Definition of blasphemy	No information	Reviling religious authority ¹⁶⁸	No information
Punishment for blasphemy	Death penalty ¹⁶⁹	Death penalty ¹⁷⁰	No information

Subject	Nephite Orthodoxy	Nehorite Beliefs	Zoramite Beliefs
Precedent for slapping	No information	Yes ¹⁷¹	No information
Precedent for spitting	No information	Yes ¹⁷²	No information
Precedent for stoning	No information ¹⁷³	Yes ¹⁷⁴	Yes ¹⁷⁵
Observance of law of witnesses	Assumed	Yes ¹⁷⁶	No information
Accepted Mosaic commandments	Yes ¹⁷⁷	Yes ¹⁷⁸	No ¹⁷⁹
Attitude toward sign seeking	Signs proved credibility of prophets ¹⁸⁰	Signs proved credibility of prophets ¹⁸¹	No information ¹⁸²
Speech against the established order a crime	Yes ¹⁸³	Yes ¹⁸⁴	Yes ¹⁸⁵
Penalty for sedition	Death, but remittance on repentance ¹⁸⁶	Death ¹⁸⁷	Unclear ¹⁸⁸
Theistic	Yes ¹⁸⁹	Yes ¹⁹⁰	Yes ¹⁹¹
Monotheistic	Yes ¹⁹²	Yes, but idols seem to have been allowed ¹⁹³	Yes, but idols allowed ¹⁹⁴
Worshipped idols	No ¹⁹⁵	Maybe ¹⁹⁶	Yes ¹⁹⁷
Religion included “a craft”	No	No information	Yes ¹⁹⁸
Ethno/political connections	Not required	Mulekite and maybe Jaredite	Zoramite
Worshipped in communities	Yes	Yes	Yes
Worshipped in synagogues	Yes	Yes ¹⁹⁹	Yes ²⁰⁰
Accepted guest preachers	No information	Yes ²⁰¹	Yes ²⁰²
How should religious teachers be temporarily sustained?	Support themselves except in cases of illness or misadventure ²⁰³	Supported by followers ²⁰⁴	Supported by followers

In my article entitled “Who was Sherem?” I suggested that

Zoramite practice and theology ... in the Book of Mormon has a distinctly Deuteronomist and even rabbinical flavor ... that many of the anti-Christian threads in the Book of Mormon likely also have Zoramite origins. I also suggest that those anti-Christian connections may be the reason why Korihor died among the Zoramites, and why many Zoramites denied the Christ.²⁰⁵

This supposition is based on my suggestion that Sherem was a son or grandson of Zoram²⁰⁶ and because “Sherem was completely wedded to the idea that the Law of Moses was an end in itself and did not include any concept of an atoning Messiah to come.”²⁰⁷

I also noted Welch’s observation that “if Sherem ... was a Zoramite, then the rift between the Zoramites and the Nephites that erupted into warfare in the days of Alma₂ had roots as far back as the contention between Sherem and Jacob.”²⁰⁸

In Part IV, I seek to draw together all this information to compare the theological difference of all three religions. As I do so, I recognize that there is significant speculation in my suggestions. Nonetheless, I hope that generous readers will find the exercise provocative, thoughtful and maybe even helpful.

Part IV: The Three Israelite Religions in the Book of Mormon Compared

The theological comparison enabled by the table above suggests that Nehorite and Zoramite theology were more like each other than they were like Nephite orthodoxy. Indeed, both rejected the core Nephite teaching that there would be a Messiah who would redeem mankind from temporal and spiritual death on conditions of repentance, and who would bring to pass the resurrection of the dead.

If we accept that the priests of King Noah were early Nehorites, then even though they rejected Nephite scriptural interpretation that found the Messiah laced through everything recorded on the plates of brass, they still purported to follow the Law of Moses. If the Zoramites were heirs of Sherem’s religious practice, then they also followed the Law of Moses.²⁰⁹ By the time of Alma₂, however, maybe 400 years later, the commandments under that law were not as important²¹⁰ as the fact that they were chosen or elected by God for salvation, while everyone else was destined to be “cast ... down to hell.”²¹¹

Of course, the possibility that the priests of King Noah were some of the earliest Nehors or the supposition that the Zoramites were the heirs of

Sherem's theology cannot be conclusively established. First, the Nehorite religion is named after Nehor, who appears among the Nephites around 91 BC, nearly 60 years after Abinadi's trial in the court of King Noah. Second, the Law of Moses does not seem to have been as important to the Zoramites around 74 BC as it was to Sherem just one generation after the landing of Lehi's party in the New World. However, these theological differences ought not surprise us, particularly the difference between Sherem's theology and later Zoramite religion. Christian and LDS history suggest that the details of religious theology change significantly over time even while core beliefs remain constant. For example, Protestant Christianity has held on to the reformation idea of salvation by grace, even though the details of the election and predestination doctrines have shifted. Perhaps then, Sherem's insistence that there would be no Christ remains important in later anti-Nephite theology, even though the Mosaic performances have dropped off in importance — and were even replaced in Zoramite theology by an election doctrine.

Nor should it surprise us that these three religions seem to divide down tribal lines. Tvedtnes has suggested that the “descendants of Lehi's colony were calling themselves Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites, after the founders of their lineage groups”²¹² from “as early as the[ir] second generation in the New World.”²¹³ I suggest that a distinctly Zoramite strain of Israelite religion developed from the beginning, although it went largely unrecorded. That contention between the Nephites and the Mulekites after the formation of the judicial republic led to the descendants of Mulek forming their own church is consistent both with human nature and what Tvedtnes suggests is a tribal division habit among the descendants of Lehi. It also added to what Reynolds and Sturgess might have called a theological justification for their right to rule.²¹⁴ As noted above, Larsen takes this even further. He says:

the Amlicites and Amalekites ... were motivated by a desire to restore the Davidic monarchy after the Nephite royal line that began with Mosiah₁ and ended w[hen] Mosiah₂ renounced power.²¹⁵

Larsen admits his thesis is unstated in the Book of Mormon text, but it clearly implied that:

when Mosiah₂ died without a royal successor, the right to rule reverted by virtue of the Davidic covenant to the Mulekite royal line that had governed prior to the arrival of Mosiah₁

... This conflict between incompatible Nephite and Mulekite ideologies is the unstated rationale for the civil war during the reign of King Benjamin (Words of Mormon 1:15–10), and it pervades the Book of Alma, from the appearance in chapter one, verse two of Nehor, the spiritual leader of the Amlicites (Alma 2:1, 24:28), to a final great battle in the last three verses of the book as the dissenters again stir up anger and send forth yet another army that must be repelled (Alma 63:14–17).²¹⁶

Larsen's interpretation also squares with Conkling's view that:

it was the Nephite apostate groups — Amlicites, Amulonites, and Zoramites — who were responsible for most of Alma's problems with the Lamanites. As already noted in Alma 21:3, these apostate groups were “still harder” than the Lamanites.²¹⁷

For Conkling, Nephite apostates were the “truly vicious villains”²¹⁸ in the Book of Mormon. They took their venom and stirred up reluctant Lamanites to go to battle to avenge their common grievance — that the religiously orthodox Nephites had usurped the right to rule. This understanding explains the “and thus we see” passages spread through the Book of Alma.²¹⁹

I suggest, based on the analysis of the three worship traditions according to the Law of Moses found in the Book of Mormon, that Sherem provided the foundation from which both the Zoramite and Nehorite religions evolved. I have previously suggested that Sherem was a descendant of Zoram, or what Tvedtnes might have called the Zoramite tribe of Nephites. The theology of that tribe remained true to Sherem's original teaching that the Law of Moses had nothing to do with a Christ to come — indeed, that there should be no Christ — but it developed an elitist strain which shocked the Nephite missionaries under Alma₂ in the first century BC.²²⁰ I also suggest that the Mulekites, who appear to have had only oral traditions when the Nephites under Mosiah₁ came to rule them, accepted the Nephite religion because it resonated with their collective memory but then adapted it to justify their own nationalism when the Nephite republic was established. In part, those adaptations resonated with the Zoramite and Lamanite tradition that the Nephites were usurpers and had no hereditary right to rule. Larsen makes this case most strongly when he suggests their argument revisited the historic wrestle between Judah and Joseph, since the Mulekites could claim Davidic origins.²²¹ I suggest the Mulekite religion was named for

Nehor simply because he was such a passionate and articulate advocate of their cause.

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested that the Zoramites in the time of Alma₂ were the heirs of a theological tradition that began with the Anti-Christ Sherem in the sixth century BC. I have also suggested that the Nehorite religion was developed to provide theological justification for the Amlicite sedition subtext that runs through the Book of Alma.

If these suggestions have any validity, it is not surprising that the Zoramites and the Nehors found common cause with the Lamanites in opposing the Nephite aristocracy. It is also not surprising that the Nephite idea of religious liberty was culturally and politically unpopular. These cultural and political conflicts the Nephites faced after the Nephite/Mulekite merger have modern coordinates. The culture wars of the twenty-first century are creating new alliances that threaten the faith of modern saints in similar ways, and they are seeding the same kinds of apostasy against which ancient and modern prophets have warned.

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Endnotes

1. J. Christopher Conkling, "Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites and the Mysterious Amalekite," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 14/1 (2005): 108–117, 130–132.
2. John L. Sorensen, "Peoples of the Book of Mormon," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow *et al.* (New York: MacMillan, 1992): 194.
3. Royal Skousen, "The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon," *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*, ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison

- V.P. Coutts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002): 54 and “History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon,” in *Uncovering the Original Text: 15; The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001): 245 and *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001): 396–397, 514.
4. Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 111, 113.
 5. A. Keith Thompson, “Who was Sherem?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 14 (2015): 1–15.
 6. Brant A. Gardner and Mark Alan Wright, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 1 (2012): 25–55. See also Brant A. Gardner, “Excursus, Religions of the Nehors,” *Second Witness, Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 4 (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007): 41–51.
 7. A. Keith Thompson, “Nephite Insights into Israelite Worship Practices before the Babylonian Captivity,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 3 (2013): 155–195.
 8. Alma 15:17; 17:4.
 9. John A. Tvedtnes, “A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names,” presented at the Twenty-Second Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures and Allied Fields, held at Brigham Young University on October 28, 1973. <http://ancientamerica.org/library/media/HTML/qx6x4fwp/A%20PHONEMIC%20ANALYSIS%20OF%20NEPHITE%20AND%20JAREDITE%20PROPER%20NAMES.htm?n=0>. Tvedtnes’ assumption seems justified both in this article and in subsequent scholarship.
 10. Tvedtnes acknowledged that he was following in the footsteps of Hugh Nibley, who did similar research in Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952, 1989): 27–30.
 11. Omni 1:21.
 12. Tvedtnes, “Phonemic Analysis,” under his heading “Biblical Names.”
 13. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 242, discussing Mosiah 8:12 and Ether 13:21.
 14. *Ibid.*, 244.
 15. *Ibid.*, 244. Gardner and Wright make similar points in their article about the possible syncretization of Nephite religion with other ancient Mesoamerican practices.

16. Tvedtnes suggests that the names Shiblon and Corianton are of Jaredite origin. Tvedtnes, “Phonemic Analysis” (citing Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 245). Sorenson says that “Jaredite personal names were used among the Nephites ... particularly among Nephite dissidents,” referring specifically to five names, “Morianton, Coriantumr, Korihor, Nehor, and Shiblon that betray strong anti-Nephite leanings” He adds that “Alma₂ named two and perhaps all three of his sons who were born during his ‘idolatrous’ phase of life (Mosiah 27:8) with (probable Jaredite names — Shiblon, Corianton, and perhaps Helaman.” John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex, An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013): 505–506.
17. For example, see John Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, “The Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 9/1 (2000): 40–51, 78–79. Specifically, on page 43:
- The Canaanite languages, along with a number of other Semitic languages, were written with consonants only, right-to-left rather than the left-to-right orientation of English writing. The reader had to mentally add the vowels according to the context of the words — which is still the case in modern Hebrew. The vowels found in medieval Hebrew Bible scrolls and in modern printed Hebrew Bibles were supplied by later scribes. Thus, the Hebrew form of Alma was written ‘lm’. From Hebrew phonetic rules, the most likely pronunciation was Alma, which is how its discoverer, Yigael Yadin, rendered it in English.
18. Note, however, that there may be other Semitic meanings for the Hebrew word *mlk*. See, for example, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/MULEK> where there is discussion as to whether the names Mulek and Muloch have the same etymological origin, whether they refer to the same person and whether they come from the common Semitic root *mlk*. That root means “to reign (malāk), king (melek)” in Semitic, but in East Semitic it means “to counsel (malāku), counselor (malku)” (citing Ariel Crowley, “The Escape of Mulek,” *Improvement Era*, May 1955, 324; and Sjordahl, *Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, p. 11). It should also be noted that Ammoron claimed he and he his brother Amalickiah were of Zoramite descent (Alma 54:23). Though Tvedtnes’s research would suggest the names of these two brothers were Jaredite in origin, that does not mean they were not Zoramite, as parental naming choices are not set. But Ammoron’s assertion of Zoramite ancestry does not remove the possibility that these two brothers did not have Mulekite blood running in their veins as well. That is more likely since Amalickiah was also said to have been “a Nephite by birth” and “a bold Lamanite.” John A. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliations and Military Castes,” *Warfare in*

the Book of Mormon, Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin eds., (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990): 305, quoting Alma 49:25 and Alma 54:24.

19. Tvedtnes, Gee and Roper, "Book of Mormon Names," 51.
20. Conkling, "Alma's Enemies," 110.
21. *Ibid.*, 110.
22. *Ibid.*, 110.
23. *Ibid.*, 111. Nor is there any recorded connection with the Amalekites with whom Moses and the Children of Israel had difficulties during their 40 years in the wilderness as recorded in the Old Testament. The *LDS Bible Dictionary* states that they were at constant war with the Hebrews from the time of Moses (Exodus 17:8, etc.), till their power was broken by Saul and David (1 Samuel 15; 27:8; 30; 2 Samuel 8:12), and their last remnant was destroyed by the Simeonites (1 Chronicles 4:43).
24. *Ibid.*, 110–111.
25. *Ibid.*, citing Sorenson, "Peoples of the Book of Mormon" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 194.
26. *Ibid.*, 111.
27. *Ibid.*, citing Skousen, "The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon" in *Uncovering the Original Text*, 54. Conkling notes from his personal correspondence with Royal Skousen that Skousen attributes the original insight to Lyle Fletcher in the early 1990s.
28. *Ibid.*, citing Skousen.
29. *Ibid.*, 111–112.
30. *Ibid.*, 113.
31. *Ibid.*, 113.
32. *Ibid.*, 113.
33. *Ibid.*, 113.
34. *Ibid.*, 113, citing Alma 3:3 and 44:22.
35. *Ibid.*, 114.
36. *Ibid.*, 114.
37. *Ibid.*, 113.
38. *Ibid.*, 113.

39. Gary L. Sturgess, "The Book of Mosiah: Thoughts about Its Structure, Purposes, Themes and Authorship," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 4/2 (1995): 107–135 (132–133).
40. Ibid., "Book of Mosiah."
41. Ibid., citing Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Political Testament," *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991) 220–229.
42. Reynolds, "Nephi's Political Testament."
43. Ibid.
44. Val Larsen, "In His Footsteps: Ammon₁ and Ammon₂," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 3 (2013): 85–113.
45. Larsen, "In His Footsteps," 91.
46. Ibid., 91–92, 101. Note again, however, that Ammoron claimed he and his brother Amalackiah, were of Zoramite descent (Alma 54:23). See discussion above at n18.
47. Ibid., 93.
48. In my article about Sherem, I have observed that it is doubtful that the Book of Mormon editors wanted to provide Sherem with any credibility. Thompson, "Who was Sherem?" 1–15(3).
49. Thompson, "Were We Foreordained to the Priesthood, or Was the Standard of Worthiness Foreordained? Alma 13 Reconsidered," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 21 (2016): 249–274.
50. Alma 8:11,12.
51. Alma 8:11.
52. Alma 14:16–18; 15:15; 16:11.
53. While it may seem odd to modern readers to refer to a religion as both an "order" and a "profession," note that a principal reason for Paul's difficulties among the Ephesians (Acts 19:24–41) was the objection of the silversmiths who feared that Paul's preaching would undermine their "craft." As Sturgess has earlier observed, the economy, politics and religion were inextricably connected in ancient societies. Sturgess, "Book of Mosiah."
54. John W. Welch, *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and the Neal A Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008): 263.
55. Ibid., *Legal Cases*, 263 n 48 referring to Gwilym H. Jones, *New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedrmans, 1984), 2:368; Carl

- Friedrich Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1857), 1:312; George A. Butterick and others, eds., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 5: 969; and William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 542.
56. Ibid., *Legal Cases*, 263–264, referring to the smiting of the prophet Micaiah before Zedekiah (1 Kings 22:24–27); the smiting of Jeremiah perhaps by Pashur (Jeremiah 20:2); “against the judges who imposed such sanctions” (Micah 5:1), and Isaiah 50:6–9 where Isaiah referenced smiting, hair plucking and spitting as symbols of accusation against the righteous by their opponents.
 57. Ibid., 265.
 58. See, for example <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/spitting.html> where the tradition of three spits is noted in various historical sources but without conclusive explanation.
 59. See, for example http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/2010/04/why-do-haredim-spit-at-christians-456.html where ultra-orthodox Jews are still spitting at Christians to this day. Also note that Christ was both smitten and spit upon during the Jewish trial which preceded His crucifixion (Matthew 26:57–68 (67); 27:30; Mark 14:65; 15:19) and this was considered by His followers to be the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy (Luke 18:32). Note that there is also authority in some strains for Judaism for the idea that Christian converts to Judaism must spit upon a cross to demonstrate the completeness of their rejection of Christianity, <https://firstlightforum.wordpress.com/2012/03/02/reprobate-jews-spit-on-christ-christians-and-the-cross-anything-sacrosanct-to-the-only-true-and-trinitarian-deity-of-israels-patriarchs-and-the-bible/>. Note that the Ammonihahites also spat upon Zeezrom when the beginning of his conversion became manifest (Alma 14:7).
 60. Note that the spitting which accompanied Alma₂'s first rejection is repeated as a part of the public trial which accompanied the second rejection (Alma 14:21).
 61. Alma 9:6; 10:12. Compare Deuteronomy 17:6.
 62. Alma 9:8. Compare Exodus 20:1–17. Note that Alma₂ may have been referring here to the official Nephite traditions, since he refers to Lehi's wilderness journey in verse 9.
 63. Alma 9:12. Note again Alma₂'s reference is again to the official Nephite tradition which featured Lehi's prophecy that those who did not keep the commandments would be cut off from the presence of God (Alma 9:13 referring to 2 Nephi 1:20). Compare Jonah 3:1–10.

64. Alma 10:2–3. Note Hugh Nibley and John Tvedtnes’s view that the extensive use of colophons (literary devices identifying the author and his integrity) in the Book of Mormon are evidence of the book’s ancient authenticity. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 17–18; John A. Tvedtnes, “Colophons in the Book of Mormon,” *Exploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992): 13–17.
65. Alma 10:24; 14:2, 5. Compare Deuteronomy 13:1–18; John 18:22.
66. Alma 11:28, 35.
67. Alma 11:35. Note that the idea that there is no future life has origins in ancient Israel that may predate the origin of the Sadduceean party in Jewish politics and theology (A. Keith Thompson, “The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 16 (2015): 101–129, (104–107).
68. Alma 12:20–21. Compare again Thompson, “The Doctrine of Resurrection, 101–129.
69. Alma 12:7. Compare Numbers 15:35 and Acts 7:58.
70. Alma 14:24. Compare Matthew 4:6 and 27:40, though note that the original source for the allusion in Matthew 4:6 does not appear to exist in the current canon of Jewish scripture.
71. Alma 14:22. Compare Jeremiah 37:6–21 and Matthew 14:3–5.
72. Thompson, “Nephite Insights.”
73. Alma 31:12.
74. Alma 21:2–11(4).
75. Alma 21:16.
76. Alma 22:7.
77. Alma 21:16.
78. Alma 22:7.
79. Alma 21:4–9.
80. A. Keith Thompson, “Who was Sherem?” 9–10.
81. Alma 30:13–17.
82. Alma 30:37–38.
83. Alma 30:52–53.
84. Alma 1:3.
85. Alma 1:4

86. Alma 21:4.
87. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliations.”
88. However, note Roger Terry’s suggestion that Abinadi was Amaleki’s missing brother from Omni 1:30 (Roger Terry, “Scripture Notes: Unearthing Abinadi’s Genealogy,” *Sunstone Magazine*, June 11, 2013 <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/scripture-notes-unearthing-abinadis-genealogy/>).
89. In Mosiah 9:3, Zeniff’s account is abridged to say that there was a civil war between these return settlers while they were en route, and that their afflictions were result of the fact that they “were slow to remember the Lord their God.”
90. Mosiah 9:1.
91. See for example, David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah* (Springville, UT: Horizon Publishers and Distributors Inc, 1999): 179.
92. Condescending, because its assertion that Lamanite culture was completely corrupt does not square with its size and competitiveness with the culture and civilization of the Nephites. Note that President Dieter F Uchtdorf has observed:

In the Book of Mormon, both the Nephites as well as the Lamanites created their own “truths” about each other. The Nephites’ “truth” about the Lamanites was that they “were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people,” [Mosiah 10:12] never able to accept the gospel. The Lamanites’ “truth” about the Nephites was that Nephi had stolen his brother’s birthright and that Nephi’s descendants were liars who continued to rob the Lamanites of what was rightfully theirs [Mosiah 10:12; Alma 20:13]. These “truths” fed their hatred for one another until it finally consumed them all.

Needless to say, there are many examples in the Book of Mormon that contradict both of these stereotypes. Nevertheless, the Nephites and Lamanites believed these “truths” that shaped the destiny of this once-mighty and beautiful people (“What is Truth?”, <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/ces-devotionals/2013/01/what-is-truth?lang=eng>).
93. Mosiah 9:8.
94. Mosiah 9:8,9.
95. Mosiah 11:3, 8–13.
96. Mosiah 11:9.
97. Mosiah 11:10–11.

98. Mosiah 11:13.
99. Mosiah 11:4.
100. Mosiah 8:13–18.
101. Mosiah 11:20.
102. Mosiah 11:21.
103. Mosiah 12:2.
104. Mosiah 12:3.
105. Mosiah 12:3–6.
106. Mosiah 12:11–12.
107. Mosiah 11:6, 20.
108. Mosiah 11:20.
109. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 139–209.
110. *Ibid.*, 148, referring to Mosiah 11:6–7 and Deuteronomy 17:16–20.
111. *Ibid.*, 200, referring to Mosiah 12:14; 17:7–8, 12.
112. *Ibid.*, referring to Mosiah 12:1 and Leviticus 19:11.
113. *Ibid.*, referring to Mosiah 12: 12 and Deuteronomy 18:20.
114. *Ibid.*, referring to Mosiah 7:26–28, 15:1–8 and Leviticus 24:16.
115. *Ibid.*, referring to Mosiah 12:3, 10–12 and Exodus 22:28.
116. *Ibid.*, referring to Mosiah 7:27–28. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997): 171–172.
117. Thompson, “The Doctrine of Resurrection,” 101–129 (111).
118. Mosiah 17:8.
119. Alma 21:4.
120. Jacob 7:2.
121. Alma 30:6.
122. Mosiah 17:1.
123. Mosiah 13:1.
124. John Welch has observed that “[n]o insanity defense existed under biblical law,” and that meant that “[e]ven a ‘mad’ person could be punished if he had broken the law.” Welch, *Legal Cases*, 179, citing Zeve W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT:

Brigham Young University Press; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001): 69.

125. Mosiah 12:31–32.
126. Mosiah 12:20–24.
127. Mosiah 12:25–37; 13:11–26.
128. Mosiah 13:27.
129. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 110.
130. Alma 31:1.
131. Alma 35:3. The nature of this “craft” is not specified in the text, but it is reminiscent of the later objections of the silversmiths at Ephesus to the preaching of Paul since he persuaded his converts that idols they manufactured were no gods at all (Acts 19:23–27).
132. Alma 31:9–10.
133. Alma 31:10, 12–23.
134. Alma 32:9–10.
135. Alma 31:13, 21.
136. Alma 32:1.
137. Alma 34:32–36.
138. Alma 31:16–18.
139. Alma 31:28.
140. Alma 31:28. Note that Abinadi’s chastisement of King Noah and his priests seems to have been premised in part on their ostentatious worship in breach of a code supposed to practice modest humility (Welch, *Legal Cases*). Note as well that the importance of wealth in the most elite form of Zoramite worship is manifest in their eviction of the poorer classes from their synagogues after the mission of Alma₂ and his colleagues, despite their sacrifices in the construction of those buildings (Alma 32:2–10). Gardner and Wright suggest that the wearing of costly apparel and ostentatious displays of wealth were more than “a cultural norm;” they were a tangible sign of apostasy. (Gardner and Wright, “Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy.”)
141. Alma 31:16.
142. Alma 34:37.
143. Alma 34:37.
144. Alma 31:35.

145. For more information about the way the Book of Mormon peoples appear to have discussed their own family or tribal connections, see Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliations,” 305.
146. For example, Mosiah 15:19–20; Alma 9:26–27; 11:38–40; 34:8–16.
147. Alma 14:5.
148. Alma 31:15–17.
149. For example, Alma 34:2, 8.
150. Alma 14:5.
151. Alma 31:16, 29.
152. For example, Alma 19:13; 34:8–16.
153. Alma 12:3, 7.
154. For example, Alma 34:28–30, 36–41.
155. Alma 31:16–18, 28.
156. For example, Mosiah 15: 26–27; Alma 9:12–30; 13:27–30; 34:28–41.
157. Alma 21:6, however note that the Amalekites may have been arguing here about their need to repent of the sins Aaron attributed to them rather than of sin generally.
158. Alma 34:32–36.
159. Note that Korihor denied the existence of crime (Alma 30:17).
160. For example, Alma 12:12–18; 13:16, 29–30.
161. Nehor’s conduct in killing Gideon consistent with his teaching that because “all mankind should be saved at the last day, ... [so] that they need not fear and tremble,” suggests he did not believe that human beings can sin or commit crime (Alma 1:4, 9).
162. I accept that this summary is simplistic and contestable. However, it is one reasonable interpretation of 2 Nephi 1:20.
163. This is an assumption derived from Nehor’s assertion that all mankind should be saved at the last day (Alma 1:4).
164. Again, this is an assumption derived from the idea that they may not have believed in repentance (Mosiah 15: 26–27; Alma 9:12–30; 13:27–30; 34:28–41).
165. For example, Mosiah 15:20–26; Alma 11:40–45; 12:8, 24–25.
166. Alma 12:20–21; 21:9–11.

167. Zoramite theology on the resurrection is not completely clear. However, it would seem that they denied the need for a resurrection since they held that God “wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.” Alma 31:15.
168. See Welch, *Legal Cases*. See also Alma 14:8–9, 14–19.
169. Jacob 7:14. However, Sherem’s death was not the result of a sentence by a civil tribunal. Note also that Korihor was not sentenced to death either (Alma 30:47–50), and Nehor was sentenced to death because he had murdered, not because he had blasphemed. In Nehor’s case, Alma said that Nehor’s death sentence “did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft ... [because] the law could have no power on any man for his belief.” Alma 1:16–17.
170. Alma 14:8–9, 14–19.
171. Alma 14:14, 15, 17, 20, 24–25. See also Welch, *Legal Cases*, 263–265; and the discussion in the text above supported by nn 54–57.
172. Alma 8:13; 14:7, 21. See also above nn 58–60 and discussion in the supporting text.
173. Note, however, that the Jewish practice of stoning rejected prophets in Israel was known to the orthodox Nephites (1 Nephi 1:20; Alma 33:17).
174. Alma 15:1; 26:29
175. Alma 38:4.
176. The entire account of Abinadi’s trial in the court of King Noah proceeds on the understanding that both parties accepted the Law of Moses as the religious and secular law of their community (Mosiah 12–16).
177. 1 Nephi 4:15; 2 Nephi 5:10; 11:4; 25:24; Jacob 4:5; Jarom 1:5,11; Mosiah 2:3; Alma 25:15–16; 30:3; 34:13; Helaman 13:1; 15:5; 3 Nephi 1:24 (though, note that this reference provides negative proof of the proposition); 3 Nephi 9:17; 15:2; 25:4; 4 Nephi 1:12 (note again, this last reference provides only negative proof).
178. Mosiah 12:28–29,31–32; 13:27–28; 16:1. Note that once Amulon joined forces with the Lamanites, though he taught them trade and commerce, he appears to have abandoned instruction in the Law of Moses (Mosiah 24:5).
179. Alma 31:9. Note that this is an orthodox Nephite view of Zoramite religious observance and may not square with what the Zoramites thought of their own religious observance.
180. 2 Nephi 17:11–14. Where Jacob quotes from the Brass Plates, Isaiah’s use of a sign to convince Ahaz of the truth of his prophecies. See also Alma₂’s

discussion of the use of signs as proof when he was teaching the poor among the Zoramites (Alma 32:17). See also Helaman 9:24–25; 14:2–6, 12, 14, 20, 28.

181. Alma 14:20, 24.

182. Note, however, that if Sherem was one of the first Zoramites as I have elsewhere surmised (Thompson, “Who was Sherem?” 1–15), then the Zoramites accepted the Jewish premise that true prophets could be recognized by the fulfillment of their prophecies (Jacob 7:13; Deuteronomy 18:18–22).

183. Alma 46:35; 51:7, 15–21; 60:24; 62:9–10. However, note that it is unclear from these references whether it was mere speech or taking up the sword against the established political order that was punished by law.

184. Alma 10:24, 28–29; 14:2, 5, 8–10. The Nehorites imposed the death penalty by fire for such dissent.

185. Alma 32:5. This reference is only proof of criminal treatment of dissent in Zoramite Antionum if this city was run along theocratic lines. Note, however, that when the Ammonites in Jershon received the Zoramite refugees, the Zoramites were angry with the Ammonites for receiving them which suggests that the Zoramites considered that the Ammonites were undermining their law (Alma 35:1–11).

186. The Nephites seem to have accepted an oath and covenant as proof that a dissenter had renounced sedition completely. Compare Alma 44:1–20, where Captain Moroni accepted an oath from the Zoramite, Amalekite and Lamanite soldiers that they would not fight against the Nephites ever again, and the apparent willingness of Giddianhi, the dissenting Nephite Gadianton leader to likewise receive the Nephites among his people if they would swear a similar oath of allegiance (3 Nephi 3:6–9).

187. Alma 14:2, 5, 8–10.

188. Alma 35:8. It appears that the Zoramites did not expect the Ammonites to inflict the death penalty on their dissenters, only that they cast them out. What would have happened to those dissenters if they returned to Zoramite Antionum is unclear.

189. For example, see Alma 11:26–29. Note that Ammon taught King Lamoni that there was one God (Alma 18:24–28) and Aaron similarly taught his father (Alma 22:7–14).

190. If the priests of King Noah — rather than just the later Amulonites — were Nehorites, then they believed that they worshipped God according to the Law of Moses. The same conclusion flows from their worship in

synagogues among the Lamanites in Alma 21 and 22. Nehor also said that “the Lord had created ... and redeemed all men” (Alma 1:4).

191. Alma 31:12–18.
192. Alma 11:26–29; 14:5. Note, however, that Abinadi’s teaching in the court of King Noah is ambiguous as to whether God and Christ are separate Gods (Mosiah 15:1–4). Zeezrom also highlighted this apparent ambiguity in Nephite teaching (Alma 11:35).
193. Mosiah 11:6,7.
194. Alma 31:1, 12–18.
195. Mosiah 13:12–13.
196. Mosiah 11:6,7.
197. Alma 31:1.
198. Alma 35:3.
199. Alma 21:5, 16; 22:7.
200. Alma 31:12–13; 32:1–3, 5, 9–1 2; 33:2.
201. Alma 21:5.
202. Alma 31:19; 32:1.
203. Mosiah 2:14; 18:24, 26, 28; Alma 30:32–35.
204. Alma 1:3.
205. Thompson, “Who was Sherem?” 4.
206. Thompson, 13.
207. Thompson.
208. Thompson, citing Welch, *Legal Cases*, 108–1 09.
209. Jacob 7:7.
210. Alma 31:9.
211. Alma 31:17.
212. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliations.”
213. Tvedtnes.
214. Sturgess, “The Book of Mosiah,” and Reynolds, “Nephi’s Political Testament.”
215. Larsen “In His Footsteps,” 89.
216. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

217. Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies,” 115.
218. *Ibid.*, 116.
219. *Ibid.*. President Henry B. Eyring suggests that these “and thus we see” passages are among the most important in the whole of the Book of Mormon, for they explain the reason why this content was included. We are supposed to learn from them the dangers of personal and collective apostasy. See, for example, an address he gave to religious educators while he was serving as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy on 5 February 1993 (https://si.lds.org/bc/seminary/content/library/talks/evening-with/and-thus-we-see_helping-a-student-in-a-moment-of-doubt_eng.pdf).
220. Gardner and Wright (“Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy”) might well attribute the development of this elitist strain to syncretization with religion that existed in Mesoamerica before the arrival of either the Lehite or Mulekite parties.
221. Larsen, “In His Footsteps.”

