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Source: *Selections from the BYU Religious Education Student Symposium 2003*
Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, 2003
Page(s): 69-79

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Some time ago I read an article by Daniel C. Peterson about various archaeological, social, and historical evidences for the Book of Mormon as an ancient record. In his article Peterson discusses similarities between the Gadianton robbers of the Book of Mormon and the guerilla groups of the twentieth century.[1]

As I studied the Gadianton robbers and the secret combination formed by Akish among the Jaredites, I observed the similarities illustrated by Peterson. As a result of my studies, I found myself becoming familiar with the scriptural record concerning these secret combinations. While serving a mission in Ireland in 2001, I purchased an old Bible out of mere curiosity. As I went through the concordance and appendices, I came across a reference to the Sicarii, an ancient Jewish group of robbers and assassins. From there I was led to several references to the works of Josephus regarding these Sicarii and other groups with which they were associated. I read through these various passages and found myself face to face with Gadianton robbers in an ancient Jewish setting.

In this paper I will examine how these secret combinations closely parallel each other in tactics, society, iniquity, and downfall. Each worked "according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness" (2 Nephi 26:22), and these combinations were "given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness" (3 Nephi 6:28). These similarities constitute what I believe is compelling evidence of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

I would hope that all here are familiar with the secret combinations found in the Book of Mormon and the destruction they caused among the various peoples. We will not discuss their origins and history in this paper. We will first briefly examine the Sicarii, placing them into their proper historical context before turning our attention to the similarities with the Gadiantons and other secret combinations in the Book of Mormon.

The Sicarii were "Jewish Zealots who attempted to expel the Romans and their partizans from the country, even resorting to murder to attain their object. Under their cloaks they concealed 'sicæ,' or small daggers, whence they received their name; and at popular assemblies, especially during the pilgrimage to the Temple mount, they stabbed their enemies, or, in other words, those who were friendly to the Romans."[2] The Romans hunted and destroyed the majority of the Sicarii. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the remainder of their group committed mass suicide in the besieged mountain fortress of Masada.[3]

There were many other criminal organizations operating alongside the Sicarii that functioned in a similar manner. At times it is hard to distinguish between these various groups when reading the historical records. I have tried to include only references to the Sicarii in this paper. Again, this is difficult because of the broad use of the term *robber* by Josephus, making it almost impossible at times to know exactly what group he is referring to. It is important to remember that all these groups operated by similar principles and therefore what applies to one group would apply to the majority of them.

In my studies I have discovered fourteen distinct and significant similarities between the Sicarii and secret combinations in the Book of Mormon. Taken together they serve to illustrate that these groups had the same author and originator.

1. Both the Sicarii and the Book of Mormon groups are referred to as *robbers*. The Gadiantons are referred to as robbers at every time period in the history covered by the Book of Mormon.[4] This distinction may be a general term applied to these groups by Mormon when he abridged the record. The Sicarii as well were repeatedly referred to as robbers by Josephus, who was their contemporary.[5]

The title *robber* is a significant description of the goals, aims, and behavior of these secret groups. They fall into the same category by title and definition, being people who take things from others by illicit means and methods. We shall see shortly that although these two groups are not connected by definition alone, the definition aptly fits both.

2. Both groups sought the downfall of the current government. The Gadiantons sought to destroy the judges of the land and the leaders of the people. The band of Akish specifically sought the destruction of the king. The Sicarii's aim was to rid Judah of the Roman government's influence. These groups' objective was the overthrow of the government and liberty of the people. Moroni, in describing the iniquity of the society of Akish, said that "whosoever buildeth [these groups] up seeketh to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries" (Ether 8:25). After several failed attempts, the Gadianton robbers were successful: "they did destroy upon the judgment-seat, yea, did murder the chief judge of the land. And the people were divided one against another" (3 Nephi 7:1–2). Akish's combination was formed for the express purpose of destroying Omer, the Jaredite king. Though Omer escaped assassination, he did lose his kingdom (see Ether 9:1–3), so it is clear that both Book of Mormon groups were successful in overthrowing their respective governments.

The Sicarii were unable to overthrow the Roman influence in the region, but they certainly tried, and they did wreak havoc at times. One of their notable exploits against the Romans was the capture and plundering of the Roman mountain fortress of Masada. The "Sicarii got possession of the fortress by treachery" and plundered its provisions and treasures.[6] They also "stirred up the people to make war with the Romans, and said they ought not to obey them [the Romans] at all."[7] Beginning at the festival of Xylophory, the Sicarii led a rebellion in which they captured Jerusalem and the fortress of Antonia.[8]

3. Both groups targeted prominent religious and political figures for assassination. Because both groups sought to destroy their governments and disrupt society as a whole, it should come as no

surprise that these groups used assassination to achieve their goals. The Jaredites, who were under a monarchy, were especially susceptible to this tactic because a single assassination could effectively change the government. Akish removed Omer from the kingship, allowing Jared to ascend to the throne. Akish then arranged the murder of Jared, at which point he assumed the throne himself (see Ether 9:5–6). All of this kingdom-changing came about by the assassination (attempted or realized) of political leaders.

The Gadianton robbers were also infamous for assassinations. Beginning with Pahoran, the Gadianton robbers assassinated many leaders, including Cezoram and his son, several prophets of the Lord, Lachoneus, and Seezoram. They also attempted to assassinate Helaman.[9] It is certainly reasonable to assume that there were additional leaders killed by the Gadiantons.

The Sicarii were also responsible for killing several people who were involved both politically and religiously in their society. Perhaps the murder for which they were most infamous was that of the high priest Jonathan. In this particular case the Sicarii worked in league with the corrupt Felix, a procurator of Judea, to destroy Jonathan, whom Felix viewed as an annoyance that had to be removed.[10] The Sicarii murdered a great many others as well.

4. Both groups used friends and close associates of the target as accomplices to the murder. In the case of the murder of Jonathan, the Sicarii performed the murder, but it was arranged by Jonathan's friend Doras. As Josephus noted, "Felix [Jonathan's chief enemy] persuaded one of Jonathan's most faithful friends . . . whose name was Doras, to bring the robbers upon Jonathan, in order to kill him."[11] The Sicarii then murdered Jonathan.

Returning to the original formation of Akish's combination, we can see that Akish was a friend of Omer, his target for assassination (see Ether 8:11). Just as the Sicarii killed Jonathan with the help of Jonathan's friends, the same sort of thing happened when Akish plotted to murder his friend Omer.

5. Both groups are accredited with killing, plundering, and destroying those who opposed them. The Gadianton robbers actually fought extensive wars with the Nephites in an attempt to destroy

them. At the beginning of 3 Nephi the Nephites found themselves locked in a struggle for survival with the Gadiantons, who had sworn to destroy the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 1–2).

The Sicarii also attacked and destroyed those who did not aid them. Several times Josephus recorded such activities: "When part of the Jews of reputation opposed them, they slew some of them,"[12] and "when any persons would not comply with them, they set fire to their villages, and plundered them."[13] "They also came frequently upon the villages belonging to their enemies, with their weapons, and plundered them, and set them on fire."[14]

Terrorism seems to be part of an important strategy that dominated the basic way these societies operated. Through threats, murders, pillages, and other forms of destruction, these societies sought to terrify the populace into complying with their wishes.

6. Both groups used flattery as a means of motivating and recruiting accomplices. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "Flattery is the act of ingratiating oneself into another's confidence by excessive praise, or by insincere speech and acts. It includes the raising of false and unfounded hopes; there is always an element of dishonesty attending it."[15] I understand this to be a crucial element in the success of any organization that is diametrically opposed to the norms of a society. These organizations' leaders tried to convince people to leave the cultural norm and to act in ways contrary to their societies' belief systems. To accomplish this they employed flattery. They made promises they could not keep, they played off of emotions and fears, they complimented and built people up to make them believe they were more capable than perhaps they actually were. The result was that the people felt empowered and that the possible return was worth the risk, to the point that they left the "system" and began a discipleship of evil. This tactic was seen in operation in both groups.

Gadianton, after becoming the leader of the robbers, "flatter[ed] them . . . that if they would place him in the judgment-seat he would grant unto those who belonged to his band that they should be placed in power and authority among the people" (Helaman 2:5). Later, Jacob, another leader among the robbers, "seeing that their

enemies were more numerous than they . . . commanded his people that they should take their flight into the northernmost part of the land . . . until they were joined by dissenters, (for he flattered them that there would be many dissenters) . . . and they did so" (3 Nephi 7:12). Akish also used flattery as a tool of control in his organization. He led his followers "away by fair promises to do whatsoever thing he desired" (Ether 8:17).

The Sicarii also used flattery as a means of recruiting people to their cause. Josephus says that the "robbers and impostors . . . deluded the multitude."[16] On one occasion they "persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God."[17] In this instance they used the promise of divine manifestations to convince people to follow them. It seems logical for the Sicarii to focus on divine manifestations when we remember that the Jews were looking for a Messiah to deliver them from a physical enemy (one of the reasons they rejected Christ). I do not believe it improbable that at some point the Sicarii would have played off of this theme of a saving Messiah in some way to gain followers. The wonders and signs they promised to show would, of course, have appeared to be proof of this divine Savior.

7. Both groups were forced to seek refuge in the wilderness to avoid destruction by the government. Every criminal organization must hide in some way to avoid destruction. Most do not flee into the wilderness; however, both of these groups were forced to do so. At the very beginning of their organization, the Gadiantons fled into the wilderness (see Helaman 2:11). There they set up a permanent base of operations and waged war against the Nephites and Lamanites from their wilderness hideouts (see Helaman 11:28–33). After this initial band of robbers was destroyed, Jacob led the revival of the organization back into the wilderness when popular opinion turned against them (see 3 Nephi 7:12).

The Sicarii likewise existed in the wilderness. It was in the wilderness where they promised the multitudes signs and wonders.[18] Josephus noted the coming of the robbers into the city, from

which we can infer that they mostly dwelt outside of the city.[19] And we read of "Eleazar, the son of Dineus, a robber, who had many years made his abode in the mountains."[20]

8. Both groups made false accusations to try to rid themselves of enemies. In the Book of Mormon, after Nephi prophesied that the people would be destroyed if they did not repent, certain of the Gadianton robbers tried to turn the people against Nephi by falsely accusing him. Though some of their accusations were true, they included falsities and lies in an attempt to anger the people more (see Helaman 8:1–7). After the murder of Seezoram, the Gadiantons accused Nephi of the murder on falsified and unfounded charges (see Helaman 9:16–20).

The Sicarii also used this tactic to eliminate people. Catullus, a governor, "taught the Sicarii to accuse men falsely" and then used their accusations as grounds to kill one of his hated enemies, Alexander, and his wife. These false accusations were then extended further to include Jews beyond Judea, even including Josephus.[21]

9. Both groups acted under false pretenses to perform their unlawful acts. Kishkumen went forth to the judgment seat to murder Pahoran (see Helaman 1:9). From the wording of the verse I receive the impression that Kishkumen was coming forth under false pretenses to kill Pahoran. I doubt that the Nephites would have let anyone close enough to the chief judge to murder him in his own chair. Most likely Kishkumen came under the pretense of needing to have some matter resolved, or having some complaint that the judge alone could deal with.

The Sicarii used this tactic with great success. First, under the pretense of religious devotion, they went among the people on the days of worship, at which point they murdered their intended targets.[22] After performing the murder they would join "those that had indignation against them [the Sicarii]" and mourn the murder, and in so doing escape detection. Because the Sicarii murdered under the cloak of disguise, it was impossible for people to trust each other. So effective were they that the people in Jerusalem lived in constant fear that even their most trusted friends might kill them.[23]

10. Both groups intermingled and mixed with the people to

avoid detection. This goes hand in hand with the previous point so I will touch only lightly on it. To avoid detection both the Gadiantons and the Sicarii hid among the general population, and by so doing they could not be found.[24]

11. Both groups were motivated by the desire for monetary gain to some extent. Paul told Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), and these robbers certainly loved money. They wanted to be in positions of power so that they could get monetary gain and make others subject to them. The Gadianton robbers "began to commit secret murders, and to rob and to plunder, that they might get gain" (Helaman 6:17). The Sicarii were also interested in making a profit. They worked with Albinus, the procurator, to plunder the populace.[25] At other times they plundered villages as well.[26]

12. Both groups profaned holy things. Since the beginning of time the devil has corrupted the things of righteousness to use for his own purposes. On the American continent, members of these secret combinations swore to do evil by that which only "inviteth and enticeth to do good" (Moroni 7:13). Akish caused his people to swear to him "by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens" (Ether 8:14). The Gadiantons swore "by their everlasting Maker" to commit iniquity (Helaman 1:11).

In their actions the Sicarii stepped beyond even the pernicious evil of swearing on holy things. They would actually "fall upon the holy places" and attack and plunder them.[27] They murdered people "not only in remote parts of the city, but in the temple itself also."[28] On another occasion the Sicarii fought amongst themselves in the temple, spilling their own blood inside the holy edifice.[29]

13. The works of both groups completely corrupted their respective societies. One of the greatest themes of the latter part of the Book of Mormon is that the Gadianton robbers completely corrupted the Nephite and Lamanite societies. Alma, in entrusting the records to his son Helaman, commanded that Helaman not reveal the works of the Jaredites so that the Nephites would not know them, "lest peradventure they should fall into darkness" (Alma 37:27).

The Sicarii were also guilty of corrupting their society, at least

in the views of Josephus. Their actions "filled the city with all sorts of impiety."[30] They caused revolts among the people and they murdered, plundered, and killed. They struck such great fear into their society as to destroy nearly all trust among the people.[31]

14. Both groups were viewed by contemporaries as being a deciding factor in the destruction of their civilizations. The Book of Mormon prophets and Josephus are equally forceful in connecting the destruction of their people with these secret combinations.

When the works of the Gadiantons had spread throughout the land, Mormon said that "they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction" (Helaman 6:40). This destruction eventually fell upon the Nephites, and Mormon stated that "this Gadianton did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi" (Helaman 2:13). Moroni added, "They have caused the destruction of this people [the Jaredites] . . . and also the destruction of the people of Nephi. And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed" (Ether 8:21–22).

An assembly of Jews cautioned the Jewish nation, in regard to the Sicarii, "to have a care, lest they [the Jews] should be brought to destruction by their means."[32] They further "accused the madness of the Sicarii, and demonstrated that they had been the authors of all the evils that had come upon them."[33] Josephus used equally strong words in condemning the Sicarii. Speaking of their works he said, "This seems to me to have been the reason why God, out of his hatred to these men's wickedness, rejected our city; and as for the temple, he no longer esteemed it sufficiently pure for him to inhabit therein, but brought the Romans upon us, and threw a fire upon the city to purge it; and brought upon us, our wives, and children, slavery,—as desirous to make us wiser by our calamities."[34]

These fourteen points I have identified serve sufficiently to show the similarities between the Sicarii and the secret combinations in the Book of Mormon. Some would argue that Joseph Smith molded the Gadianton robbers after the Sicarii, but this is a simply absurd stance to take. The information available to Joseph Smith would have been

limited to the passages in Josephus, the information totaling no more than a few pages of text. In the index of the 1868 edition of the complete works of Josephus is exactly one reference to the Sicarii, and none to robbers. To copy from Josephus would have meant that Joseph read the entire volume of *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Wars of the Jews* (755 total pages in the 1868 edition), combining the scattered references into a coherent picture of this secretive organization. On top of this, because of his lack of education it is highly unlikely that Joseph had ever heard of the Sicarii.

The logical explanation is that these two groups had the same origin and author, that being the devil. The devil revealed these plots to Cain (see Moses 5:29–31), he revealed them to Gadianton (see Helaman 6:26), and he revealed them to the Sicarii. These plans "were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit" (Helaman 6:26). The Book of Mormon is a true record of their evils. If the Gadiantons are not merely a plagiarized form of the Sicarii but an actual separate organization founded by the devil in the ancient Americas, then the similarities between the two are substantial evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

My research into this matter has strengthened my testimony of the Book of Mormon and the prophetic call of Joseph Smith. I hope that this paper has helped the readers strengthen their testimonies as well. Still, it is only through the power of the Holy Ghost that we can come to know for ourselves the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I hope that we have all taken the time, and found the sincerity, to ask God for ourselves.

NOTES

1. See Daniel C. Peterson, "A Scholar Looks at Evidences of the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Book of Mormon Lecture Series* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995) 6–10.

2. Richard Gottheil and Samuel Krauss, *Jewish Encyclopedia,* www.jewishencyclopedia.com, s.v. "sicarii."

3. See Gottheil and Krauss, *Jewish Encyclopedia,* s.v. "masada."

4. See Helaman 2:10; 3:23; 6:18; 6:37; 7:14; 11:26; 3 Nephi 1:27; 2:17; 4 Nephi 1:46; Mormon 1:18; Ether 10:33.

5. See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews,* trans. William Whiston (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868), Book XX, 8:5, 10; Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews,* trans. William Whiston (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868), Book II, 17:3, 6.

6. Josephus, *Wars,* Book VII, 8:4; see also 8:1–4.

7. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6.

8. Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 17:6–10.

9. See Helaman 1:19; 6:19, 23; 8:27; 3 Nephi 6:23; 7:1.

10. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:5; *Wars,* Book VII, 10:1.

11. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:5.

12. Josephus, *Wars,* Book VII, 10:1.

13. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6.

14. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:10.

15. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine,* 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 287.

16. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:5.

17. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6.

18. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6.

19. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 9:3.

20. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 6:1.

21. Josephus, *Wars,* Book VII, 11:2–3.

22. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:10.

23. Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 13:3.

24. See Helaman 1:12; Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:10; Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 13:3.

25. See Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 14:1.

26. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6, 10.

27. Josephus, *Wars,* Book IV, 7:2.

28. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:5.

29. See Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 17:9.

30. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:6.

31. See Josephus, *Wars,* Book II, 13:3.

32. Josephus, *Wars,* Book VII, 10:1.

33. Josephus, *Wars,* Book VII, 10:1.

34. Josephus, *Antiquities,* Book XX, 8:5.