



## BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL

<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>

---

### Love vs. Hate

Author(s): David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes

Source: *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible*

Published: Toelle, UT; Heritage Press, 2003

Page(s): 193-195

---

## Chapter 33

# LOVE VS. HATE

---

*But behold my brethren, the Lamanites hath he hated because their deeds have been evil continually. (Helaman 15:4)*

Few literary genres from the ancient world stand out so prominently as the Near Eastern vassal treaty.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have shown that these political contracts formed between vassal kings and suzerain provided the conceptual background for the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup> “The assumption is that Israel conceived of its relation to Yahweh as that of subject peoples to a world king and that they expressed this relationship in the concepts and formulas of the suzerainty treaty.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Near Eastern treaty, vassals were required to *love* their superiors: “If you do not *love* the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal,” warns the Assyrian treaty of Esarhaddon, “[then] may Ashur, king of the gods, who determines the fates, decree for you an evil, unpropitious

---

<sup>1</sup> See David E. Bokovoy, “Love vs. Hate: An Analysis of Helaman 15:1–4,” *Insights* 22/2 (2002).

<sup>2</sup> “That there is a connection between Deuteronomy and this extra-biblical treaty tradition is certain,” writes A. D. H. Mayes, “the relationship is clear not only in formal structure . . . but also in many details.” *Deuteronomy: New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 33; see also Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 60–61.

<sup>3</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 205.

## TESTAMENTS

fate.”<sup>4</sup> In this ancient context, “loving the king with one’s entire heart signified the severance of all contact with other political powers.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, Israel’s command to “love the Lord” presented in the book of Deuteronomy seems to refer to a political commitment rather than an emotional attachment (Deuteronomy 6:5).<sup>6</sup>

In recent decades, scholars have shown that in the biblical world *love* often represented a covenantal devotion to one’s superior while its opposite, namely *hate*, at times signified the status of an individual outside of this affiliation.<sup>7</sup> While the connotation of these words for westerners usually signifies an intense emotional charge, in the ancient Near East, *love* and *hate* often carried this unique covenantal connotation.

The Lord told Hosea, “All their [the Ephraimites] wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I *hated* them for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house” (Hosea 9:15). As demonstrated in this biblical passage, the Ephraimites’ wickedness resulted in their loss of the blessing associated with having the God of Israel serve as their sovereign. The Lord *hated* the Ephraimites, “for the wickedness of their doings,” since in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties these acts were tantamount to a political insurrection. As a result, these individuals were removed from God’s covenantal “house” or “family.” The Hosea passage continues, “I will *love* them no more,” declared the Lord, “all their princes

---

<sup>4</sup> As cited in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 537, 538.

<sup>5</sup> Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> William L. Moran, S. J., “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77–87.

<sup>7</sup> N. Lohfink, S. J., “Hate and Love in Osee 9,15,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 417.

## LOVE VS. HATE

are revolters” (Hosea 9:15). Thus, the words *love* and *hate* in the biblical world often carried a deliberate connotation of political alliance (or lack thereof). With this observation in mind, the problematic passages in Helaman 15 where Samuel the Lamanite described God’s love and hatred seem to convey a specific nuance derived from the world of antiquity.

In Helaman 15, Samuel presented his inspired message to the people of Nephi. Among his many observations the prophet declared, “they [the Nephites] have been a *chosen* people of the Lord . . . yea, the people of Nephi hath he *loved*” (v. 3). With these words, the prophet attempted to remind the Nephites that they had traditionally served as God’s covenant people. In this relationship, the Lord had acted as the Nephite suzerain from whom the people of Nephi received reciprocal “love.” In contrast, Samuel presented his own people, the Lamanites, as those whom God “hath *hated* because their deeds have been evil continually” (v. 4). Significantly, Samuel used the verb *to hate* in the same context in which it appears in the book of Hosea. God *hated* the Lamanites in a parallel manner to the way he *hated* the Ephraimites. Their evil acts had placed them outside the boundary of his covenantal love.

While some modern readers have expressed concern regarding this apparently harsh statement preserved in the Book of Mormon, Samuel’s message relates perfectly to the context of love and hate in the ancient sense of alliance.