

Women and Nephite Men

Lessons from the Book of Alma

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The Book of Mormon refers to only three nonbiblical women by name. One of these is Sariah, the woman who—so to speak—gives birth to the principal societies whose history the book recounts. Another is Abish, the celebrated Lamanite servant woman divinely prepared to facilitate the first successful missionary efforts among her people. The third, however, is “the harlot Isabel,” mentioned in the fraught context of Alma’s remonstrations with his wayward son Corianton (Alma 39:3). In a book where women rise so infrequently to the surface of the narrative, why should *this* woman be among those graced with this rare privilege? Is it evidence, as one author somewhat sentimentally suggests, that “Alma was aware of someone as lowly as a harlot,” demonstrating his “knowledge and familiarity with his people”?¹ Or is it evidence, as another author critically suggests, that Alma principally saw a woman like Isabel as “merely a vehicle for

male degeneracy”?² Are there other and perhaps better approaches to Isabel’s peculiar place of privilege in the Book of Mormon?

In this essay, I wish to outline a possible approach to the question of Isabel’s unexpected prominence in the text of the Book of Mormon, though mention of her might be passing in certain ways. I proceed as follows. First, I argue that Mormon deliberately places the discussion of Corianton’s involvement with Isabel in a structurally significant place in the book of Alma, this as part of a larger literary project meant to draw the attention of readers to questions about the experience of women in Nephite and Lamanite societies. Second, I discuss the possibility that Isabel represents an important historical development within Nephite society, a period of time in which some Nephite women seem to have gained a sense of self-awareness. Third and finally, I analyze the text of Alma 39 itself, concluding that Isabel brings into focus crucial problems surrounding gender—especially paired conceptions of femininity and masculinity. In a brief conclusion, I indicate what I take to be the relevance of all this to twenty-first-century concerns.

Places

The book of Alma is a sprawling book, but it is not without its principle of organization. It divides naturally into two halves (Alma 1–29 and Alma 30–63) that tell parallel stories. Each half opens with the story of a disruptive figure on whom the law has no power (Nehor, Korihor) but whose influence lays the groundwork for a Nephite civil war (the Amlicites, the Zoramites). The reader is then treated, in each half of the book, to three of Alma’s sermons in succession (in three cities, to three sons), meant to curb growing pride and wickedness. As the story continues, each half goes on to tell the story of a Nephite man who goes among the Lamanites and has dealings with the royal family (Ammon, Amalickiah), ultimately in the hopes of converting his own people’s enemies to his view of things. Finally, each half concludes with a shift to the brother of the Nephite man

in question, who takes over the first's responsibilities and continues the work of spreading his message (Aaron, Ammoron). Mormon's overarching aim in the book of Alma thus seems to be to spur his readers to reflect on (1) the similarities between two distinct periods of Alma's ministry (Alma 1–16, Alma 30–42) and (2) the differences between the peaceful missionizing of the sons of Mosiah and the warmongering interests of the usurping family of Amalickiah (Alma 17–29, Alma 43–63).³

This larger structure is significant in all kinds of ways, inviting readers to approach each story or sermon in the book of Alma with the appropriate parallel story or sermon in mind. Further, careful study of the *details* of the book's structure suggests that the few women who appear within it are strategically placed. This is perhaps clearest in the contrasting but parallel stories of the Nephite-Lamanite mission and the Nephite-Lamanite wars. Each of these stories begins with a Nephite man in line (or wishing to be in line) to be a Nephite king. Each figure finds himself eventually among the Lamanites and discovers that he must negotiate his place among that people through an encounter with a Lamanite queen—a woman wielding power in a fashion apparently foreign to the Nephites. Ammon praises the queen's faith and promises her husband's safety and then retires while a Lamanite servant woman gathers the first mass group of Lamanite converts. Amalickiah, by contrast, kills the queen's husband, lies about his own treachery, and then deceptively gains the queen's favor and usurps her position as ruler. These differences already underscore that women are strategically central to the parallel stories.

More striking still, however, is the way that each of these contrasting stories of preaching peace and promoting war centers on a turning point that concerns women. The unmistakable turning point in the Nephite-Lamanite mission comes when Abish, the Lamanite servant woman, takes the necessary initiative to gather her people to the site of the royal household's conversion. She is in the right place at the right time, the text says, "on account of a remarkable vision of

her father” (Alma 19:16).⁴ The turning point of the parallel story of the Nephite-Lamanite wars occurs when the so-called stripling warriors turn out to fight in defense of the Nephite nation. They are, of course, Lamanite boys, young men who are in the right place at the right time, according to the text, because “they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47). Successful Nephite preaching among the Lamanites, like successful Nephite military defense against invading Lamanites (used, really, as pawns in a war launched by a dissenting Nephite), depends intensely on Lamanite domestic relations: daughters taught by fathers and sons taught by mothers. Mormon highlights in these parallel stories what the prophet Jacob teaches much earlier in the Book of Mormon—that the Lamanites’ “husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children” (Jacob 3:7).⁵

Clearly, certain portions of Mormon’s larger structuring of the book of Alma seem meant to draw readers’ attention toward female characters—and specifically toward women living among the Lamanites. In just a few glimpses into Lamanite culture and civilization, one sees families where women and men are relatively equal, societies where women wield political power, and situations where women serve as real heroes in complex narratives. What of the rest of the book of Alma? Do women emerge in the parallel stories of Alma’s preaching among the Nephites?

Indeed, they do, but the picture is disturbingly bleak. In situations where Lamanites stand outside the picture and Nephites fill the frame, women fare poorly. The first sequence of Alma’s ministry comes to an end with his visit to Ammonihah, which yields one of the grisliest scenes in the Book of Mormon: the martyrdom—*the burning alive*—of women who have believed Alma’s words. In perfect, disturbing parallel, the second sequence of Alma’s ministry comes to an end when he has to confront his son Corianton about the latter’s problematic (but somewhat unclear) relationship to “the harlot Isabel” (Alma 39:3). The parallel stories of Alma’s ministerial

efforts among the Nephites thus both reach their climax with situations where the church's high priest has to confront the bald fact that Nephite men tend toward physical and sexual oppression of women.⁶ It is of course true that Corianton's relationship to Isabel, whatever its nature, is less egregious than the murderous actions of the people in Ammonihah. Alma himself clarifies that "the shedding of innocent blood" is more "abominable" than whatever Corianton is guilty of (Alma 39:5). Yet Corianton's sins are not without their serious implications. Alma calls them "most abominable above all sins" except for murder and the unpardonable sin (Alma 39:5). The nature of Corianton's sins remains to be clarified, but the strict parallel between the situation in Ammonihah and the situation with Corianton is clear.

All these details of structure come together to provide a relatively clear sketch of Mormon's intentions. He seems to wish his readers to see the book of Alma as, among other things, providing readers with a sense for the respective statuses of women among the Nephites and of women among the Lamanites. As Jacob makes clear from the outset of the Book of Mormon, there is a real difference between how women fare among the Nephites and how they fare among the Lamanites. Mormon seems to hope in the book of Alma to help make that difference apparent. His stories alternately highlight the way that Nephite wickedness repeatedly culminates in oppression for women, and the way that Lamanite repentance rests on the foundation of the right relations between women and men that characterize their society.⁷

In the midst of all this, Isabel seems to have an important place. She is privileged not only by the use of her actual name in Alma 39, but also by the larger structure within which her story fits. Readers are, it seems, meant to reflect on what her relationship with Corianton might suggest about women in Nephite society two decades or so into the reign of the Nephite judges.

Times

The specific moment when Isabel appears within the Book of Mormon is itself noteworthy. Study shows that Nephite sociopolitical and socioreligious history reaches a kind of crisis at exactly the moment Corianton finds himself involved with Isabel.⁸ The presence of her name in the text suggests a recognized figure, a person of fame or notoriety. Some interpreters have therefore explored the possibility that she represents a kind of religious movement (a cult with ancient roots, perhaps).⁹ But one need not go beyond what the text says to determine the setting that gives her some context. There is reason to believe that Isabel has some connection—whether of direct influence or whether through the shared spirit of the times—with the famous anti-Christ Korihor (Alma 30:12).

First, Isabel may be no ordinary harlot. Little comparative data is available from the text, but all other harlots in the Book of Mormon are nameless and vague, grouped together as women under the sexual control of men in power (see 1 Nephi 13:7–8; Mosiah 11:14; 12:29). Isabel seems to be something different. Although Alma connects her to other “harlots” (Alma 39:11), she appears to work in relative independence, and the text suggests that she is particularly successful, having a kind of sexual control over men (she “steal[s] away the hearts of many”; Alma 39:4). Her very existence as a harlot unquestionably would depend directly on men’s sexual license (her livelihood requires paying customers), and this makes her partially a victim of a social system that fails to support women in situations of economic difficulty. And yet her implied fame or notoriety—the fact that she is one of only three Book of Mormon women with a name—suggests that she has inverted the usual social order, transforming her victimization into a powerful social position of its own. Isabel may be a victimizer as much as she is a victim.

This portrait of Isabel suggests a kind of novelty, a situation in which some women see a reversal of their situations of oppression as possible. And there is, in fact, evidence in the text that Isabel lives

in such times. The historical proximity between Isabel and Korihor is perhaps too easily overlooked, but year-markers in the text make clear that Korihor's miserable end occurred only months—perhaps even just weeks—before Corianton's involvement with Isabel.¹⁰ Is there reason to think that Isabel's haughty form of harlotry grows out of Korihor's success in popularizing his deeply problematic views? It seems significant that Mormon reports Korihor's successes in Zarahemla as follows: "And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof" (Alma 30:18). This fascinating report requires careful comment.

It should first be noted that Mormon specifically focuses here on how Korihor's effect on his followers is less to inspire them to do wickedness than to inspire them to take pride in it, "to lift up their heads in their wickedness." Later, Korihor makes clear that this is intended as a provocation to the Nephite Christian church, which he describes as binding people under "foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads" (Alma 30:23).¹¹ If Korihor's cultural revolution of sorts plays a role in Isabel's self-understanding, then it may be that she sees her apparent inversion of social hierarchies as a form of confronting the Nephite Christian church. Is it coincidence that she becomes involved in some way with the son of the church's high priest? One can only guess, of course, but it requires little imagination to picture a situation in which Isabel would see a real opportunity in drawing the attention of a figure like Corianton.

Further, it seems important that Mormon speaks of Korihor as having success with "women, and also men." Book of Mormon authors and editors seldom place women before men when describing events—and no one else uses "and also men" as a kind of additive phrase after a reference to women. Mormon's words therefore stand

out as significant. The implication would seem to be that Korihor's first and most impactful success is among women specifically. If this is right, it would not at all be surprising to learn that Isabel is among the women making up Korihor's following. It is unclear whether Mormon uses the word *whoredoms* in a literal sense when he speaks of Korihor's followers as being led "to commit whoredoms" (Alma 30:18), but if so, it would seem that Isabel is the only character in the Book of Mormon who perfectly fits the description of a follower of Korihor.

There is in fact some evidence that Korihor makes women a focus of his critique of Nephite Christianity. When he attempts to spread his message in the city of Gideon, Korihor accuses Nephite Christians of teaching that the Nephite nation "is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent" (Alma 30:25). What makes this passage intriguing is that no other Book of Mormon prophet speaks in the singular of "a parent" as having caused the fall; all Nephite prophetic voices speak of their "first parents" in the plural when referring to the fall. It is possible—if nonetheless not entirely clear¹²—that Korihor understands (or deliberately misconstrues) the Nephite Christian church as laying blame for fallen humanity specifically on Eve (in something like the way of traditional Christianity). It may also be significant that, when addressing Corianton, Alma speaks, unlike Korihor and perhaps by way of response, of "first parents" in the plural (Alma 42:2, 7). There is other evidence, at any rate, that the situation with Korihor leads Alma to reflect wisely on the women who hear his preaching. Uncharacteristically, Alma's first sermon after his encounter with Korihor contains a gender-sensitive moment of self-correction: "And now, [God] imparteth his word by angels unto men," he says, but then immediately adds, "yea, not only men but women also" (Alma 32:23). In the immediate aftermath of Korihor's success among Nephite women, Alma seems to worry more than before about how his words might sound to the often-ignored female half of his audiences.¹³

All these textual details suggest the possibility that Isabel is a more complex character than one gleans from a casual reading of Alma 39. The details in that chapter alone might be said largely to give the impression of simple sexual depravity. But the larger network of texts in the story leading up to Alma's conversation with Corianton suggests that readers are meant to see her as representing a complex moment in Nephite history. She seems to represent a Nephite counterculture in some ways indebted to the prophet Jacob, criticizing problems with how Nephite men understand and relate to women. But where Jacob speaks with a prophet's voice, Isabel (or at least Korihor, contemporary with her) speaks with the voice of an anti-Christ. Korihor and Isabel offer a cheap imitation to what Jacob recommends regarding the sexes.

There is, however, more to learn directly from Alma 39 itself. It is there, after all, that one finds the actual details regarding what happens between Corianton and Isabel, details that remain to be analyzed on their own terms. And it is there that one finds the greatest wealth of information about what most concerns Alma (and, arguably, Mormon) regarding Corianton's relationship with Isabel and about the situation women face in Nephite culture more generally.

Persons

Alma 39 is of course best known for its claim that Corianton was guilty of a sin next to murder in seriousness. Readers and even writers most frequently identify this sin with (general) sexual transgression.¹⁴ This traditional interpretation makes two assumptions not directly supported by the text (although this does not mean that these assumptions are necessarily untrue). These are worth careful consideration because they generally determine the way that Isabel's place in the Book of Mormon is understood.

First, the traditional interpretation assumes that Corianton's relationship to Isabel involves sexual intercourse. The text says only that Corianton "did go . . . after" this woman (Alma 39:3) and that

he did “go . . . after the lusts of [his] eyes” (Alma 39:9). These vague phrases could describe general intentions and attitudes, rather than concrete actions and deeds. It is possible too that Alma might use these phrases euphemistically, that is, as polite ways of referring to illicit sexual relations.¹⁵ This is unclear, however.¹⁶ Second, the traditional interpretation assumes that the phrase “these things” in Alma 39:5 refers solely or at least primarily to Corianton’s involvement with Isabel. This is certainly possible—the phrase also might be euphemistic—but it is just as or more likely that the “these things” (plural) refers to a full list of grievances, numerous things Alma has “against” Corianton (Alma 39:2). In fact, as some scholars note, Alma lists many errors on Corianton’s part in the course of the chapter: forsaking the ministry, going after the lusts of his eyes, being led away by vain or foolish things, allowing the devil to lead away his heart, and bringing iniquity on those he is responsible to teach.¹⁷

The traditional understanding of Corianton’s waywardness thus derives from a possible but not definitive (or even the most likely) reading of the text. Of course, it must be said that believing Latter-day Saints cannot dismiss this interpretation lightly. The idea behind it—namely, that sexual transgression stands next to violence in seriousness—in fact “has the status of Church doctrine,” set forth in a 1942 First Presidency statement (and reiterated in statements by subsequent Church leaders).¹⁸ In other words, it has been an official teaching of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹⁹ One can nonetheless, as one faithful reader of scripture helpfully puts it, “accept the doctrine” while arguing that Alma 39 “does not simply and unambiguously yield a proof-text for it.”²⁰ It is possible that Corianton in fact has sexual relations with Isabel, but it is far from sure that this is the case. Indeed, when Alma refers to “that which was grievous” among Corianton’s offenses, he emphasizes first that he has dared to “forsake the ministry” (Alma 39:3). The occasion for Corianton’s abandonment of his preaching responsibilities is, of course, “the harlot Isabel,” but, again, Alma only says that he “did go over into the land of Siron . . . after” her (Alma 39:3). And when he

concedes that “she did steal away the hearts of many,” he adds, “this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted” (Alma 39:4). When Alma again mentions “those wicked harlots” later in his discussion, he again lays emphasis on the ministry: “Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

With an eye to these kinds of details, careful readers have argued that what Alma identifies as “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” is not sexual sin (Alma 39:5). Instead, such suggest, the sin next to literal, physical murder is a kind of metaphorical, spiritual murder. As one scholar summarizes this interpretation, what worries Alma would be “anything—self-esteem, unchastity, anger, riches, or any vain or foolish things—by which I let my heart be led, or by which I lead the heart of another, away from God.”²¹ Alma himself offers support for such an interpretation in his words to Helaman when he describes his earlier efforts at leading people away from the Nephite Christian church as a kind of spiritual murder. “I had murdered many of his children,” he says, “or rather led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14). It is clear that Alma is elsewhere deeply concerned with a kind of spiritual murder, and the patterns of his speech in Alma 39 suggest that he fears Corianton has ventured into that extremely dangerous territory. It thus seems likely that what Alma himself means to suggest is that not one’s own sexual transgressions but rather one’s efforts (intentional or not) to lead others astray is “most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5). And Alma knows firsthand—and has explained in detail to both Helaman and Shiblón, likely in Corianton’s hearing—how hard it is to be forgiven of such an offense.²²

Corianton looks dangerously like the young Alma in another way. The first thing Alma criticizes about Corianton’s behavior among the Zoramites is his tendency to “go on unto boasting” (Alma 39:2). He indicates also that he lacks “steadiness” and “diligence” (Alma

39:1), in part because he remains in his “youth” (Alma 39:10) and in part because he is easily distracted by “vain or foolish” things (Alma 39:11). This psychological profile does not suggest a modest young man conquered by temptation after spiritual struggle or despite usual patterns of obedience and diligence. It suggests instead a coarse and arrogant youth, one convinced he is smarter and stronger than others and dismissive of what he has been taught.²³ This of course has broad implications, sketching a general picture of pride. But it may, in the context of Corianton’s relationship to Isabel, also have specifically gendered implications. Corianton’s problem seems to be less that the existence of a tempting woman brings out his weakness (such would apparently have been more characteristic of his spiritually steadier brother Shiblon; see Alma 38:12), than that his own understanding of what it means to be a man leads him into troubling relations with women. His problem might be something like what has been labeled toxic masculinity in the context of the twenty-first century. Apprehensive in the wake of emerging defenses of sexual equality—perhaps problematically rooted in Korihor’s teachings, rather than in Jacob’s prophetic denunciations of sexual oppression and abuse—Corianton may well be a part of an attempt among some Nephite young men to defend and even to rigidify violently misogynistic conceptions of masculinity.²⁴ And so his sin seems to be “excessive self-reliance,” something leading him “to believe he could take [certain] risks without seriously endangering his soul or anyone else’s.”²⁵ He is, unless he repents (and thankfully, he does), a perfect embodiment of Nephite (male) pride, pride that grows desperate when its traditional acceptance is questioned.

Perhaps, then, Isabel is best read not simply as a wicked woman, a figure for temptations that men should know to avoid. Perhaps she is better understood as a symbol of the unnecessary struggles for power that perpetuate patterns of sexual oppression at the very moment those patterns begin to disappear. She seems to be a woman at the end of a long history of oppression, glimpsing the possibility of female ascendancy for the first time (unfortunately through the eyes of

Korihor). She was victimized before, but now she victimizes in turn. All this is already sad in itself. But then the target of her struggle for power becomes, in the Book of Mormon's narrative, Corianton, a young man who may well fear that men will lose their ascendancy and therefore may worry about the possibility of experiencing oppression himself. This is doubly sad, then, because Corianton seems to represent a loud masculinity that would try to reinstate patterns of oppression. (The irony is that it is precisely Corianton's arrogant form of masculinity that leads him directly into a kind of oppression, playing directly into Isabel's hands.) In Hugh Nibley's words, which he classically applies to broad patterns he finds in the records of ancient history, the story of Corianton and Isabel exemplifies the "never-ending tension and conflict between the matriarchal and patriarchal orders," both of them "perversions" of the truth.²⁶

Alma does not give much space to Isabel in his instructions to Corianton, but he gives her enough space to raise a host of questions for careful readers. And anyone watching for how Mormon arranges the larger narrative within which Isabel's brief story appears can see that readers are *meant* to read the texts surrounding Isabel's situation carefully. One must read between the lines, watching for details that are too easily overlooked and synthesizing those details in order to produce a coherent story. But it is possible, it seems, to see that Isabel's name finds its way into the Book of Mormon with good reason.

Conclusions

I have outlined the possibility that Isabel's name stands for the precarious and complex situation that the long history of women's oppression has created for women who now face the possibility—if not the reality—of emancipation. I have also outlined the possibility that Corianton's name in turn stands for the confused state of young men who are aware of but unsure about the changing situation for women. Sadly, with this reading, Isabel needs Corianton, just as Corianton needs Isabel. But there is another, better way for

women and men to relate to one another in a world free from sexual oppression. In Mormon's larger project with the book of Alma, it seems clear that he finds a shining example of how things ought to be among the Lamanites. Likely with an eye to the prophecies of Jacob, he narratively shows that women and men work together for just and righteous purposes among the Lamanites, something from which Nephite men *and* Nephite women might learn.

Alma himself perhaps provides a glimpse of sexual equality. He of course opens Alma 39–42 by referring to the problematic (and perhaps codependent) relationship that exists between Corianton and Isabel. He closes the same instructions with another—but far subtler—reference to male–female relationships. Having laid out the nature of repentance through the atonement of Jesus Christ, he tells Corianton this: “For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24). Might one find here, where Alma genders justice and mercy, a hint of how this worried father thinks about an ideal relationship between the sexes? Of course, twenty-first-century sensibilities are likely to bristle a bit at traditional associations of justice with men and mercy with women. But Alma is no twenty-first-century prophet, and there may nonetheless be something to learn from his words. He has just finished explaining to Corianton that justice, if it speaks up too early or makes its demands too loudly, ruins all, ending in pure misery (see Alma 42:11). He has also explained that mercy, if it does not aim at real change or if it seeks to claim the unrepentant, compromises God's intentions (see Alma 42:13). But where justice ultimately guarantees the complete restoration of the righteousness produced by mercy's work, God can be viewed as “a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15). There is wisdom here.

Is the story of Isabel and Corianton of real value in the twenty-first century? It is certainly true that the Book of Mormon leaves modern readers wondering about “the relative absence of women and women's voices in scriptural texts” and raises questions about “issues

of equality and the meaning and authority that these texts can or should have for us today.”²⁷ And yet it also seems important that when Nephi reports on his vision of the last days, he worries explicitly that latter-day readers might not regard “male and female” as “alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). It may be that the Book of Mormon is *intended* to raise the sorts of questions just mentioned. It may be, in fact, that it implicitly asks readers to reflect on how certain cultures might claim to model righteousness before God while embracing social practices that produce “sorrow” and “mourning” among their more vulnerable members (Jacob 2:31). The Book of Mormon is, as God himself states in a revelation to Joseph Smith, “a record of a fallen people” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:9). It seems that one of the reasons for that people’s fall concerns the failure on the part of their men to repent, while those among them who survive do so because they do not forget God’s equal regard for women and men (see Jacob 3:3–6). The situation with Isabel and Corianton might serve as a reminder of these deep and still-relevant concerns.

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Notes

1. Heather B. Moore, *Women of the Book of Mormon: Insights and Inspirations* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2010), 69.
2. Melodie Moench Charles, “Precedents for Mormon Women from Scriptures,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 50.
3. For a full exposition of this structure, see Joseph M. Spencer, “The Structure of Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 273–83.

4. The ambiguity of this text deserves notice. It could mean that Abish's father had a vision, which he communicated to her. It could also mean, however, that Abish herself had a vision in which her father appeared to her. See the brief discussion in Kevin Christensen and Shauna Christensen, "Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thought on Carol Lynn Pearson's View of Women in the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 10, no. 2 (1998): 16.
5. For some discussion of Jacob's understanding of gender and its larger implications for the Book of Mormon, see Joseph M. Spencer and Kimberly M. Berkey, "Great Cause to Mourn: The Complexity of *The Book of Mormon's* Presentation of Gender and Race," in *The Book of Mormon: Americanist Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2019).
6. After the book of Mosiah, readers expect such actions from Nephite men. Mosiah tells of Nephite men reducing women to harlotry, taking many wives, abandoning women to invading armies, kidnapping women for forced marriage, and requiring women to plead for men's safety.
7. The book of Helaman, immediately after the book of Alma, follows up this basic insight by reporting on the complete reversal of the relationship between Nephites and Lamanites. It records the events through which the Nephites become completely abased while the Lamanites become shining examples of righteousness.
8. See Dan Belnap, "And It Came to Pass . . . : The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 101–39; and John L. Sorenson, "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 B.C.," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 163–208.
9. See Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 542. For a somewhat expanded discussion, see Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 468.

10. Korihor appears in Zarahemla “in the latter end of the seventeenth year” (Alma 30:6), while the Zoramite mission—during which Corianton goes after Isabel—closes at the very end of “the seventeenth year” (Alma 35:12).
11. It may be significant that Israelite prophetic texts that mention brazen harlotry specifically mention the defiant pose of the head. Thus Jeremiah speaks of “a whore’s forehead” (Jeremiah 3:3). See comments in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 302–3; and William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 115.
12. It is true that some passages in the Book of Mormon speak of “the fall of Adam” or of “the curse of Adam” (see 2 Nephi 2:22, 25; Mosiah 3:11, 16, 19, 26; 4:7; Alma 12:22; Helaman 14:16; Mormon 9:12; Moroni 8:8). These are phrases that might lead someone like Korihor to speak of “a parent” while having reference specifically to Adam. This is a real possibility as well, to be sure.
13. Kylie Turley, “Alma’s Hell: Repentance, Consequence, and the Lake of Fire and Brimstone,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 28 (2019): 1–45, makes the argument that Alma’s experience in Ammonihah has much to do with this change in his style of discourse.
14. For a good example of the traditional interpretation, see Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 3:289–91. It is important that this commentary presents itself as a *doctrinal* commentary, for reasons made clear below.
15. It is worth noting that Mormon does something like this in Moroni 9:9 when referring to rape.
16. Bruce Jorgensen rightly notes that nowhere does “Alma specifically charge Corianton with the sin of which our chastity lessons usually accuse and convict him without a hearing.” Jorgensen admits that Alma might have “a compunction . . . about using specifically sexual terms” but adds that “it’s hard to believe this of Alma, who otherwise seems to mince no words in his forthright denunciation.” Jorgensen therefore wisely concludes:

“Maybe it’s all right for us to suppose what we will, as long as we don’t mind being in the morally awkward position of accusing Corianton of more than his father does.” Bruce W. Jorgensen, “Scriptural Chastity Lessons: Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife; Corianton and the Harlot Isabel,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 21–22. See also Marilyn Arnold, “Corianton,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 214, who takes apparent care to limit her accusations by what the text explicitly states.

17. See Jorgensen, “Scriptural Chastity Lessons,” 20–21.
18. See James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–76), 6:176. For a recent example of endorsement of the doctrine, see Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 5.
19. For a helpful discussion of what it means to decide what is and is not church doctrine, see Anthony R. Sweat, Michael Hubbard MacKay, and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, “Doctrine: Models to Evaluate Types and Sources of Latter-day Saint Teachings,” *Religious Educator* 17, no. 3 (2016): 100–125. For further reflection on this question, see Brian D. Birch, “Beyond the Canon: Authoritative Discourse in Comparative Perspective,” in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts*, ed. Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, and Boyd J. Petersen (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 25–46.
20. Jorgensen, “Scriptural Chastity Lessons,” 19. A similar move is made in Michael R. Ash, “The Sin ‘Next to Murder’: An Alternative Interpretation,” *Sunstone Magazine*, November 2006, 34.
21. Jorgensen, “Scriptural Chastity Lessons,” 28.
22. It seems significant that commentary written before the establishment of the doctrine of the “sin next to murder” emphasizes other aspects of the text over questions of sexual morality. See, for instance, George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume IV: The Book of Alma Chapters 27 through 44*, arr. and ed. Philip C. Reynolds and David Sjodahl King (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 188–89.

23. Jorgensen, "Scriptural Chastity Lessons," 24, nicely speaks of Alma as performing "a kind of psychology, or even reconstructive psychosurgery" in the course of Alma 39–42.
24. For some context relevant to recent movements along such lines, see Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216–53.
25. Jorgensen, "Scriptural Chastity Lessons," 24–25.
26. Hugh Nibley, "Patriarchy and Matriarchy," in *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 93–94. On what it means to speak of truth in the context of gender, see Adam S. Miller, "Love, Truth, and the Meaning of Marriage," in *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 89–97.
27. Camille S. Williams, "Women in the Book of Mormon: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Interpretation," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 67.