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Sojourn, Dwell, and Stay: Terms of Servitude

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Abstract: Two accounts employ terms whose Hebrew roots point to service relationships. The first consists of the desert crossing of Lehi's party, hinting that its members were obliged to sell themselves for protection or for food. The second, the service of Ammon in King Lamoni's court, also uses expressions of servitude when describing the interaction of these two princes. Notably, such terms adhere to established biblical custom.



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Two accounts employ terms whose Hebrew roots point to service relationships. The first consists of the desert crossing of Lehi's party, hinting that its members were obliged to sell themselves for protection or for food. The second, the service of Ammon in King Lamoni's court, also uses expressions of servitude when describing the interaction of these two princes. Notably, such terms adhere to established biblical custom.

The terms *to sojourn*, *to dwell*, and *to stay* often describe servile relationships in the Bible,¹ a feature mirrored in the Book of Mormon. The scene that makes the case for the verb *to sojourn* is that of Lehi's trip through the Arabian desert. For the expressions *to dwell* and *to stay*, the account of the service of Ammon, son of Mosiah, to the Lamanite king Lamoni illustrates servility most clearly. Naturally, to proceed with a study of this sort, one has to assume—correctly, in my view—that the English text of the Book of Mormon represents an accurate translation which in turn can serve as the basis for studies of terms, whether individual words or phrases. According to Moroni, the last Nephite writer, the language of discourse and therefore of the text was an “altered” Hebrew (Morm. 9:33). Hence, the proper window to gaze through is that of ancient Hebrew.

Nephi's claim that his family sojourned for “eight years” in the desert of Arabia (1 Ne. 17:4) predictably brings a reader face to face with the possibility, even likelihood, that family members had to come under the domination of desert tribesmen either for protection or for food.² How so? Before taking up this issue, we should explore the ties between servanthood and the terms *to sojourn*, *to dwell*, and *to stay*.

In English, of course, we perceive connections between the expressions *to sojourn*, *to dwell*, and *to stay*, for they all mean something like *to sit* or *to reside*. It is ancient Hebrew that illuminates the threads which securely link these English terms in the Bible to one another. At base, all of these verbs in Hebrew, and their derivative nouns, are related to the notion of sitting. The verb *yšb*—whose chief meanings are *to sit*, *to dwell*, and *to stay*—is the root of the noun *tôšāb*, which signifies “resident alien” or “sojourner.” The other Hebrew term for “sojourner” or “alien,” *gēr*, often connotes the same sense of living as a subject. Hence, whether one lives as a stranger in a foreign society or dwells as a subject, either “resident alien, hireling, slave or inferior wife,” the verb *yšb*, whose meanings stem “from legal institutions,” often describes a person’s legal status.³

On the broader stage, the set of issues before us plucks at strings which tie the Book of Mormon to the world of the Bible and, beyond it, to the ancient Near East. While we possess mostly fragmentary bits of information, occasionally a piece draws us inside the world of the Book of Mormon to an unusual depth, guiding a beam of light onto one more cord that stretches between the Book of Mormon and the biblical world. Simply stated, there is more than meets the eye.

“We Did Sojourn”

Only two references to sojourning appear in the Book of Mormon, both in a part of Nephi’s record that must go back to the account of his father Lehi.⁴ Writing in the style of a diary-like travel narrative that is framed on a series of “we” passages (1 Ne. 16:11–19, 33; 17:1–6), Nephi recorded that turning “nearly eastward” into the desert, “we did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did . . . wade through much affliction. . . . [God] did provide means for us while we did *sojourn* in the wilderness. And we did *sojourn* for the space of . . . eight years in the wilderness” (17:1, 3–4, emphasis added).⁵ In my view, Nephi’s use of the verb *to sojourn* points to one or more periods of servility. Scattered clues hint that family members lived in a dependent or servile relationship to desert peoples—whom they could not avoid⁶—suffering difficulty and conflict.⁷

We notice that the verbal phrase “did sojourn” appears in Nephi’s restrained retelling of the extended trip deep into the southern Arabian desert, through an environment whose harsh character has become well known to the West only relatively recently.⁸ Moreover, one observes that the expression *to sojourn* often means “to live as a resident alien” in territory where one owns no property and has no family roots. Further, “in not a few passages throughout the Old Testament the verb definitely has the connotation ‘to live as a subject’—be it as resident alien, hireling, slave or inferior wife.”⁹

In this light, the question naturally follows whether Nephi’s parents and siblings, traveling as resident aliens, experienced subjugation to, or dependence on, desert dwellers. As far as I am aware, no one has suggested such a possibility.¹⁰ Instead, interpreters have focused only on what Nephi recorded in his typically understated way about the severe difficulties encountered by the family.¹¹ Commentators have left matters vague because the language of Nephi’s account is vague and clipped.

Nephi wrote about the desert crossing in a tight summary fashion, stressing the dependence of the family on the Lord for well-being.¹² Not surprisingly, it is the complaint of Laman and Lemuel, which Nephi allows to stand in his record, that may unveil the first piece of evidence concerning their experience in the desert. At the end of the trip, Laman and Lemuel bemoaned that “our women have toiled, . . . and suffered all things” so terribly that “it would have been better that they had died” (1 Ne. 17:20).¹³ Does the grievance “our women have toiled” possibly refer to the labor of subjects dependent on people in the desert? By holding up this piece alone we cannot be certain. But any answer must embrace this prospect, however tentative. Again the complaint of the brothers: “These many years *we* have suffered” (17:21, emphasis added). What had occurred? This misery was so deep that others also wrote of it.¹⁴

The first to refer backward to this period was Lehi. When he blessed his younger sons Jacob and Joseph, he called the years of his family’s sojourn in the wilderness not merely “the days of my tribulation” (2 Ne. 2:1) but “the wilderness of mine afflictions” and “the days of my greatest sorrow” (3:1). For Lehi, it was the worst of times.¹⁵ How so? Evidently Lehi was well equipped for desert living, and thus long before he and his family fled Jerusa-

lem he must have known the rigors that one encounters in such a clime.¹⁶ If Lehi, then, was apparently equipped and experienced, there must have been an event—or series of events—which had soured him so that he termed the desert trek “the days of my greatest sorrow” (3:1). What had happened to cause Lehi to speak thus? For rays of illumination, we turn to Alma the Younger.

In a telling passage, Alma rehearsed for his son Helaman the kindnesses of God to the founding generation—Lehi and his family—by recalling that “[God] has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also . . . delivered them out of bondage and captivity” (Alma 36:29). The quotation points plainly to at least one divinely assisted deliverance from “bondage and captivity” suffered by the family of Lehi and Sariah.

In an earlier address to people in Ammonihah, making reference to past events known to himself and his audience, Alma recounted that “our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God. . . . And have ye forgotten so soon how many times he delivered our fathers¹⁷ out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed?” (9:9–10). In this same address, Alma also recalled that these very ancestors had been led “out of the land of Jerusalem, . . . having been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases, . . . they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed” (9:22). In these two passages, the references to physical difficulties such as “sickness” and “diseases,”¹⁸ as well as to “enemies” and to “battle,” point to the expected hardships found in a harsh desert environment, and perhaps more, considering their lack of food, water, and fuel, and the presence of unfriendly tribesmen.

Another detail points in the same direction. The eight-year duration of the wilderness experience suggests that besides the time at the first camp (1 Ne. 2:6–16:12), the family must have spent a considerable period in at least one location, possibly at an oasis or an area of pasture land, dependent on the household of a desert tribesman. The period is far too long even for a cautious crossing of the Arabian desert. As an example, the time required in antiquity for a loaded caravan of several hundred camels to travel from the coast of the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea—approximately the assumed route traveled by Lehi and his family, though in reverse—was a matter of weeks, not years.¹⁹

One further consideration is both relevant and illuminating. It concerns the principle that the Lord orchestrates experiences for prophets so that they come to see matters as the Lord sees them, thus adding intensity and acuity to their messages. Abraham Heschel noted this aspect of prophetic experience, selecting the marriage of Hosea as proof.²⁰ In this light, we turn to Lehi's prophetic messages *after* he had emerged from the desert.

As he speaks to his children and grandchildren just before his death, Lehi lifts to view the clashing concepts of captivity and rejuvenating freedom. For instance, in language that recalls slavery, he pleads with his sons that they "shake off the awful chains" by which they "are carried away captive," being "led according to the . . . captivity of the devil" with no control over their own destinies (2 Ne. 1:13, 18). He then urges them to "shake off the chains . . . and arise from the dust" (1:23).²¹ As a second example, Lehi's whole concern with "redemption . . . through the Holy Messiah" borrows language from the freeing of slaves (2:6). Thus, he declares that the Messiah is to "redeem the children of men," making them "free forever," terminology associated with ending servility (2:26).²² One naturally asks, does not the force of these concepts arise partially from the experiences shared with his children? In light of what we have been able so far to determine, the answer has to be yes.²³

In sum, it seems reasonable that the years spent by Lehi and his family in crossing the desert were characterized by the not uncommon practice "in times of scarcity" of "the bargaining away of freedom—or part of it—in return for food."²⁴ Whether the "enemies" (Alma 9:10), the escape from destruction "in battle" (9:22), and the "bondage and captivity" (36:29) had to do with a single experience with desert dwellers is impossible to determine. Whatever the case, Nephi's choice of the term *to sojourn*—commonly denoting servanthood in the Old Testament—when combined with Lehi's touching remarks and the brothers' bitter complaints about the heavy labor of their wives, likely points to a period of servility and conflict during the desert journey.²⁵

"I Desire to Dwell among This People"

The verb translated *to dwell* in the Book of Mormon, as in the Old Testament, occasionally means to reside in a domicile. For

example, Nephi said of his father that he “dwelt in a tent” in the desert (1 Ne. 2:15).²⁶ Similarly, though on a celestial plane, “the heavens is a place where God dwells” (Alma 18:30). But more to our point, the term *to dwell* can also carry the connotation of living in a condition of dependency, even subjugation or slavery, consistent with Old Testament usage. In this latter sense, one “dwells” in the house of another, under circumstances that one does not fully control, and effort is required—legal or otherwise—to bring the person out free, as God did for the enslaved Israelites.²⁷

The most interesting case in the Book of Mormon consists of the introductory meeting between the Nephite prince Ammon and the Lamanite regent-king Lamoni (Alma 17:21–25). Of course, other occurrences of the verb *to dwell* set out some of the legal and social dimensions of this term.²⁸ But it is the story of Ammon and Lamoni that catches our attention. The key passage reads: “And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire *to dwell* in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people. And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire *to dwell* among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die. And it came to pass that king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, . . . and he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife. But Ammon said unto him: Nay, but I will be thy servant” (17:22–25, emphasis added).

Before attempting to elucidate this passage, we should set out the Mosaic law that governs the relationship between Israelite masters and servants. According to the so-called Covenant Code, which follows directly after the Ten Commandments,²⁹ the following regulation governs an Israelite overlord: “If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. . . . And if the servant shall plainly say, . . . I will not go out free: Then his master . . . shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever” (Ex. 21:2–3, 5–6). This law is repeated in the Deuteronomic code, which adjusts and adds the following significant instructions for the master: “And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress. . . . And thou shalt remem-

ber that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee" (Deut. 15:13–15). This restatement in Deuteronomy appends two important elements. First, a master is not to dismiss a servant without presenting gifts to the latter. Second, the stated reason for offering gifts to a departing servant goes back to the exodus from Egypt wherein the Israelite slaves received the divine gift of redemption, in addition to taking gifts—willingly offered—from the Egyptians.³⁰

Now to the story. To begin, two important features emerge. First, Ammon's quoted words reflect the dual time element spelled out in the Covenant Code for one Israelite serving another: for a limited time, to a maximum of six years ("for a time," Ammon said), and for one's life ("until the day I die"). Second, Ammon's response to Lamoni's offer of marriage to his daughter properly interprets the negotiation and tells us how the conversation between them was understood: "I will be thy servant."³¹ Thus, their conversation had to do with Ammon's social and legal status in Lamoni's kingdom, a status that potentially bore not only liabilities but also benefits because Ammon was a Nephite prince, one of four sons of king Mosiah.³² Hence, a marriage between a Lamanite princess and a Nephite of similar rank could have been a political coup of sorts for both the Nephite and, under the circumstance, especially the Lamanite royal families. But the issues went well beyond the obvious political dimensions. In fact, as Ammon specifically articulated, they involved the status and treatment of a servant.³³

Ammon had traveled by himself into the land of Ishmael, Lamoni's domain. He was captured and brought before the king to determine his fate, whether "to slay [him], or to retain [him] in captivity, or to cast [him] into prison, or to cast [him] out of [the king's] land" (Alma 17:20; see also 19, 21).³⁴ At some early point, evidently the king learned Ammon's royal identity. Then initiating the conversation, as he should, the king asked Ammon whether he wished "to dwell in the land among the Lamanites."³⁵ As is manifest from the direction that the discussion finally took, Ammon understood Lamoni's question—about dwelling among the Lamanites—to mean doing so in a relationship of dependency.

Not surprisingly, the legal right of the king to set the status of an encroacher seems to be one of the points of Alma 17:20. Lamanite "custom" left it "to the pleasure of the king [whether]

to slay [Nephite intruders], or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land." Because the text differentiates between "captivity" and "prison," the former term likely refers to a servile condition, possibly tied only to the royal house. If so, this Lamanite "custom" illumines the negotiation between Ammon and the king.

Whether one thinks that Ammon, in light of his royal station, should or should not have accepted the king's offer "to dwell" in the land as a dependent vassal, he did. Significantly, his acceptance conformed to that of an Israelite who seeks to become a servant in the house of an Israelite master, indicating that he wanted "to dwell" there "for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die." After all, Ammon was probably out of food, out of money, and certainly far away from home. Wherever he might go, he would surely be shunned because he was among Lamanites, the avowed enemies of his own people.

In his acceptance, Ammon links his decision to two important statutes of law. In raising the first, Ammon repeated the verb "dwell" that Lamoni had uttered. By so doing, he signified that he understood the general thrust of Lamoni's question and indicated that he had accepted the implicit offer of protection that a master is to guarantee to a dependent, whether servant or otherwise.³⁶ Second, Ammon signaled that he would reserve judgment for a later time whether to remain "until the day I die," conforming to the explicit option that according to the Covenant Code lies with the servant, not the master: "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, . . . I will not go out free: . . . he shall serve him for ever" (Ex. 21:5–6). As far as Lamoni was concerned, Ammon was simply keeping his options open—"perhaps"—until he could decide whether he liked his master and his situation well enough "to dwell" under his protection for the rest of his life (Alma 17:23).

Lamoni's offer of his daughter brings up at least five matters. All bear directly on Ammon's status. First, presenting the woman seems to be a natural overture to the prince when it became evident that he might stay on permanently. But the other four points brighten with interest.

The second concerns the regulation in the Deuteronomic code quoted above—that of a master supplying a departing servant with gifts. To be sure, gifts were to be bestowed at the end of the servant's employ and, what is more, they were to come from

the flock, the threshing floor, and the winepress (Deut. 15:14). So what was going on with Lamoni and Ammon? On one level, as we noticed, one has to see the obvious political ingredient in the offer, a marriage between a Nephite prince and a Lamanite princess. On another level, however, one discovers an offer of a gift, a payment of sorts, that comes at the beginning of an underling's period of service. Two questions naturally arise, both pointing in one direction: Why was the gift not simply of produce or of the flock? And what was the precedent to offer a wife in exchange for service? In response, the report that comes readily to mind is that of Jacob receiving his two wives, Leah and Rachel, from their father Laban. As David Daube has pointed out, Jacob undertook "service for a reward," even though he was a member of the family and should have served "for nothing as any junior member of the family has to."³⁷ In the case of Ammon, he was not a member of Lamoni's family and hence his service could be performed for pay. Certainly this is the thrust of the provision in the Deuteronomic code that called for a master to furnish gifts to an outgoing servant. Further, the episode involving Lamoni appears to be the only example in the Book of Mormon text of willing conformity to this requirement.³⁸

This set of considerations brings up the third point. According to the Covenant Code, if a servant "came in by himself, he shall go out by himself." Further, "if his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself" (Ex. 21:3-4). In this light, if the king were treating Ammon in accord with custom established by ancient Israelite law, as I believe he was, there was reason for Ammon to wonder whether Lamoni might keep his daughter when Ammon's period of service ended, not allowing her to leave. Certainly a falling-out between the two men could lead to this consequence. Under the terms of the Covenant Code, if a servant received a wife during his period of service to a master, the woman remained the property of the master when the servant finished his service. One must keep in mind that according to the sequence of the story, the conversation *before* Lamoni's offer of his daughter had concerned Ammon's status as a servant, not as a prince.

We now come to the fourth point: the servant was to go away happy, satisfied that the master had been generous. In this con-

nection, the Bible required that the master “furnish [the servant] liberally” (Deut. 15:14). Stinginess on the part of the master would only lead to unhappiness on the part of the outgoing servant. It is this ingredient of the law, in fact, that is linked closely with actions of the Lord, for “to be generous to a departing slave, is not enforceable by secular authority.”³⁹ Speaking to the Israelite master, the Lord required that “of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto [the departing servant]” (15:14). Further, the law promised to the master, “It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; . . . the Lord thy God shall bless thee” (15:18). Ultimately, it was to secure divine blessings that a person was generous in dismissing a servant with gifts in abundance.

Fifth and finally, even though he would become a servant of the king, Ammon could not appear unadorned—that is, without a suitable gift. This was because before the negotiation over his status had concluded, he was still a visiting member of a royal family. There was precedent that a visiting dignitary receive a gift from the hosting king, even though it could bring Ammon under an obligation to the throne⁴⁰ and even though he was apparently not in a position to reciprocate.⁴¹ Importantly, this point connects closely to that of “furnishing” a servant generously, discussed just above. In Old Testament society there was a strong cultural “feeling against sending a person away ‘empty.’”⁴² To thus treat a prince of a neighboring, even if hostile, kingdom would constitute a colossal cultural breach.⁴³ In the case of Lamoni, the king offered a gift that he evidently thought would bring happiness to Ammon, as well as satisfaction to himself that he had been more than fair.

But Ammon declined. Obviously the offer from Lamoni could have elevated Ammon, raising him from one who would dwell in a dependent station to one who would dwell in regal splendor. But, in a measure, Ammon would still be dependent on the king, in this instance because of his wife. In response, Ammon concluded the negotiation by agreeing to the original offer, to “dwell” in the country as a “servant” of the king. To be sure, it was important that he keep his options open in terms of his long-term relationship with the royal house of Lamoni, as custom allowed. But Ammon carried a hidden purpose in steering the negotiation in this direction: he also wanted ultimately to bring

the message of the gospel to the Lamanite people (Mosiah 28:1–9; Alma 17:9–11). The negotiation with the king also allowed him to control in a measure what might happen to himself. In the end, being a servant opened more opportunities to Ammon—as subsequent events bore out—than he might have enjoyed as a son-in-law of the king, with its attendant family ties and points whereby Ammon could be pressured. For his part, Lamoni had perhaps conceived an agenda, that of joining his kingdom politically to that of the Nephites. For this reason, instead of dismissing Ammon, or worse, Lamoni entered into the time-honored process of negotiating the status of this visitor to his kingdom, as Lamanite custom apparently allowed,⁴⁴ keeping the matter securely within accepted legal and social traditions which exhibit firm ties to the world of the Old Testament.

“Rabbanah, the King Desireth Thee to Stay”

The final term to investigate is *to stay*.⁴⁵ Let us deal first with the meanings of this term in the Book of Mormon that go beyond the connotations of residing or living in a place.⁴⁶ In at least two passages, the verb carries the sense of relying upon another person for support. One thinks, for instance, of Nephi’s quotation from the book of Isaiah: “They call themselves of the holy city, but they do not *stay* themselves upon the God of Israel” (1 Ne. 20:2, emphasis added).⁴⁷ With a different slant, in one verse quoted from Isaiah, the verb signifies “to linger” or “to come to a stop”: “All ye that doeth iniquity, *stay* yourselves and wonder” (2 Ne. 27:4, emphasis added).⁴⁸ In a contrasting vein, other passages employ *to stay* with the meaning “to withhold” or “to hold back.” For example, in king Benjamin’s speech, in an imagined disdainful retort to the pleas of impoverished people, the king hypothesized what one might say about a poor person: “The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will *stay* my hand, and will not give unto him . . . of my substance” (Mosiah 4:17, emphasis added).⁴⁹

We now turn to four cases wherein connotations of the verb *to stay* lie closer to those of *to sojourn* and *to dwell* already noted; all denote more than the sense of residing in a place. The first involved the prophet Nephi, son of Helaman, who had just returned from an extended preaching tour among inhabitants of the

“land northward,” having preached the “word of God” and prophesied “many things.” These people had rejected “all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them” (Hel. 7:2–3). In my view, here the verbal phrase “could not stay” means in the context that Nephi could not make spiritual headway among the people of the north because of their spiritual depravity.⁵⁰

The second instance appears in a letter from the illegally deposed chief judge Pahoran to his military commander Moroni. In discussing defensive warfare, Pahoran wrote, “We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land” (Alma 61:10). To my mind, “to stay in their own land” means more than simply to reside “in their own land.” It carries the additional sense not to make war.⁵¹ Thus, the rich connotations of the verb here embrace both peacefully residing in one’s homeland and not going off to war.

The third and fourth examples are more interesting in a legal sense and come up in passages that deal with some sort of subjugation. One is in the book of Mosiah, in the incident wherein male subjects of a Nephite colony were encouraged by king Noah to abandon family members in the face of an invading Lamanite army. While some men fled without family members, setting up a legal snarl for those whom they had abandoned,⁵² “there were many that would not leave them, but had rather *stay* and perish with them” (Mosiah 19:12, emphasis added). Although the expression is a bit awkward, the sense seems plain. By deciding to stay, the men were deciding to die at the hands of captors. As events turned out—and the narrator of course knew the result—they became “captives” and were obliged to “pay tribute to the king of the Lamanites” (19:15).⁵³ In the end, then, staying really meant captivity for the colonists.⁵⁴

In the fourth case, the context brims with servility. The story again concerns the Nephite prince Ammon and the regent Lamoni. The scene follows Lamoni’s offer of his daughter in marriage to Ammon and Ammon’s subsequent nonacceptance, making of the latter a palace servant. Three days later, in the company of others, Ammon was taking care of the king’s flocks. When Ammon and his fellow servants attempted to water the flocks, “a certain number of the Lamanites” scattered the king’s flocks in order to steal them and to cause trouble for the king’s servants (Alma 17:27–35; 18:7). But Ammon turned the tables on

those would-be thieves, defeating them in hand-to-hand combat and bringing the flocks safely back to the king's "pasture" (17:36–39). When the king heard the news, he was struck by "the faithfulness of Ammon" (18:2, 10)—a phrase that carries servile overtones.⁵⁵ But he appeared to be most deeply impressed by the seemingly indestructible nature of Ammon, leading him to believe that Ammon was "more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit?" (18:2, 11). A short time later, when Ammon came to see the king, "he saw that the countenance of the king was changed" (18:12). In apparent deference, the Nephite prince turned to leave. But one of Lamoni's attendants said to Ammon, "Rabbanah,⁵⁶ the king desireth thee *to stay*" (18:13, emphasis added).

The attendant and the king evidently intended that Ammon remain because everyone was impressed with what he had done. For Ammon's part, even though he saw that the tables had been turned so that he was momentarily regarded as more than the king, he cleverly and appropriately—after all, it was Lamoni's palace—responded to the request as a servant. At least he answered thus. For, after trying without success to coax a response out of the king, he said in reassuring terms, "I am a man, and am *thy servant*; therefore, whatsoever thou desirest which is right,⁵⁷ that will I do" (18:17, emphasis added). Hence, the request that Ammon stay in the king's presence was understood, at least as Ammon explained it, as the request of master to servant. Thus, the use of the verb *to stay* in this context points to the servile status of Ammon, though that status was changing as Ammon spoke. This conclusion brings us back to the opening observations of this study. For in becoming a servant, he and Lamoni had negotiated as two Israelites who followed procedures whose closest parallels lie in Old Testament law and custom.

NOTES

1. David Daube sets out such inferences for the biblical text in *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 24–26, pointing out that these terms go back to a common root. One verb (Hebrew *yšb*) has the basic sense “to sit.” In the Book of Mormon, as in the Bible, the verb “to sit” and its noun derivative, “seat,” usually carry a sense of sitting in a special place, often because of divine action. The other verb form (Hebrew *gwr*) frequently takes the word “stranger” as its subject (Ex. 12:48–49; Lev. 16:29; 17:8; etc.). See also John R. Spencer, “Sojourner,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:103–4.
2. For the possibilities, see S. Kent Brown, “A Case for Lehi’s Bondage in Arabia,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (fall 1997): 206–17.
3. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 24–26.
4. See chapter 3 in this volume, “Recovering the Missing Record of Lehi.”
5. To my knowledge, no one has explained *why* the family spent this extended stay in the desert, other than suggesting that they stopped to raise crops, as do Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton in *In Search of Lehi’s Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 50, 77, 92, and Warren P. and Michaela K. Aston in *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 5, 21, 31. Typically, commentators have attempted only to outline *how* Lehi and his family coped in the desert, including the Lord’s requirement that they not “make much fire” (1 Ne. 17:12). For example, George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl portray the family as successfully avoiding contact with desert peoples because of the aid of the Liahona: *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1955), 1:166–67, 173. Hugh Nibley similarly observes that the desert was a dangerous place and that Lehi’s family did their best to avoid contact with its inhabitants: *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 5:47–49, 63–67.
6. Among LDS authors, both the Hiltons (*In Search of Lehi’s Trail*, 28) and the Astons (*In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 10) rightly emphasize that, on the basis of what has come to light about early Arabian governments, settlements, and economy, the family would have met many people during the journey.
7. Dependency should not surprise us in light of the need for protection in the desert. Even along the “incense trail” that ran inland from the Red Sea, as Nigel Groom points out, caravaners “moved through harsh tribal areas inhabited by nomads, where unpredictable squabbles could put both their profits and, perhaps, their lives at risk.” Away from major centers of civilization, he writes, “in the absence of strong rule, law and order must have been precarious”; *Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade* (London: Longman Group, 1981), 197–98. Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79), in his

Natural History, observed that “of these innumerable tribes an equal part are engaged in trade or live by brigandage” (6.32 [§ 162]).

8. For example, Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932). A first-rate study on the incense trade through the Arabian desert is that of Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh*. See also the discussion by Eugene England, “Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?” in *Book of Mormon Authorship*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 143–56.

9. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 24.

10. The hint that Nephi preached while “in the wilderness” (D&C 33:8) does not alter this possibility.

11. See Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary*, 1:173–74; Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 63–65; Robert L. Millet and Joseph F. McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:131–32. Nephi summarizes rather blandly the severity of the problems that faced family members by speaking generally of “much affliction” (1 Ne. 17:1) and “many afflictions and much difficulty” (17:6).

12. This dependence arises especially in discussions of the Liahona (e.g., Mosiah 1:16–17; Alma 37:38–42). In linking the family’s well-being with the gracious actions of the Lord, Nephi tied the story of his family’s exodus from Jerusalem to that of the exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt. See Ps. 105:37: “He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.” In the case of the extended family of Lehi and Sariah, evidently all survived the trip, including newborns, with the exception of Ishmael (1 Ne. 17:1–2).

13. Raising the prospect of dying in the wilderness clearly echoes similar complaints by the Israelites in the desert; see Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 38–51.

14. Nephi wrote in a guarded way, including only hints of the intensity of suffering, that “we had suffered many afflictions and much difficulty, yea, even so much that we cannot write them all” (1 Ne. 17:6, emphasis added).

15. As one gauge of the severe impact of the desert experience, Jacob, who had been born in the desert to Lehi and Sariah, seems to have remained a sober, serious person all of his life (see Jacob 7:26).

16. Lehi was equipped with “tents” and other means for desert living and was apparently able to leave his home without delay (e.g., 1 Ne. 2:4; 3:9; 16:12). See Nibley’s discussion, *Lehi in the Desert*, 46–49. John Tvedtnes takes a dim view of Lehi’s possible involvement with desert trade: “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” *F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report* (Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1984).

17. One may argue that the phrase “our fathers” points to an intermediate generation, nearer Alma’s time, who had suffered difficulties with “their enemies.” But the notation that immediately follows—“even by the hands of their own brethren” (Alma 9:10)—clarifies that the reference is to Lehi and his children, since the older sons sought at least once to kill Lehi (1 Ne. 16:37; 17:44) and three times to kill the younger son Nephi (1 Ne. 7:16; 16:37; 2 Ne. 5:3–4; cf. 2 Ne. 1:24).

18. Writing of an unsuccessful military foray into western Arabia in 25–24 B.C., the Roman geographer Strabo noted that soldiers died from “hunger and fatigue and diseases” (*Geography*, 16.4.24). It is possible, of course, that by Lehi’s day some wells and water sources had been polluted by camel dung and urine left behind by caravans, as nowadays.

19. According to Groom, the maximum time for a caravan to travel from Zufar (or Dhofar) on the Indian Ocean to Gaza on the Mediterranean coast was 118 days, a distance of about 2,100 miles (*Frankincense*, chart on 213). The Hiltons also reckon the distance as just over 2,100 miles, though using a different beginning point (“In Search of Lehi’s Trail, Part 2,” *Ensign*, October 1976, 39; cf. *In Search of Lehi’s Trail*, 32). Naturally, caravans did not include flocks, something Lehi’s family seems to have eschewed (see 1 Ne. 2:4; 16:11–12).

20. Heschel wrote that Hosea’s strange marriage “was a lesson” instead of “a symbol.” Further, its “purpose was not to demonstrate divine attitudes to the people, but to educate Hosea himself in the understanding of divine sensibility” (*The Prophets* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962], 56).

21. Dust is also tied to the notion of servanthood or low social status in the speech of king Benjamin (Mosiah 2:25–26; cf. 4:2).

22. It is also important to note how he speaks of the promised land, calling it “a land of liberty” whose inhabitants “shall never be brought down into captivity” and “shall dwell safely forever,” except for the cause “of iniquity” (2 Ne. 1:7, 9).

23. For the relevance of certain passages in Isaiah 48–49, quoted in 1 Nephi 20–21, see Brown, “A Case for Lehi’s Bondage in Arabia,” 213–16.

24. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 25. For the fleeing family of Lehi, food (“provisions” [1 Ne. 2:4; 16:11] and “seed” [16:11]) was crucial. Nephi notes two occasions when the family faced starvation, both occurring before the party turned to the east (1 Ne. 16:21, 39).

25. An additional hardship was the family’s infrequent use of fire. Whether it was to save fuel, along with the efforts that one expends to find fuel, or whether it was to avoid drawing attention to themselves that the Lord “suffered [not] that we should make much fire, as we journeyed in the wilderness,” or both, is not clear from the account (1 Ne. 17:12). Reynolds

and Sjodahl (*Commentary*, 1:173) and Nibley (*Lehi in the Desert*, 63–67) opt for the second explanation.

26. The case is richer than one might think at first, for Lehi dwells in his tent because he is a servant of God and has been obedient to him, thus standing in a relationship of servanthood.

27. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 24–26; the verb, we presume, is Hebrew *yšb*. See above for discussion.

28. In the following passages (emphasis added), God brings about special circumstances, putting humans in a dependent relationship, a situation that matches the Old Testament. First, God leads people to a land and imposes obligations on that people: “It is a choice land, saith God . . . wherefore I will have all men that *dwell* thereon that they shall worship me” (2 Ne. 10:19). See also 1 Ne. 21:20 (= Isa. 49:20); 2 Ne. 1:9, 31; 8:6 (= Isa. 51:6); 16:5 (= Isa. 6:5); 19:2 (= Isa. 9:2); 20:24 (= Isa. 10:24); Mosiah 1:10; Alma 31:26; 3 Ne. 10:5, 7; cf. Ether 13:2. Compare the expectations that Israelites worship the Lord after he has led them to the promised land (e.g., Ex. 3:12, 17–18; 6:4–8; 8:1; 9:1; 15:17; also Lev. 20:22; Deut. 11:31–32; 12:10–14). The Canaanites “shall not *dwell*” in the promised land because they will “make thee sin against [the Lord]” (Ex. 23:33).

Second, God and an individual enjoy a relationship, for good or ill: “The Lord hath said he *dwell*eth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he *dwell*,” and “the righteous shall *sit down* in his kingdom, to go no more out” (Alma 34:36). Sitting down lies at the base of the Hebrew verb *to dwell*. On the need for righteousness, see also 1 Ne. 10:21; 2 Ne. 2:8; Mosiah 2:37; 3:6; Alma 7:21; 18:35; Hel. 4:24; and 4 Ne. 1:15. Compare the requirement that Israelites be holy “unto me [God]” in Ex. 19:6; 22:31; also Ex. 9:27; 31:14–15; Lev. 11:44–45; cf. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; Solomon’s dedicatory prayer espouses an opposite view (1 Kgs. 8:27; 2 Chr. 6:18).

Third, those dwelling with God enjoy a special status: “Those that keep the commandments . . . may *dwell* with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41; see also 3 Ne. 28:9). The reverse may be true, dwelling eternally as a subject to the devil. See also 1 Ne. 15:33, 35; 22:26, 28; Mosiah 15:23; Alma 24:22; 28:12; 36:28; 3 Ne. 28:40; Morm. 7:7; 9:3–4; Ether 4:19 (words of Moroni); and Moro. 8:26. The Old Testament rarely expresses the concept of dwelling with God, only in song; see Ps. 23:6; usually dwelling with God refers to being in the temple: Ps. 27:4; 84:4; 101:7.

Finally, dwelling on earth in a circumstance linked to the purposes and timing of the Lord entails a divinely offered privilege: “Blessed are they who *dwell*” in the New Jerusalem (Ether 13:10). In the days of the Messiah the “wolf also shall *dwell* with the lamb” (2 Ne. 21:6 [= Isa. 11:6]; see also 2 Ne. 30:12). At the other extreme is the fate of Babylon, where “wild beasts of the desert shall lie” and “owls shall *dwell*” (2 Ne. 23:21 [= Isa. 13:21]). Note that at the end of time, the Lord will “cast the lot” for the wasted land of his people

and, after improvements, "from generation to generation shall they dwell therein" (Isa. 34:17; also 65:9).

29. Ex. 20:22–23:33. Some call it the Book of the Covenant. See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 5.

30. Ex. 12:36; cf. 3:22; 15:9; Gen. 15:14. There is an entire complex of legal and social issues associated with property, such as flocks and jewelry, as one observes in the escape of the people of Limhi (Mosiah 22:12). See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 47–61.

31. This point is made firm because Lamoni later reversed Ammon's status: "King Lamoni would not suffer that Ammon should serve him, or be his servant" (Alma 21:19).

32. Greg W. Stephens suggests that Lamoni's hospitality and offer of his daughter to Ammon arose from "the law of hospitality or asylum" ("Elements of Israelite Tribal Law in the Book of Mormon," Ancient Legal Systems Seminar, J. Reuben Clark Law School, 1981, 8). Mark Davis and Brent Israelson explain Ammon's warm reception by Lamoni as conforming to customary "alien's rights" in a foreign environment ("International Relations and Treaties in the Book of Mormon," *F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report* [Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1982], 5). But the legal and social elements of the scene are more complex than these positions imply.

33. Servility cannot have been foreign to Lamanite society. To be sure, the entire issue of forced labor in the Book of Mormon has yet to be studied carefully. But Ammon labored among "other servants" of the king (Alma 17:25–29; 18:1, 5). Further, Ammon's brother Aaron "with his brethren" proposed that they be accepted as servants in the palace of Lamoni's father, a proposal that the father refused (Alma 22:2–3).

34. The text says "his land," apparently meaning land of the king. It is not clear whether in a legal sense the king was thought of as owner of the land or as its steward.

35. Emphasis added. One of the little-explored issues in the Book of Mormon that arises here is that of acquiring land—that is, of acquiring an inheritance. The matter teems with legal questions. Roger R. Keller has explored the way that land was thought of geographically and theologically in his *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1996), 103–50.

36. According to Spencer, "Sojourner," 104, this assurance in the ancient Near East is extended even to "sojourners."

37. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 63; also 64: "The two women were to be Jacob's wages and, strictly, he was paid when he wedded them."

38. One can think of examples in which persons took gifts that were not offered. For instance, Limhi's people took their "flocks" and "herds" as well

as “all their gold, and silver, and their precious things,” even though by treaty half of these goods belonged to the Lamanites (Mosiah 22:11–12; also 19:15, 26).

39. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 51; also 52–53, 86–87. Of course, the case of Ammon is measurably different from the cases of the escaping Nephite colonists under Limhi and Alma the Elder from their respective Lamanite overlords. It was the Lord, not the Lamanites, who was generous in their release from captivity, freeing them all, guiding them to safety, and frustrating their pursuers (Mosiah 22:11–16; 24:16–25). As the Psalmist sang of the Exodus, “There was not one feeble person among their tribes” (Ps. 105:37), the stress resting “on the triumphant, miraculous, protective guidance of God” (Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 55).

40. Few such incidents are recorded in the Bible. One thinks of the exchange of gifts between the queen of Sheba and Solomon (1 Kgs. 10:10, 13; 2 Chr. 9:9, 12), the land grant of Achish, the Philistine king, to David (1 Sam. 27:6), and Pharaoh’s gifts to Abraham, who was a commoner (Gen. 12:20–13:2; *Genesis Apocryphon* 20.31–34).

41. Ammon’s intended gift, of course, was to bring “salvation” to Lamanite converts (Alma 17:11).

42. See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 60–61.

43. In this context, one has to explain the very different treatment that Ammon’s companions experienced in other parts of the extended Lamanite kingdom (Alma 21:13–14). The most natural response is that Ammon and Lamoni apparently liked one another. Camille Fronk suggests something similar (“Show Forth Good Examples in Me,” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 7, 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987], 323). Further, Ammon did not come preaching, as his companions did in other parts of the country. Thus, concern about the message that Ammon carried did not become an immediate issue, as it did in the other cases.

44. It is also evident that a generation earlier Amulon, the leader of the renegade priests of Noah, negotiated a favorable position for himself and his associates when the Lamanite king appointed him governor over Alma’s colony in Helam (Mosiah 23:39) and his associates as “teachers” (24:4).

45. There are fifteen occurrences of the word “stay” in the Book of Mormon, mostly verbs. *The Oxford English Dictionary* notes each of the meanings for the verbal and nominal forms that are discussed in this section.

46. As with the other verbs of sitting, the usual Hebrew verb is *yšb*.

47. Isa. 48:2 (Hebrew niph'al of *smk*), with the addition “they do not” in the Book of Mormon text; similarly, 2 Ne. 20:20 (= Isa. 10:20; Hebrew niph'al of *š'n*; with the sense of “save,” see 2 Kgs. 16:7). The nominal form “stay” refers to a support, as in 2 Ne. 13:1 (= Isa. 3:1; Hebrew *maš'en*): “the *stay* and the staff, . . . the whole *stay* of water” (emphasis added).

48. Isa. 29:9 (Hebrew hithpalpel of *mhh*). The New English Bible renders the verb "loiter." The RSV—and similarly the Jerusalem Bible—renders the first line of the Isaiah verse thus: "Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor." Importantly, Nephi's text adds an address to the wicked: "For behold, all ye that doeth iniquity. . . ."

49. See also Alma 10:23; 3 Ne. 3:8; Morm. 8:26; Moro. 9:14.

50. It is possible, of course, that Nephi had suffered debilitating persecution or that he could not penetrate the social and political corruption in that part of the country (as in Hel. 7:4–5), or a combination of these factors.

51. The term here means more than residing, for when Lamanites depart home—at least in Pahoran's view—they come to make war.

52. As in most ancient cultures, there must have been laws that governed the standing of a wife who was abandoned, possibly allowing her to divorce the man who had left her and their children, and not to be responsible for his debts. One thinks of the laws governing cases of abandonment in the Code of Hammurabi (135–36).

53. According to Mosiah 19:15, the agreement held that the lives of the colonists would be spared and they would be allowed to "possess the land" again. Then, in Mosiah 19:25–26, the Lamanite king pledged "that his people should not slay" the Nephites while, on his part, the Nephite king Limhi promised that "his people should pay tribute . . . [of] one half of all they possessed." This level of payment had been established in an earlier accord (7:22).

54. Here *stay* does not denote servility, but the context is saturated with the sense of vassalhood.

55. While a master may be called "faithful," it is usually the master who applies this label, not the servant. Though the servants hailed Ammon as "a friend to the king" (Alma 18:3), evidently a title of some stature, both Ammon and Lamoni knew his real status at court, based on their prior negotiation (17:22–25).

56. This honorific term, as interpreted in the text, meant "powerful or great king" (Alma 18:13).

57. The phrase "which is right" may show that by this moment Ammon sensed he was in a position to exercise some control over what followed.