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The Escape of Mulek

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Abstract: This article is an attempt to reconcile the biblical account of Zedekiah's capture and the implied extermination of all his male royal line, with the Book of Mormon account of an escape by one son, referred to as Mulek. The author attempts a reconciliation between the two accounts.

The ESCAPE of MULEK

by Ariel L. Crowley, Ph.D.

ONE OF the points at which the biblical narrative touches the Book of Mormon narrative is the seizure and murder of the sons of Zedekiah, king of Judah. When Zedekiah and members of his household and staff fled by the Jericho Road at the end of the Chaldean siege, they were overtaken and carried to Riblah for a summary trial. After judgment, the Chaldean army "slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes."^{1*}

In the Book of Mormon account, one of the sons of Zedekiah escaped death, and was brought into the Western Hemisphere, where his name *Mulek* became attached to a people, a city, and a land.² It is more than possible that his name is rather a title than a proper name, being indistinguishable from the Hebrew *MLK* "a king."³ The application of such a title to a sole surviving son of Zedekiah, who was thus heir apparent to the throne of Judah, appears perfectly consistent. In biblical and Book of Mormon names alike, the root *MLK*, a king, is a commonplace element.⁴

The reconciliation of the biblical account, implying extermination of the male royal line, with the Book of Mormon account of an escape by one son, requires a critical examination of the biblical language used, in the light of parallel biblical narratives, as well as an examination of the circumstantial evidence available, in and out of the Bible.

At the outset consideration must be given to the probable ages of the sons of Zedekiah. This king ascended the throne at twenty-one years of age⁵ and perished at thirty-one in the eleventh year of his reign.⁶ According to Jewish tradition, the number of his sons who were slain by the order of Nebuchadnezzar was ten.⁷

Assuming that Zedekiah married at the early age of eighteen, his eldest child could not have exceeded twelve or thirteen years of age at the time of his death. If ten of his sons were slain, and in the meantime he had a family of daughters, as is well attested,⁸ then there is a high prob-

ability that Mulek was a mere infant at the time he escaped. This probability is strongly supported by the quite uniform habit of distinguishing between sons and male infants in biblical accounts. Examples are numerous.

Thus, Dathan and Abiram came out and stood in the doors of their tents ". . . and their wives, and their sons, and their little children."⁹

So also, Ittai, the Gittite, passed over the brook Kidron, ". . . and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him."¹⁰

In the temple arrangements set up by Hezekiah, the courses of the priests were set, among other things, according to ". . . to the genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, and their sons, and their daughters."¹¹

The order of Haman, in Esther, for the destruction of the Jews carried the directive to kill all the Jews ". . . both young and old, little children and women."¹²

Even the commandment given for the destruction of the Canaanite people under Moses made the same distinction. The Israelites were ordered to ". . . smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword" excepting ". . . the women, and the little ones, . . ."¹³

This commandment gave rise to great wrath on the part of Moses when it was literally obeyed in the case of the Midianite invasion. It is said that the Israelites ". . . warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males,"¹⁴ whereas, in point of fact they spared "all the women . . . and their little ones."¹⁵ When Moses learned of this literal application of the law requiring the sparing of children, he issued a summary order, "Now therefore kill every male among the little ones."¹⁶

While instances might be multiplied, it seems thoroughly settled in the samples given that male babies

were not counted among the sons or men of Israel as such and were the subjects of a special immunity, along with women and girls.

Pursuing a rule of construction which has come to be a standard in modern law, that words once used in a particular sense are presumed to be used always in the same sense in the same document unless distinguished specially,¹⁷ the word *sons* in the notices of the death of the sons of Zedekiah excludes "the little ones" on biblical precedent.

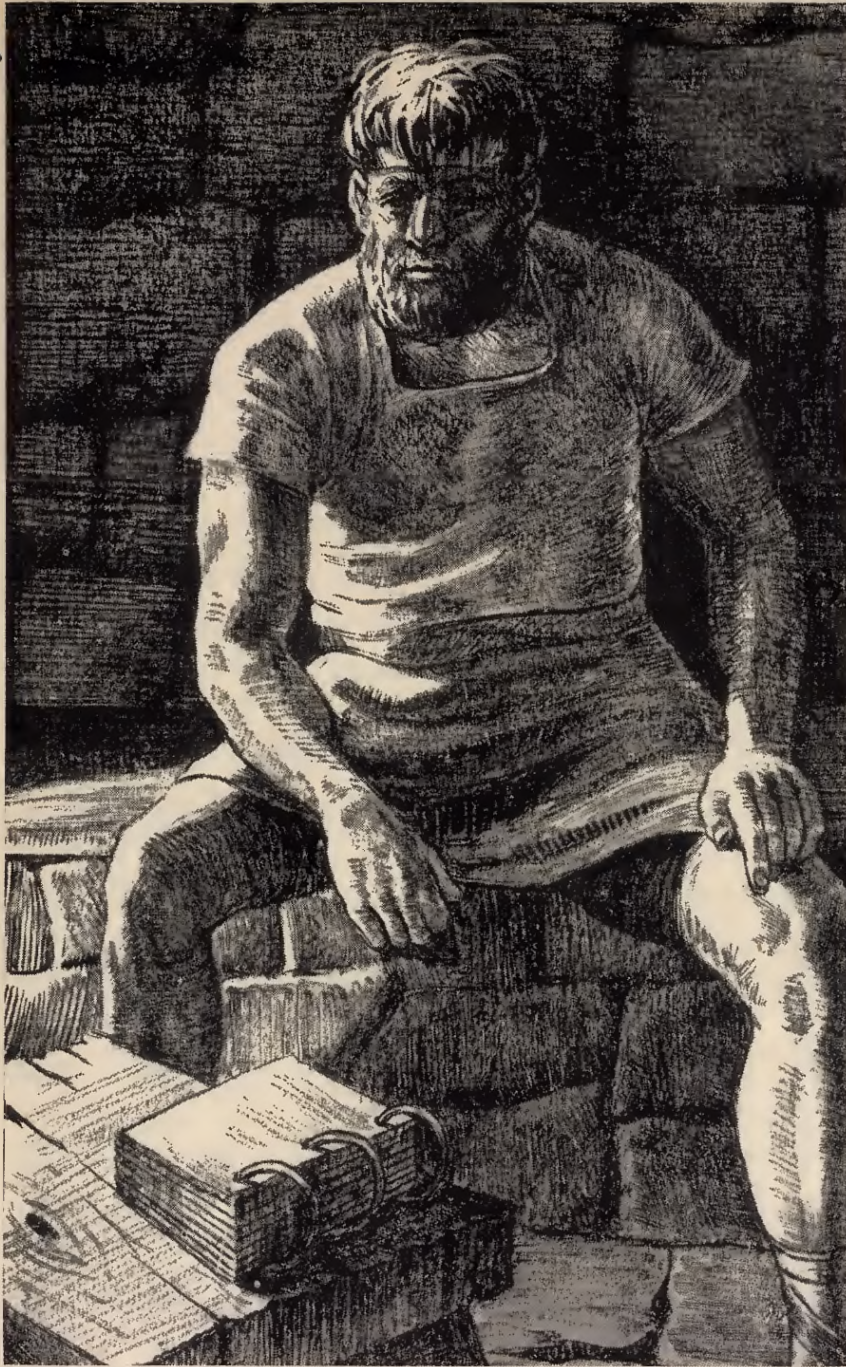
It is, moreover, a common thing in the Bible, for historians to use all-inclusive terms, without intending in the least either to mislead or to misrepresent the facts. Instances closely paralleling the case of the sons of Zedekiah are easily found.

In the case of the household of Ahaziah, the king, it is written that his mother Athaliah, ". . . arose and destroyed all the seed royal."¹⁸ Athaliah herself thought that was exactly what she had done, and ruled for six years on that premise.¹⁹ In point of fact a girl named Jehoshaba ". . . took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain."²⁰

In connection with the same slaughter in which the sons of Zedekiah perished, Jeremiah declared that ". . . the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah,"²¹ yet the new governor, Gedaliah, was shortly thereafter murdered by Ishmael "of the seed royal"²² who had escaped by hiding in Ammonite country during the siege.²³ With Ishmael were "the princes of the king."²⁴

There is something grimly amusing in the accounts of the destruction of the Midianites and Amalekites. Excepting little girls, it appears that the Midianite people were utterly exterminated under Moses.²⁵ But

*Numbers refer to bibliography at end of article.



"Biblical accounts tell of the seizure and murder of the sons of Zedekiah, king of Judah. In the Book of Mormon account, one of the sons of Zedekiah escaped death and came to the Western Hemisphere, where his name Mulek became attached to a people, a city, and a land."

some time later the Midianites rose up in such force that they overwhelmed Israel and kept them in misery for seven years.²⁶ Similarly, it is written that Saul reported to the prophet Samuel, saying that he had "... utterly destroyed the Amalekites,"²⁷ pursuant to a directive from Samuel requiring that Saul slay "... both man and woman, infant and suckling, . . ."²⁸ Yet David,

the successor of Saul found it necessary to repeat the killing, and again "... left neither man nor woman alive."²⁹ Notwithstanding these two destructions, shortly afterward a group of four hundred Amalekites kidnaped two of David's wives,³⁰ in company with other Amalekites, and escaped on camels leaving many more Amalekites dead behind.³¹

Instances in which even the word

all must be construed to mean something less than totality are many. A few will suffice to demonstrate the point. According to the record at one time Solomon held an eight-day feast "... and all Israel with him."³² Again, "... the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord."³³ In the very invasion at the time of Zedekiah, despite the record of many who escaped into Egypt,³⁴ it was recorded that young and old, "all" were given into the hand of the Chaldean invader.³⁵ And as a last example, at the death of Saul, "... all his house died together."³⁶ Of this passage, the celebrated commentator, Dr. Adam Clarke, judged that this could mean that those who were with the king were cut off, nothing more.³⁷ It is apparent in all of the passages cited that the writers had no intention of denying that there were exceptions. "All" seems to have been used to mean "the bulk" or perhaps only "representatives of all."

It is at once apparent that where the word *all* is not used, the mere expression being "... they slew the sons of Zedekiah . . ."³⁸ the narrative is even weaker, and it is perfectly proper to reach the true sense by inferring "they slew the sons of Zedekiah who did not escape."

Having seen, therefore, that the existence of an exception in the escape of Mulek is within the proper sense of the record, it remains to be seen whether or not the mechanics of the escape are in any way indicated.

Little children, as nature has ordained, and more particularly among people of simple life, are universally the charge of their mothers and sisters. At the escape of Zedekiah from Jerusalem, his wives and daughters went with him. The historian Josephus details it thus: "When the city was taken about midnight, and the enemy's generals were entered into the temple, and when Zedekiah was sensible of it, he took his wives and his children, and his captains and friends, and with them fled out of the city through the fortified ditch, and through the desert."³⁹ When the pursuing soldiers caught up with the

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fugitives near Jericho, many of those who fled the city with Zedekiah "left him and dispersed themselves, some one way and some another, and every one resolved to save himself."⁴⁰ "So the enemy took Zedekiah alive when he was deserted by all but a few, with his children and his wives." Those who were, as Dr. Clarke said in his commentary on the passage, "most probably persons who belonged to the palace and harem of Zedekiah, some of them his own concubines and children."

The women, with whom, as before demonstrated, would be found the "little ones" were remanded into the custody of Nebuzar-adan, the Chaldean general, and by him turned over to Gedaliah as puppet governor.⁴¹

When Ishmael, kinsman of the dead king, treacherously killed Gedaliah, he carried away with him the daughters of Zedekiah, toward the land of the Ammonites,⁴² with "all the residue of the people." Johanan followed quickly in pursuit, whereupon the "people who had gone with Ishmael joined forces with Johanan, and it is written that "the mighty men of war, and the women and the children" fearing to return to Jerusalem, departed to go into Egypt.⁴³

It is made eminently clear therefore, that whether with the women who were turned over to Nebuzar-adan, or behind in Jerusalem, or at Mizpah, the way was open for escape of Mulek. Indeed the narrative of the escape of the "women and children" among whom were the daughters of Zedekiah, furnishes a probable record of the way it was accomplished.

There is a strange and mysterious passage of scripture which is, by these happenings, and by the very implications of escape contained in the words *little ones* as including male children, for the first time made understandable:

A little one shall become a thousand,
and a small one a strong nation: I
the Lord will hasten it in his time.⁴⁴

The accomplishment of fulfilment of this prophecy through Mulek by way of the escape of the women of the house of Zedekiah is indicated in the Book of Mormon with clarity.

Thus, while but one son of Zedekiah is mentioned as having escaped, it is written in the plural form that "they," the "seed of Zedekiah are with us, and they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem," necessarily implying women, seed of Zedekiah, i.e., his daughters. That the "little one" became a thousand and a small one a strong nation is manifest from the fact that they were exceedingly numerous at the time Mosiah found them and brought about a union of countries.⁴⁵

It will be seen by reference to the passage cited, wherein complete destruction of groups is first declared and then an exception recited, that the only distinguishing characteristic between the common biblical accounts and the account of the killing of the sons of Zedekiah is the absence of a record of the exception within the pages of the Bible. It is supplied for the first time in the Book of Mormon, which stands thus as a necessary link in the chain of records.

Properly read, therefore, the record in the words of Jeremiah and II Kings, as supplemented in Helaman, is this:

And the king of Babylon slew the sons
of Zedekiah before his eyes:
All except it were Mulek.⁴⁶

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- ⁴Gen. 36:12; I Chron. 6:40; Dan. 2:37; John 18:10; Alma 8:3; 20:2; Omni 30.
- ⁵ II Kings 24:18; 25:2.
- ⁶ Ginsberg, *Leg. IV:293*; VI:382-3.
- ⁷Jer. 41:10; Josephus, *Ant. X:IX:4*.
- ⁸Num. 16:27.
- ⁹I Sam. 15:22.
- ¹⁰I Chron. 31:18.
- ¹¹Ezra. 3:13.
- ¹²Deut. 20:13-14.
- ¹³Num. 31:7, 9, 17.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, 31:9.
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- ¹⁶C. J. 10:3.
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- ²⁷*Ibid.*, 15:3.
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