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Marriage and Treaty in the Book of Mormon: The Case of the Abducted Lamanite Daughters

Biblical law and custom must have persisted among Book of Mormon peoples. The account of the abducted Lamanite women offers an unusually clear view into legal and social norms among Nephites. Perhaps surprisingly, the report hints strongly that some of these norms also survived among Lamanites.

Marriage seemingly receives little attention in the Book of Mormon. The earliest notice, that of the marriage of the sons of Lehi and Sariah to the daughters of Ishmael, rates no more than a single verse (1 Ne. 16:7). In the following generation, the prophet Jacob condemns certain men in his society for seeking to introduce the practice of plural marriage (Jacob 2:22–35), a practice that seems not to have been continued.¹ The regent Lamanite king Lamoni, in a much later scene, proposes to marry his daughter to Ammon, a Nephite prince, a proposal that Ammon respectfully declines (Alma 17:22–25). In a celebrated case, the traitorous Nephite Amalickiah deceitfully “obtained the kingdom” of the Lamanites and “took [the queen] unto him to wife” (47:35).² Oddly, perhaps, the most interesting, complex, and complete account of marriage in the Book of Mormon is that of the fugitive priests of king Noah to young Lamanite women whom they had abducted (Mosiah 20:3–5), rupturing a treaty in the process.

These priests of Noah, part of a Nephite colony in the midst of Lamanite territory, had abandoned their homes and families in

an effort to avoid death at the hands of an invading Lamanite army (Mosiah 19:9–23). Two years later (19:29), the priests crept back to the outskirts of their former colony and, presumably in order to stay alive, “carried off [fellow colonists’] grain and many of their precious things,” coming “by night”—which, if caught at night, made their thievery a capital crime (21:21).³ It was while these priests were in the neighboring wilderness that they stumbled upon “a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves” (20:1). After discovering “the daughters of the Lamanites, they laid and watched them; and when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness” (20:4–5).

The sudden disappearance of the young women led to an immediate rupture in the treaty—a suzerain–vassal relationship between Lamanite overlords and the subject Nephite colony then under the leadership of Limhi—a rupture that brought a military reprisal against the Nephites (20:6–11).⁴ The Lamanite king and his people suspected that the Nephites were responsible for the wrong.⁵ When both parties grasped that it was the renegade priests who had kidnapped these young women (20:17–19, 23–24), they set out to discover the whereabouts of the priests and their captives in order to punish them, but without success.⁶ When a disoriented Lamanite army accidentally located them many months later, the priests craftily escaped punishment by obliging their “wives” to intercede on their behalf, thereafter easing themselves into Lamanite society and even taking positions of responsibility (23:30–39; 24:1, 4).⁷

“Wives” and “Husbands”

A number of legal and social issues stem from the narrative. The most important is the fact that at the end of this series of events, the women are called “wives” and the priests “husbands” (Mosiah 23:33–34). The terms are most significant, for they establish the legal framework for the outcome of the story. Perhaps just as important is the observation that the editor of the account, Mormon, has accepted the terminology of his source. Plainly, by so doing he demonstrates that in his culture—though he lived much later—the women were thought of as legally married. One

of the complicating issues that does not arise in the narrative has to do with the legal status of the priests' previous wives whom they had abandoned, although their children are discussed.⁸

The terminology not only interprets the outcome of the situation but also invites us to enter the world of the Old Testament, where laws deal rather extensively with marriage, including that of a master to a captive woman. As we shall soon see, a number of elements in the account can be understood best in light of either the Mosaic code or Old Testament events that established legal norms.⁹

In the situation at hand, the text features verbs that point to the captive status of the Lamanite women: the priests "took them and carried them" away (20:5; cf. 20:15, 23).¹⁰ But the captivity was illegal, because those who subsequently accused the priests said that they had "stolen" the young women—a term with severe legal implications (20:18; 21:20–21).¹¹

Two issues come immediately to the fore: (a) taking the daughters as captives—an illegal act in both the Lamanite and Nephite societies, as the responses illustrate (20:6, 16), and (b) the consequent depriving of each woman of a marriage performed with the "consent" of her parents, particularly of her father—"there is a complete break with her family."¹² In this latter instance, such marriages were allowed between Israelite males and foreign women whose cities, lying at a distance "very far off," had been sacked by an Israelite army (Deut. 20:10–15). But of course, the Lamanite daughters were not foreigners in the sense that they were non-Israelites—hence, the enormity of the priests' actions: abducting the young women, forcibly separating them from their families while intending to take them as wives, forcing their will on Israelite women, and carrying out marriages that were illegal under the Mosaic code because they did not result from war. But in the end, astonishingly, the marriages were honored, at least in Lamanite society.

The decree of death pronounced upon the priests, issued by both the Lamanite king and the Nephite ruler Limhi (Mosiah 20:7, 16), seems to suggest that some of the young women were already betrothed to be married—and therefore were considered to be under a marriage obligation—and that their kidnappers were thought of as rapists. In such a situation, the men are to die.¹³ In contrast, in the case of an unmarried virgin, biblical law holds

that the rapist must pay a fine, marry the woman, and never divorce her (Deut. 22:28–29). Hence, had none of the young women been engaged—that is, if none were under a marriage contract—the severity of the reprisal sought by the Lamanite king might be thought of as excessive,¹⁴ unless one could demonstrate that he acted solely on emotion and not according to law.¹⁵

Another possible legal component is at play here, that of “humiliating” a woman.¹⁶ In the Bible this issue is closely associated with that of a woman forced to marry without the consent of her father. The meaning of the humiliation remains an open question. David Daube believes that the matter is identical to taking a woman “without the correct formalities” and arises when a woman is treated as if she comes from a social class that does not deserve a wedding with all the trimmings, so to speak.¹⁷ But the humiliation may rather have to do with treating a woman as a harlot, as was done in the case of Shechem forcing Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah. It was this defiling of Dinah that led to the murderous response of her two brothers against Shechem and his fellow townsmen (Genesis 34).¹⁸ From this viewpoint, even though the Lamanite women were later reckoned as wives of the renegade priests, the route to their marriages was through defiled beds, thus humbling the women.¹⁹ In fact, it is the story of Dinah that provides some of the most striking parallels with the experience of the Lamanite daughters, except that in the end Dinah did not marry the man who “took her, and lay with her, and defiled her” (34:2).²⁰

Ruptured Treaty

The broken treaty, at least as it was perceived by the Lamanite king, is the next feature to draw our attention. It is important not only because a lot of space is granted to it—underscoring its value to both sides, including mention of the treaty ceremony itself²¹—but also because its apparent rupture lay at the heart of the king’s decision to send his armies “to destroy the people of Limhi.” It is also important to the story to note that “even the king himself went before his people” into battle (Mosiah 20:7). Apparently the king felt that he had invested a good deal of effort in bringing the treaty about²² and, as a result, was hurt and angered

that the agreement had apparently been broken by the Nephite colonists and Limhi, his negotiating partner.²³

Beyond question, the making of the treaty is to be understood as a very serious and sacred matter.²⁴ On the human side, it had become the basis for an era of peace, even though the peace benefitted chiefly the Lamanites (19:25–27, 29).²⁵ According to Old Testament law, the breaking of an agreement that had been concluded between two parties led to whatever consequences were spelled out in the “curses” which accompanied the oaths, the classic example being the covenant between the Israelites, who were about to possess the promised land, and the Lord.²⁶ As is plain from the response of the Lamanite king, his promise that “his people should not slay” the people of Limhi (19:25) was reversed as one of the penalties for breaking the treaty.

In the end, the king’s decision to destroy the Nephite colony must have rested on a combination of considerations, one of which was his feeling of anger. In general, when a treaty has evidently been broken, the question is, “How flagrant must a violation be before the sovereign could legitimately muster his military forces and attack the recalcitrant vassal?”²⁷ The Lamanite king must have seen a series of misdeeds in the abduction of the young women. First, it was an act of stealing—a clear breach of law; the people there were not in a state of war or national tension. Second, any marriages that might result would consequently be illegal or, at the very least, extremely odious. Third, the kidnaping was evidence, as he perceived the matter, of the breaking of solemn pledges made only two years earlier.²⁸ It would appear that he had no choice except to bring down the weight of the Lamanite army on the Nephite colonists.

Status of the Marriages

Now we come to a key question. Why were these marriages between the priests and the abducted women recognized? Clearly the priests broke the law and thus distanced themselves from custom as understood in both the Nephite and Lamanite societies. Yet in the end the marriages were not only more or less legitimized according to the terminology used in a Nephite record—“wives” and “husbands”—but were also allowed to stand

in Lamanite society, where the couples came to live and raise families.

The answer must be that an array of factors brought about a favorable resolution of the issue for the priests. First, on the legal side, we have already seen that under Mosaic law a man can marry a captive woman if certain procedures are followed, particularly because the marriage takes place without the consent of her father and without the normal wedding celebrations (Deut. 21:10–14). The law stipulates that the woman must be a prize of war and a citizen of a city “very far off” (20:15). But for the renegade priests, such stipulations—even if honored in the larger society²⁹—would have made little difference. Moreover, it was evidently possible in Book of Mormon society, as it was in societies in the ancient Near East,³⁰ to make a woman a wife by engaging in sexual relations, an action particularly repugnant to the woman’s family. Hence, the priests may have been partially, if weakly, justified—in their own eyes at least—in holding onto the Lamanite daughters as wives.

One cannot prove directly that the particular stipulations of the Deuteronomic code, noted above, were known and observed among Book of Mormon peoples. But the account does exhibit clues of a serious legal difficulty in resolving the status of the marriages, clues that invite one to examine the only legal texts that were available to Book of Mormon societies early on.³¹

The second set of circumstances surfaced when the wandering Lamanite army came upon the new settlement founded by the priests and their new wives. Essentially, the priests made a deal. We note before anything else that typical soldiers in antiquity would not be literate and therefore acquainted with legal niceties.³² But the army that discovered the settlement was well aware that these priests were deserving of death.³³ As a result, the priests did everything they could to escape being killed. The leader of the group, a man named Amulon,³⁴ adopted a two-pronged approach. First, he himself “did plead with the Lamanites” that they not destroy the members of the settlement. Then “he also sent forth their wives, who were the daughters of the Lamanites, to plead with their brethren, that they should not destroy their husbands” (Mosiah 23:33). His own efforts seem to have failed. But the efforts of the women paid off: “And the Lamanites had

compassion on Amulon and his brethren, and did not destroy them, because of their wives" (23:34).³⁵

Simply stated, Amulon's tactic to throw himself and his fellow priests on the mercy of the Lamanite army worked because it spared their lives. But there is more. To all appearances, the wives were willing to intercede for their husbands. There was no visibly abusive compulsion on the part of the former priests, forcing the women to come forward and beg on their behalf in a demeaning way, an action that would surely have given the Lamanite soldiers an excuse to execute the husbands.

Negotiations, however, also meant that the priests were required to abandon their new settlement, to return to the homeland of the Lamanites, and to "join the Lamanites," although the text does not specify what this latter means (23:35).³⁶ The results for the priests were that they would keep both their lives and their wives, a decision that was not subsequently overturned by the Lamanite king because, afterward, he appointed Amulon to serve as a regent king over the colony of Alma, "his [Amulon's] people" (23:39).

Epilogue: The Fate of the Children of the Priests

In a somber aftermath, we learn of the terrible fate of the former priests and their sons.³⁷ A generation after the priests were allowed to keep their wives, and following a series of remarkable successes by Nephite missionaries preaching among the Lamanites which led to a split in the society along religious lines, a Lamanite army—chiefly out of frustration—attacked the Nephite frontier city Ammonihah and destroyed all life in it (Alma 16:1–3).³⁸ Of the events that followed, we possess two accounts. One is that of the Nephite army which tracked the Lamanite force "into the wilderness" because this latter group had taken captives from neighboring settlements whom the Nephites sought to rescue. Rescue them they did. The commanding general consulted with Alma, the prophet of the church, who gave inspired instructions about where the Nephite army could intercept the Lamanites with their captives, which they did without loss of life to any of the prisoners. The first account ends with the notation that the former prisoners "were brought by their brethren to possess their own lands" (16:4–8).

It is the second account that fills in the picture about the fate of the priests and their sons who, as it happened, were part of the invading Lamanite army that destroyed the city of Ammonihah. This record originated with the sons of king Mosiah whose successful missionary work had raised anger and fear in certain Lamanite circles, an anger that spilled over into a civil conflict between nonbelievers and newly won believers in the message of Mosiah's sons. Because the believers, called Anti-Nephi-Lehies (23:17), refused to take up arms in self-defense, and because their attackers became frustrated and angry with themselves for slaughtering fellow citizens who were believers, the nonbelievers "swore vengeance upon the Nephites" and subsequently attacked the city of Ammonihah. It was this force that the Nephite army intercepted, freeing the prisoners. But there was more. When the Nephite force ambushed the Lamanite army, it both killed "almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, who were the priests of Noah," and drove the remainder deeper into the wilderness where a rift occurred among the Lamanite soldiers (25:4–5). Some had begun to doubt the worthwhile character of making war, having seen the pacifist stance of their fellow countrymen, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. At this point, the remaining priests and "the children of Amulon" executed those who had begun "to disbelieve the traditions of their fathers, and to believe in the Lord." After an ensuing mutiny, termed a "contention in the wilderness," "the Lamanites" began "to hunt" and kill "the seed of Amulon and his brethren."³⁹ As a grim ending to this episode, the record observes that "they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites" (25:1–9).

In a postscript, other "descendants of the priests of Noah" (43:13)—presumably not only children of the priests who were too young to participate in the attack on Ammonihah but also grandchildren of the former priests⁴⁰—participated in the protracted wars between Lamanites and Nephites (Alma 43–44; 49–62). From this point on, we lose sight of them in the record. But at last glance, we see them again joining those whose hatred for the Nephites was almost insatiable, and dealing in death.

NOTES

1. Legalized polygamy is not commented on again, with one possible exception. It concerns Amulek, who, in referring to blessings received during the extended visit of Alma to his home, said, "He hath blessed me, and my women" (Alma 10:11). However, the reference may be to his wife and his mother, not to multiple wives. Even though Amulek mentions "my father and my kinsfolk," the nature of the text does not allow a decisive judgment.
2. The legal and social dimensions of this case are intriguing but go beyond the scope of the present study.
3. The seemingly unnecessary notation of the night as the time of crime may suggest Nephite knowledge of this stipulation of the Mosaic code. On theft "by night" (Mosiah 21:21) as a capital crime, see J. Coert Rylaarsdam, *The Book of Exodus* (New York: Abingdon, 1952), 1002–3; and Samuel Greengus, "Law," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:249. According to Ex. 22:2, a thief who comes by night can be killed without attaching a "bloodguilt" penalty to the executioner.
4. For a discussion of this treaty and its connections to the Bible and the ancient Near East, see Mark Davis and Brent Israelsen, "International Relations and Treaties in the Book of Mormon" (Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 14–16.
5. The Lamanites were aware that the crime was kidnapping, and possibly worse, for the king told Limhi that "thy people did carry away the daughters of my people" (Mosiah 20:15). Hence, either there were witnesses, or one or more of the young women successfully escaped the priests.
6. At first, the kidnappers' identity remained unknown (Mosiah 20:16); according to Mosiah 21:21, the punishment was to be for other crimes, such as theft of grain. For each crime, kidnapping and theft "by night," the punishment was to be death. Cf. Mosiah 20:7, wherein the Lamanite king seeks to "destroy" Limhi's people for the kidnapping; and Mosiah 21:23, wherein Limhi, at first thinking "Ammon and his brethren" to be "priests of Noah," would have "put [them] to death."
7. For one approach to the theft of the Lamanite daughters, see Alan Goff, "The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 67–74. Goff draws attention to connections between this story and accounts in the book of Judges about the people of the tribe of Benjamin. John W. Welch, in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1992), 139–41, suggests that the dancing was an annual event. Not incidentally, the narrative in Mosiah 20–23 gives the impression of a significant passage of time.

8. There must have been laws that governed the standing of a wife who found herself in such straits, possibly allowing her to divorce the man who had abandoned her and their children and to not be responsible for his debts. Concerning the status of abandoned children, in the case at hand we read that the children adopted a patronymic that would not identify them with their biological fathers: "The children of Amulon and his brethren, who had taken to wife the daughters of the Lamanites, were displeased with the conduct of their fathers, and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore they took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi" (Mosiah 25:12). It is not clear how this sort of action might affect, for instance, the legal claim of the children to the property of their fathers. In later Jewish law, these kinds of issues were dealt with, for instance, in the Mishnah, *Yebamoth* 10.1–5; 15.1–16.7; *Shebuoth* 7.7.

9. We know that Nephites appealed to biblical events for legal and social precedents. See Jacob's spirited condemnation of those who appealed to "things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son" (Jacob 2:23).

10. Understanding the verb *to take* as meaning "to take under one's control" (as Hebrew *lqh*) or "to take away by theft" (as Hebrew *gnb*); and "to carry" as connoting "to carry away that which does not belong to one" or, in a broadly legal sense, "to deprive." The Hebrew verb *lqh* also appears with the meaning "to take [a wife]" (e.g., Gen. 4:19; 6:2; cf. 1 Ne. 7:1; 16:7). See David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 73.

11. According to Mosaic law, kidnaping an Israelite was to be punished by death (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7). See Muhammad A. Dandamayev, "Slavery: Old Testament," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:63.

12. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 65; also Phyllis A. Bird, "Women: Old Testament," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:956. The account presumes something like the law found in Deut. 21:10–14. See also Ex. 22:17; Num. 30:16.

13. For biblical law, see Deut. 22:23–27. "In the case of the betrothed . . . woman, the penalty is death for the rapist and the woman goes free if one can presume that she struggled and was coerced." Greengus, "Law," 4:247.

14. The "excessive" character of the reprisal must have to do with the fact that two peoples were living side by side under a treaty. If events had taken place entirely within either the Lamanite society or the Nephite colony, and if all of the young women were not betrothed, a more measured response might be expected. But when a treaty is involved, the king of the wronged party would see himself as pursuing the interests of his people and their god by gathering an army and pursuing the breaker of the treaty. (According to Deut. 28:20–22, even the Lord punishes "with the sword" of another; cf. Jer. 1:13–16.) See Michael L. Barré, "Treaties in the Ancient Near East," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:655.

15. Speaking of the Lamanites in general, the text does say that “they were angry with the people of Limhi” (Mosiah 20:6). Further, the Lamanite king admits that “in my anger I did cause my people to come up to war” (20:15). But there is nothing to suggest that the warlike response did not conform to established custom or law. See Michael L. Barré, “Treaties,” 6:655, who maintains that “in suzerain–vassal treaties, this [effort to punish] often took the form of a punitive campaign by the suzerain against the transgressor.”

16. For example, Deut. 21:14; 22:24, 29.

17. Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 65–66.

18. Cf. also Lam. 5:11.

19. One must keep in mind that in the ancient world, women and children were often treated as a man’s possessions, though not strictly as property (cf. Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21); see Phyllis A. Bird, “Women,” 6:956.

20. For example, Dinah was initially spotted by Shechem in the company of other women (Gen. 34:1). He in effect abducted her (“he took her”—34:2). His act was judged to be a wrong that needed a strong response, a wrong that had “humbled” Dinah, e.g., Deut. 22:29 (“which thing ought not to be done”—Gen. 34:7; “Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”—Gen. 34:31). In this light, the brothers of Dinah sought death for Shechem and those who harbored him (34:25–26). A deal was struck, deceitfully in this case (34:13), that would allow Shechem to retain Dinah as wife. Note the proposed fine in Gen. 34:11, and the required circumcision in Gen. 34:14–17. In the present case, the priests of Noah were required to abandon their new settlement (Mosiah 23:31) and to “join the Lamanites” (23:35).

21. Indicated by the term “granted” in Mosiah 19:15, 22; cf. Gen. 9:12; 17:2 (Hebrew *ntn*, “give” or “grant”; KJV renders “make”; on words used to describe ceremonies, see Michael L. Barré, “Treaties,” 6:654). Also present are: the terms of the treaty, confirmed by oaths of ratification on both sides (Mosiah 19:15, 25–26); the elevation of Limhi—“having the kingdom conferred upon him”—who then represented the Nephite colonists in making the agreement (19:26); the Lamanite effort to assure compliance through the stationing of guards (19:28); the benefits of the agreement—peace for two years (19:29); the complaint of breaking the treaty (20:14–15); the Lamanite response to the apparent breaking of the treaty—sending an invasion force “to destroy” the colonists (20:7); and the Nephite military response (20:8–11). Nothing is known of the place where the treaty was concluded—possibly the temple—or whether a written copy was made.

22. It appears that the tribute of “one half of all” was to be paid “unto him” personally (Mosiah 19:26). Clearly, the king was a major figure in the negotiations, providing more than merely the expected oath (19:25).

23. The colonists would eventually break the treaty by flight and particularly—in an echo of the Israelite exodus—by taking their “flocks” and

"herds," in addition to "all their gold, and silver, and their precious things, which they could carry" (Mosiah 22:11–12), half of which belonged to the Lamanites under the agreement. But the Nephites had the law on their side: they had been vassals for a number of years. Hence, their Lamanite-Israelite masters owed them freedom and gifts (Deut. 15:12–15). Cf. also Jacob and Laban (Genesis 29–31). See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 47–61.

24. Quite naturally, God becomes involved in the language of oaths sworn in making treaties. Regularly in treaties of the ancient Near East, "the deities before whom the oath was taken were thought to act as guarantors of the treaty"; Michael L. Barré, "Treaties," 6:654.

25. According to Mosiah 19:15 the agreement held that the lives of the colonists would be spared and that they would be allowed to "possess the land" again. In Mosiah 19:25–26, the Lamanite king pledged "that his people would not slay" the Nephites, but 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; 19:15, 22).

26. Deut. 28:1–13 enumerates the "blessings" of the covenant from the Lord, and Deut. 27:15–26 and 28:15–68 list the "curses." One of the consequences of Israelite disobedience to the covenant is, "Thou [shalt] serve thine enemies . . . until [they] have destroyed thee" (28:48). Note the additional phrase, "which the Lord shall send against thee," clear proof that the Lord is the guarantor of the agreement.

27. George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, "Covenant," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1182.

28. In a moving scene, after he had learned that the guilt rested on the renegade priests, the Lamanite king restores the oath that he thought had been broken and then "did bow himself down" before his army, pleading that they "not slay [the Nephite] people" (Mosiah 20:24–26).

29. Lamanites do not seem to have married female prisoners of war. For example, in the exchange of letters between Moroni and Ammoron about swapping prisoners of war, Moroni seems to expect that he can get most of the women back (Alma 54).

30. In both biblical and ancient Near Eastern law, a dichotomy apparently existed between the divine imperative that an adulterer be punished by death and the right of pardon that could be exercised by the injured husband or, one infers, the injured fiancé. Joseph acts thus for Mary (Matt. 1:18–19). See Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Adultery," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:82–83. In the present case of the abducted daughters who were betrothed, such a dichotomy in Lamanite law would have allowed their former fiancés to forgive them, thus freeing them from penalty. One must remember, of course, that at least three years had passed before the women, now "wives," were discovered by the Lamanite army (Mosiah 23:30–31); some of the former fiancés may have married other women in the meantime.

31. The later legal reforms of king Mosiah do not come into play in the case here (Alma 1:1, 14). The Nephite system then current is described as "the law which has been given to us by our fathers" (Mosiah 29:15, 25); in addition, "the law [of Moses] was engraven upon the plates of brass" (1 Ne. 4:16), which the Nephites possessed.

32. An entire complex of issues has to do with literacy in the wider Nephite and Lamanite societies. To make reasonable judgments about Lamanite levels of education is especially difficult because of the nature of the sources. The Lamanites' regular acceptance of Nephite dissenters and the elevation of them to high places in Lamanite society, particularly in the military, may well stem from the higher levels of education that Nephites seem to have enjoyed (e.g., Mosiah 24:1, 4).

33. The verb "to destroy," meaning to kill, appears twice in Mosiah 23:33–34.

34. In an obvious coloration from the Exodus story, Amulon is usually mentioned in the phrase "Amulon and his brethren" (Mosiah 23:34–35; 24:1; 25:12; Alma 25:4, 8), who stand as a substitute for Pharaoh and his people whom God punishes, even their children eventually being slain (Ex. 12:29–30; Alma 25:4, 8). On the opposite side stand "Alma and his brethren" (Mosiah 23:35–37; 24:8, 15), or "Alma and his people" (Mosiah 24:12, 17–18, 20, 23), who recall Moses and his people whom the Lord delivers from bondage by leading them into the wilderness, onto God's path, all preparations having been made the previous night (Ex. 12:1–13, 21–23; Mosiah 24:18–20). See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 75–77. In this vein, in a source with a decided Lamanite connection, Amulon and his followers are routinely called "Amulonites" (Alma 21:3–4; 23:14; 24:1, 28–29). In one passage, one finds the phrase "the people of Amulon" (21:2), which seems to designate this group before it became well established.

35. The successful pleading of the women continues a pattern found elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 7:19; Mosiah 19:13) that finds echoes in the Exodus story (Ex. 3:21–22; 11:2–3). See Daube, *Exodus Pattern*, 55–61.

36. It is possible that the men, who were Nephites, were obliged to swear an oath of allegiance to the Lamanite nation, or the like. For they were to go with the army to the "land of Nephi," the Lamanite homeland, when they were diverted by the discovery of the people of Alma (Mosiah 23:35–38). Moreover, they raised their children within the Lamanite society, establishing a colony in cooperation with Lamanites and other dissident Nephites, as later accounts indicate (Alma 21:2–3; 25:4). On an oath of allegiance administered by Nephites, see Terrence L. Szink, "An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 35–45.

37. Abinadi, who was convicted unjustly by king Noah and these same priests (Mosiah 17:6, 12), had prophesied that both the priests and their "seed" would "be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered

to and fro, . . . and in that day ye shall be hunted, . . . and then ye shall suffer . . . the pains of death by fire" (17:17–18).

38. The "utter destruction" of the city had been prophesied by Alma the Younger, former chief judge of the country (Alma 9:12, 18, 24; cf. 10:18, 22). The complete ruin was so devastating that the date is repeated twice in introducing the account (16:1). Evidently, it was a date remembered for decades afterward.

39. The distinction between "the Lamanites" and "the seed of Amulon and his brethren" (Alma 25:8) must reflect accurately the Lamanite point of view in this matter (see especially Alma 24:29; also the pointed phrase "his people," meaning Nephites, in Mosiah 23:39). As one might infer, the children of the priests must have looked different from other Lamanites because they came from a Nephite father and a Lamanite mother. It is also possible that, unhappily, those children had also suffered certain kinds of discrimination as they grew up. Of course, the whole issue of social discrimination has yet to be explored. In this connection, one needs to consider the Lamanite "custom . . . to slay [Nephites], or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of [the] land" (Alma 17:20). Hence, not all Nephites were welcomed among Lamanites.

40. Over time, people settled an area known as the "land of Amulon" (Alma 24:1) in Lamanite territory, a place name that likely goes back to the leader of the defrocked priests. One can perhaps assume that it was descendants and family members of these former officials who were among the prominent colonists who came to live in this area.