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SERIES OF LAWS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

By John W. Welch

Statutes in the ancient Near East often appear in law codes or series. A law code is a relatively thorough body of laws and rules defining a full set of rights and remedies. A series of laws, on the other hand, is a brief listing of legal statements. Thus, for example, Deuteronomy 12:1--26:19 and Exodus 20:23--23:19 are law codes, whereas the Ten Commandments form a series. The Ten Commandments are not the only series of laws listed in the Old Testament, and this law series form is considered "a general law form in the Bible."¹ Other series, which often resemble or relate to the Decalogue, have been identified in Exodus 34:11-26; Deuteronomy 5:7-21; 27:15-26; Leviticus 19:3-14; 19:26-36; 18:7-18; 21:1-9; 21:10-15; 25:13-31; 25:39-54; and elsewhere.²

In the Book of Mormon, there are no law codes. There are, however, several law series. The Decalogue of Exodus 20 is one such series. It was quoted verbatim by the prophet Abinadi in Mosiah 12:34-36, 13:12-24, as part of his refutation of charges brought against him by the people, king Noah, and his priests in

¹ Elias Auerbach, "Das Zehngebot--Allgemeine Gesetzes-Form in der Bibel," Vetus Testamentum 16 (1966): 255-76.

² Ibid. See also William Brinner, "An Islamic Decalogue," in W. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions, Papers Presented at the University of Denver Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies, 1983-85, Brown Judaic Studies 110 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 67-84.

the city of Nephi. Thus, it is clear that the Decalogue was present on the Plates of Brass and was considered by the Nephites to be a fundamental part of their law.

In addition to the Decalogue, the Nephites had other laws. For example, the "laws of the land" (Jar. 1:5) and the "laws of their country" (Hel. 6:23), as well as the "the law of Moses" (Alma 30:3), "the laws of Mosiah" (Hel. 4:22) and the "laws of God" (Hel. 6:23) are mentioned frequently in the Book of Mormon. These laws were probably written to some extent in a law codes. The purpose of this report is to explore what can be discovered about those underlying Nephite laws by examining several places in the Book of Mormon where those laws are summarized or restated in the form of legal series. At least nine texts in the Book of Mormon contain such series. They have much in common with each other. By comparing and amalgamating them, one can conjecture about the form and content of the underlying Nephite law code.

The earliest series of laws in the Book of Mormon appears in 2 Nephi 26:32, where Nephi states that "the Lord God hath commanded that men should not" do the eight following things:

- Murder
- Lie
- Steal
- Take the name of God in vain
- Envy
- Have malice
- Contend with one another
- Commit whoredoms.

Nephi concludes with the words: "They should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them shall perish." As will be seen

below, it is typical for each Nephite law series to end with a universalization of these rules. Here, Nephi's series ends with the broad injunction that "they should do none of these things." Other series will end with prohibitions against "any manner of wickedness."

Also, a relationship between Nephi's series and the Decalogue is apparent, as is also often the case with other law series in the Old Testament. Six of Nephi's eight proscriptions come from the Ten Commandments, namely those against murder, lying (bearing false witness), stealing, taking the name of God in vain, envying (coveting), and committing whoredoms (adultery).

It is also interesting that a so-called "motivating clause"³ follows Nephi's series: "For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness" (2 Nephi 26:33). Stylistically similar "motive clauses" in Exodus 34:18, 24 read: "For in the month of Abib thou camest out from Egypt. . . . For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land." Leviticus 20:26 provides another example of a similar motive clause: "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."

³ See generally Rifat Sonsino, Motive Clauses in Hebrew Law, SBL Dissertation Series 45 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980).

The next instance of a law series in the Book of Mormon appears in Mosiah 2:13. Here King Benjamin certifies to his people that he has enforced the laws. In particular, he lists those laws and says that he has:

Not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches
 Not allowed confinement in dungeons
 Not allowed slavery
 No murder
 No plunder
 No stealing
 No commit adultery
 Not allowed any manner of wickedness.

Here too, as was the case with Nephi's list, an apparent connection with the Decalogue can be observed in four instances: namely regarding the seeking of riches (coveting), murder, stealing, and adultery. Also, Benjamin's list ends with the universalization disallowing "any manner of wickedness."

The last five of the eight things mentioned by Benjamin in his list are repeated several subsequent times in the Book of Mormon. This series appears again in Mosiah 29:36, where Benjamin's son, Mosiah II, uses this list to describe the conduct of an unrighteous king. After mentioning iniquities and abominations, wars and contentions in general, he enumerates these other things a wicked king would do:

Bloodshed
 Stealing
 Plundering
 Committing whoredoms
 All manner of iniquities.

It is apparent that the elements in this list are equivalent to those in Mosiah 2:13. Only the order of plundering and stealing

has been reversed, which might be due to the fact that these words were spoken by Mosiah in a speech or due to Mormon's abridging process (see Mosiah 29:33).

Next, in Alma 23:3 a proclamation was issued by the king of the Lamanites, following his conversion at the hands of Benjamin's grandson Aaron. That decree ordered that his people ought not to:

Murder
Plunder
Steal
Commit adultery
Commit any manner of wickedness.

Apparently, the law that had been taught by King Benjamin was specifically taught by his grandsons Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni, as they preached among the Lamanites, for the Benjamite list is replicated precisely in the proclamation of this Lamanite king.

In Alma 30:10, Alma gives an accounting of his administration of the laws by affirming that he had enforced the law to the full extent possible:

If [a man] murdered he was punished unto death;
and if he robbed he was also punished;
and if he stole he was also punished;
and if he committed adultery he was also punished;
yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

It appears that Alma is claiming here to have done the same things that Benjamin had previously claimed to have done, namely to have carried out his duty as the highest legal officer of the land. It is probably significant that both Benjamin and Alma

give this accounting of their stewardships at what appears to be a year rite festival probably held on a sabbatical year.⁴

The Benjamite list appears again in Helaman 6:23. That verse explains that the Gadianton robbers had bound themselves together in order that they might:

Murder
Plunder
Steal
Commit whoredoms
And all manner of wickedness.

These things were said to be "contrary to the laws of their country and also the laws of their God" (Hel. 6:23). Those laws of God and country were undoubtedly the same as the laws enforced by King Benjamin and his son Mosiah (see Mosiah 2:31, "the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him"), for this list is again identical to the list in Mosiah 2:13.

The same series surfaces again in Helaman 7:21 in the words of Nephi, when he criticized the corrupt rulers in the city of Zarahemla who were acting improperly that they might:

⁴ Israelite rulers were periodically required to give such a public accounting, typically at the New Year Feast of Tabernacles, at which time the Paragraph of the King (Deut. 17:14-17) was read to assure that the ruler had carried out his duties (as Benjamin had) and had not "multiplied horses, wives, or silver and gold to himself." See further, John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report WEL-85c.

Get gold and silver [and] the riches and vain things of this
 world
 Murder
 Plunder
 Steal
 Bear false witness
 And do all manner of iniquity.

Like King Benjamin's list, this list begins by mentioning gold and silver and the riches of the world, and it again ends with an expansive reference to "all manner of iniquity." The only difference here is that Nephi has substituted "bear false witness" in this list in the place of "commit adultery" in Benjamin's usually followed list. This is understandable, for the political crimes of the corrupt leaders of the government in Zarahemla undoubtedly involved lying and perjury, whereas they may well not have committed adultery (or if they had, adultery would have been irrelevant to Nephi's political indictment). In particular, they conspired against Nephi and tried to provoke the citizenry to bring legal action against Nephi for "revil[ing] against this people and against our law" (Hel. 8:2). Raising such trumped up charges in a judicial context was of the essence of "bearing false witness."⁵

Thus, it appears that Nephi, who authored both Helaman 6:23 and 7:21, indeed followed the admonition of his father, Helaman II, who admonished his sons to "remember, remember, my

⁵ See, e.g., Deut. 19:16-21. "The words translated 'false witness' are technical terms designating a person who offers false or deceptive testimony in a trial," Dale Patrick, Old Testament Law (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), p. 56. To bring a law suit, one needed to state one's complaint basically as a witness.

sons, the words which King Benjamin spake unto his people" (Helaman 5:9). The words of Benjamin were remembered and used accurately on these two occasions.

Two slightly modified versions of Benjamin's list appear in later Nephite writings. In Helaman 3:14, Mormon laments his inability to give a full account of Nephite history, mentioning among other things, their righteousness and their wickedness,

Their murders
 Their robbings
 Their plunderings
 All manner of abominations
 Whoredoms.

For some unknown reason, Mormon has reversed the order of the last two items in the standard formulaic list--an understandable variation given the intervening years. He has also substituted "robbings" for "stealing," a significant change, since Mormon was deeply concerned, especially in the book of Helaman, to record the foul deeds of the Gadianton robbers. He has also switched the order of robbing and plundering, evidently to emphasize the seriousness of the robbings.⁶

Finally, in Ether 8:16, Moroni comments about the corruptness of the Jaredite kings. He says that "they were kept up by the power of the devil to administer these oaths under the people, to keep them in darkness," to help those people who sought:

⁶ For a relevant discussion of the distinction between theft and robbery, see my, "Theft and Robbery in the Book of Mormon and Ancient Near Eastern Law," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report WEL-85a.

To gain power
 To murder
 To plunder
 To lie
 To commit all manner of wickedness
 And whoredoms.

In some respects, Moroni's series resembles that used by Nephi to describe the wickedness of the Gadianton rulers, and in other respects, it follows his father Mormon's series in Helaman 3:14. Like Nephi's series in Helaman 7:21, Moroni's list begins with a reference to power (cf. riches), murder, and plunder. Also, Nephi's reference to bearing false witness has been retained. Like Helaman 3:14 and the standard Benjamite list, Moroni goes on to mention whoredoms, which (like his father) he places after the generic clause, "all manner of wickedness." Mention of stealing or robbing is lacking. It appears, therefore, that Moroni drew upon both the form of this series found in Helaman 7:21, but that he also kept in "adultery" from the normal Benjamite list, thereby implicitly saying that the kings of the Jaredites not only violated the laws of king Benjamin but also were like the corrupt rulers in Zarahemla at the end of the first century B.C.

It is significant that each of the foregoing eight instances of the five-part Benjaminite list occurs in a politically and administratively oriented context. In each case, kings or rulers are affirming that they have carried out their official duties, or are describing or establishing the public laws of their lands, or are being criticized for having failed to discharge the obligations imposed by this series. Thus, it

appears that this particular series of laws constituted the essential charter of public law in Nephite civilization, against which the performance and behavior of kings, rulers, and public officers was regularly and consistently judged.

Of those who "belong[ed] to the church of God" (Hel. 4:11; Alma 1:31), however, a higher standard of behavior was required, as the following three series directed at the church demonstrate. One may note that Jewish law similarly distinguishes between one series of basic laws that are applicable to all mankind (referred to in the rabbinic literature as the Noachide or Noachian laws⁷), and the further body of laws applicable to the covenant people of God, who were expected to live by a higher and holier standard.

In Alma 1:32, after reporting that those in the church lived by a high moral code, the Chief Judge Alma the Younger describes the offenses committed by those outside the church. Their crimes included:

- 1 Sorceries
- 2 Idolatry

- 3 Idleness
- 4 Babblings

- 5 Envyings
- 6 Strife

- 7 Wearing costly apparel
- 8 Being lifted up in pride

⁷ These rules were called Noachide laws because they were applicable to Jew and Gentile alike, all of whom are descendants of Noah and therefore come under the Noachitic covenant. Research on this subject has been reported by Thane A. Sandberg, "Noachide Laws," F.A.R.M.S. Archive, a student under my direction.

- 9 Lying
- 10 Persecuting⁸
- 11 Thieving
- 12 Robbing
- 13 Committing whoredoms
- 14 Murdering
- 15 All manner of wickedness.

Since Alma was a judge, he was conscious of the extent to which these fourteen specific actions and one general offense were contrary to the law. He certifies that "the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible" (1:32). Alma may be saying at least three here. First, it appears that church members were expected to avoid transgressing all of these rules, not just the shorter list applicable to the population generally. Thus, the law was enforced to the extent possible, i.e. in those areas covered by the shorter publicly applicable list. Second, Alma may have added this comment in his own defense, thereby affirming in the record that he had diligently discharged his public duties as the Chief Judge. Third, Alma may be acknowledging that fact that it is difficult to enforce laws against being idle, babbling, or envying. Similar enforcement problems were encountered by Jewish jurists in trying to decide how to enforce, for example, the Tenth Commandment that a person should

⁸ "Persecuting" appears in the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon; it was overlooked in typesetting the 1830 Edition and was restored to the text in the 1981 edition. This word in the text restores the paired characteristic of the overall list.

not covet.⁹ In addition we note that, as was the case with Benjamin's series, a connection between Alma's series here and the Ten Commandments is also perceptible in five places. Both mention idolatry, lying (bearing false witness), thieving (stealing), whoredoms (adultery), and murder. This list of offenses has also been given a literary form by pairing each crime with a related one.

Later in Alma's legal career second long list appears. It is found in Alma 16:18 and describes the laws which were taught by the priests ordained by Alma and Amulek for the "establishment of the church . . . throughout the land" (Alma 16:15). These priests went forth among the people and preached against:

- 1 Lyings
- 2 Deceivings
- 3 Envyings
- 4 Strifes
- 5 Malice
- 6 Revilings
- 7 Stealing
- 8 Robbing
- 9 Plundering
- 10 Murdering
- 11 Committing adultery
- 12 All manner of lasciviousness.

⁹ See, e.g., Bernard S. Jackson, "Liability for Mere Intention in Early Jewish Law," in his Essays in Jewish and Comparative Legal History (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 202-34.

They cried "that these things ought not so to be" (16:18). The word "ought" or an equivalent idea also appears in 2 Nephi 26:32 (men should not . . .), and in Alma 23:3 in the decree of the king of the Lamanites ("they ought not to . . ."). More moral suasion than legal force stands behind these rules and laws. Those who would belong to the church would be expected to abide by this expanded set of ethical and legal provisions.

Alma's two series in Alma 1:32 and 16:18 can therefore be compared and contrasted with the Benjamite series in several ways. (1) Both of Alma's lists are similar to each other in length, and they stand out when compared in this regard with the family of shorter series following the formulation of King Benjamin. (2) Alma's long lists mention all of the items found in Benjamin's list (riches, murder, plunder, stealing, adultery, all manner of wickedness), but Alma's lists go on to include other things as well. This evidence indicates that Alma was concerned in the church with the observance of a wider array of crimes and ethical concepts than had been previously enforced by the kings in the public setting. Perhaps this was one of the consequences of the shift from kingship to judgeship. Previously, the king was concerned only with what might be considered major public crimes, whereas the judge was involved with all the law, including its requirements of inner morality and righteousness. (3) Alma's two lists both mention "stealing (or thieving)" and also "robbing," whereas Benjamin's series speaks only of "stealing." (4) The Benjamite lists appear quite consistently in the order of "murder-plunder-steal-commit

adultery—any manner of wickedness," whereas Alma's lists place "steal-rob" together ahead of plunder, murder, and adultery, followed by "all manner of lasciviousness (or wickedness)." (5) Alma's two series contain offenses such as envying, strife, malice, reviling, idolatry, which no Benjamite series ever includes. (6) The Benjamite series always appears in the context of royal proclamations or commentary on governmental behavior, whereas Alma's series is given as a standard of conduct for individual behavior especially applicable to church members. Thus, it is evident that Alma's lists were distinctive and stand apart from the more politically oriented Benjamite series.

Alma's two lists themselves can be compared as follows. It is striking that the twelve items listed in Alma 16:18, like those in 1:32, follow the same literary technique of presenting these items in matching pairs. The pairing in Alma 16:18 is somewhat different from that used in Alma 1:32, but the differences are not so great that one cannot discern several singular characteristics, if not distinctive authorship. There are eight points of overlap between these two lists, and the pairing characteristic is evident in each, apparently as a distinctive element of Alma's style. For convenient comparison the two lists are arranged here side by side:

Alma 16:18

- 1 Lyings
- 2 Deceivings
- 3 Envyings
- 4 Strifes
- 5 Malice
- 6 Revilings
- 7 Stealing
- 8 Robbing
- 9 Plundering
- 10 Murdering
- 11 Committing adultery
- 12 All manner of lasciviousness.

Alma 1:32

- 1 Sorceries
- 2 Idolatry
- 3 Idleness
- 4 Babblings
- 9 Persecuting
- 10 Lying
- 5 Envyings
- 6 Strife
- 7 Wearing costly apparel
- 8 Being lifted up in pride
- 11 Thieving
- 12 Robbing
- 14 Murdering
- 13 Committing whoredoms
- 15 All manner of wickedness.

It also appears that Alma's series is the product, to a large extent, of a combination of the early series of Nephi (2 Nephi 26:32) and the list of Benjamin. By combining Nephi's words (which included lying, envy, malice, and strife, along with murder, stealing, taking the name of God in vain, and adultery) with Benjamin's provisions (concerning riches, murder, plunder, stealing, and adultery), one obtains all of Alma's laws except for the first four, namely sorcery, idolatry, idleness and babblings. Perhaps, Alma was consciously and symbolically combining here the prophetic tradition of Nephi with the political office of Benjamin, both of which Alma had inherited.

In these lists, also, one can identify the ways in which Alma's legal regime was different from that of all other Nephite rulers. His concerns about sorcery and speech undoubtedly arose in connection with his open conflicts with the followers of Nehor during the first years of Alma's judicial tenure.

The influence of Alma's lists can be discerned in yet a further list that appears in Helaman 4:12. Here too the subject is the behavior of people "who professed to belong to the church of God" (Hel. 4:11), and the long list is used to indict them of their misconduct and transgressions. The following list appears in the annals of the sixty-first year of the reign of the judges, still in the tradition of Alma the Younger, the first Chief Judge, but 47 and 56 years after Alma's articulation of the two lists discussed above. In Helaman, the record indicates that wickedness and abomination came among the members of the church because of the following:

- 1 Pride
- 2 Excessive riches
- 3 Oppressing the poor
- 4 Withholding food
- 5 Withholding clothing
- 6 Smiting the weak on the cheek

- 7 Mocking the sacred
- 8 Denying prophecy and revelation

- 9 Murdering
- 10 Plundering
- 11 Lying
- 12 Stealing
- 13 Committing Adultery

- 14 Rising up in contentions
- 15 Deserting to the land of Nephi

- 16 Great Wickedness.

This list is different in several ways from Alma's earlier lists, showing that such formulations of Nephite law, especially within the church, was not rigid. Provisions could apparently be modified, added or deleted, based on the needs and circumstances of the time. During the time reported in Helaman 4, for example, persecution (Alma 1:32) had escalated to sacrilege (mocking sacred things) and to repudiation (denying the spirit of prophecy and revelation); strife (Alma 1:32) had expanded into contentions. Also, the problem of expatriation had become a severe problem (many Nephites would have preferred to move out rather than live under the corrupt regime of the Gadianton rulers), and thus leaving Zarahemla for the land of Nephi was specifically prohibited. In most other respects, however, this list compares closely with Alma's lists. Pride not only appears in Alma 1:32 (wearing costly apparel, being lifted up in pride), but also in Alma 1:30. Murder, plunder, lying, stealing, adultery, and the universalization of wickedness are all present in Alma's lists as well.

Finally, if one combines these Nephite legal lists into a single composite series, one generates a collection which undoubtedly reflects a major portion of the underlying Nephite law code. By then comparing the following composite series with the Ten Commandments and the Code of the Covenant (together found in Exodus 20:1-23:19), one can further see that virtually all of the laws found in the Nephite lists are also contained in Exodus 20:1-23:19. This leads to the conclusion that the Nephites knew and used a text similar to the Ten Commandments

and the Code of the Covenant as their basic source of law, which in turn yields specific insights into the meaning of specific terms and provisions in the Nephite law lists.

<u>Composite Series</u>	<u>Exodus 20-23</u>
Sorceries	22:18 (witches)
Idolatry	20:3-6, 23-26; 23:24
Taking the name of God in vain	20:7
Idleness	23:10 ("thou <u>shalt</u> sow")
Babblings	21:17? (cursing parents)
Lying	20:16; 23:1-4
Deceiving	23:8 (bribery)
Persecuting	22:21; 23:9 (oppression?)
Envy	20:17 (covet)
Strife-Contention	21:18-27 (striving, fighting)
Malice	20:12; 21:15 (hitting parents)
Reviling	22:28 (reviling the gods)
Wearing costly apparel- seeking riches	22:25 (usury, oppress poor)
Being lifted up in pride	22:21; 23:9 ("ye were strangers")
Stealing-Thieving ¹⁰	20:15; 22:7-14
Robbing-Plundering ¹¹	22:6 (arson)
Murder	20:13; 21:12-14

¹⁰ Stealing and thieving are synonyms in English, both being the translation of the Hebrew ganab. Since no Nephite list contains both stealing and thieving, we can assume that there was only one crime involved here.

¹¹ Robbery and Plundering are nearly synonymous. "Robbery" appears in Alma 30:10 in the place where "plundering" stands in all of the other Benjamite lists. But Alma 16:18 shows that the two words can appear in the same list, indicating that some technical distinction between the two probably existed.

Adultery-whoredoms ¹²	20:14; 22:16, 19
Prohibition against slavery or involuntary servitude	21:2-11 (slavery laws)
Smite on the Cheek	23:1 ("put not thine hand with the wicked" as false witness)
Mocking the sacred	23:14-19? (cultic laws)
Denying prophecy and revelation	20:19? ("speak thou with us, and we will hear")
Desertion	23:20-22? ("the place which I have prepared").

The Nephite law lists are not identical with the Code of the Covenant, but they are close enough in content that a relationship can be asserted. Most of the items on the Nephite law lists have counterparts in the Code of the Covenant. Furthermore, only a few items in Exodus 20-23 do not appear in the Nephite lists, and they are probably absent for cultural reasons. The "ox laws" (Ex. 21:28-22:5) were possibly irrelevant in the Nephite world because they did not make much (if any) use oxen for agriculture. The law of injury to borrowed or rented animals (Ex. 22:14) does not appear in the Nephite law lists, but the subject of delinquent debtors comes up twice in the Book of Mormon as a separate legal issue (Mos. 4:28; Alma 11:2), perhaps indicating that Ex. 22:14 was applied in this way by the Nephites to deal with their particular

¹² The word whoredoms seems to be used interchangeably with adultery in the Nephite law lists, but the word whoredoms is a broader word encompassing all kinds of sexual offenses.

commercial needs. Otherwise, the only main laws in Exodus 20-23 not appearing in the Nephite law lists are those concerning such things as the first fruits, eating torn flesh, observing the three major festivals each year and the sabbatical seventh year. It appears, however, from other evidence that the Nephites observed these provisions as well.¹³

On the other side of the coin, one of the Nephite lists mentions babblings, pride, and wearing costly apparel, unlike Exodus 20-23. While these concepts may be derived from the legal and ethical terms such as "cursing," "oppressing," and lifting oneself up above the "poor" and the "foreigner," all found in the Exodus laws, it appears that Alma has interpreted the old Israelite words and has given them a specific contemporary meaning within the context of his own society, in which the offenses he describes had become especially problematic. This kind of close dependency upon Exodus 20-23, coupled with flexibility in applying the law to various situations, is paralleled by the way in which Deuteronomy 12:1-26:11 similarly draws upon legal materials in Exodus 20-23.¹⁴ Just as the Exodus laws were the basic law code in ancient Israel, they were fundamental laws among the Nephites.

The foregoing examination of series of laws in the Book of Mormon leads to several interesting possible observations:

¹³ E.g. Mos. 2:3 "firstlings." On their observance of the Fall festivals, Pentecost, and Passover, see the F.A.R.M.S. Updates and Preliminary Reports on these subjects.

¹⁴ See Dale Patrick, Old Testament Law (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), pp. 97-103.

1. The underlying Nephite law code was either the same or similar to the Code of the Covenant in Exodus 20-23, the fundamental law text of the Law of Moses.

2. The law was adapted in certain respects within the Nephite experience to serve those people as their circumstances required.

3. The law was summarized by Nephite prophets, speakers, writers and lawgivers in consistently patterned law series.

4. The most numerous and lengthy law lists are presented by the Nephite writer most personally and professionally involved with the law, namely Alma the Younger, Chief Judge in Zarahemla.

5. The long law lists are uniformly directed at those professing membership of the church of God, whereas the shorter list is always employed in a public or state setting.

6. The shorter formulaic list of five laws was used among the Nephites to measure the extent to which rulers had discharged their legal and administrative duties and to judge the righteousness and uprightness of these rulers.

7. This formulaic list of five public laws was rigidly employed for at least a century, from Benjamin, to the Sons of Mosiah, Alma the Younger, and Nephi (ca. 122-25 B.C.)

8. A modification in the standard list arose when Nephi introduced bearing false witness (bringing false charges) into the list in the place of adultery, as he was condemning those who had brought suit falsely against Nephi himself.

9. Years later, Mormon and Moroni still employed the basic formulaic series, but they were less precise in its formulation.

It is possible that by that time in Nephite legal history the original technical form of this series, which appears consistently in the earlier portions of the record, was no longer strictly used; or Mormon and Moroni may have been writing more as historians and less as lawyers with a concern over legalese.

10. This information is embedded rather remarkably, accurately, and realistically, in the texts of the Book of Mormon. Although the Book of Mormon is not primarily concerned with the legal history or legal institutions of the Nephites, a remarkable amount of legal detail has survived in the text. Longstanding patterns of usage and formulation give evidence of a solid cultural tradition here, but at the same time, subtle but relevant variations reflect the influence of individual historical figures. Details such as these open a few small windows through which many insights about Nephite law can yet be derived.