Mormon the Writer
Turning History into Story

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On the Book of Mormon's title page, Moroni declared that it had been written "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God." It does that. However, that cannot have been the only reason that Mormon wrote. Were the declaration of Christ his only purpose, he could have given us 3 Nephi and been done with it. Mormon wrote more because he had a much more complex message to deliver. The Book of Mormon was not a haphazard creation. Mormon did not condense the history he found on the plates of Nephi. Rather, he carefully crafted the Book of Mormon to highlight the messages he wanted to convey. The Book of Mormon is the result of Mormon's shaping of history into a theological message. He selected and emphasized the lessons from the past to teach the future.

This volume focuses on what was originally three chapters that Mormon included in his text: Alma's instructions to his three sons.

It is certainly profitable to examine what Alma said to his sons, but my interest isn't in Alma. Instead, I will be looking at where Mormon found the stories and his purpose in including them.

It should be simple enough to know where Mormon found those instructions. Mormon himself declared, "I made this record out of the plates of Nephi" (Mormon 6:6). Mormon makes it sound like he simply read through the plates of Nephi and made his selections from what he found there. The process, however, was more complicated and required much more of Mormon's vision to guide both the selection of the stories to be told and the way they were told. From clues Mormon left in his text, we will see that if the plates of Nephi had been the only records Mormon consulted, we would not have Alma's instructions to his sons at all.

The Nephite Archive

Nephi himself created the charter for the type of material to be recorded on the large plates. They would contain "an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions of my people" (1 Nephi 9:4). By Mormon's time, the set of records we know as the large plates of Nephi consisted of sets of books named for the head of a political dynasty: Lehi, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, and Nephi.[1] The material that Mormon took from the large plates suggests that Nephi's original charter continued to inform what the Nephite record keepers thought should be contained on the large plates. They continued to contain the deeds of the kings and later chief judges. They continued to contain the accounts of wars and contentions— lots of accounts of wars and contentions.

Equally important as understanding that the large plates continued along the path Nephi set is understanding that the large plates could not have been a single set of records. The original sources for Mormon's account of the deeds of the kings and judges could not have been written on a single set of bound plates. There had to have been different sets of plates for each book (if not more)[2] and all these

differently bound sets of plates had the collective title of "plates of Nephi."

There were other types of records available to Mormon in the Nephite archive. When Ammaron placed the Nephite archive in the hill Shim, it consisted of "all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation, which were sacred" (4 Nephi 1:48). Among "all the sacred records" were both the large and small plates of Nephi. The plates of brass had been passed down through generations and may be assumed to have been in the archive. Similarly, the plates of Ether were likely included. Other records were also included, as can be discerned from the way Mormon included material from them in his masterwork. The evidence for the most important of these records is found in the way Mormon uses synoptic headers.

Nephi also began a tradition of including a synoptic header for each of the named books in the record. We can see the synoptic headers in Nephi's two books on the small plates and see the tradition continued in Jacob, although the subsequent writers on the small plates discontinued the practice. However, we also see synoptic headers at the beginning of the named books that Mormon edited, suggesting that the tradition had continued on the large plates.

All the books that Mormon edited contain synoptic headers.[3] Not only did Mormon create synoptic headers for books, but he also used them for certain chapters within books.[4] The book headers marked a change in the dynastic record Mormon consulted. The chapter headers mark a change to a new source for the stories that Mormon told that fit within the framework of the dynastic books. Interestingly, Mormon's book headers only describe the content that would be taken from the large plates. Even when significant material was taken from secondary sources, none of the content of those secondary sources is mentioned in the book synoptic headers.

Sources Other Than the Large Plates

The most obvious introduction of a source not found on the large plates is found in the header prior to Mosiah 9. It reads: "The Record of Zeniff—An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites." Mormon not only declares that this is a separate record, but the nature of the material taken from that record recounts stories that could not have been available to contemporary Nephite writers.

Mosiah chapters 10 and 11 are copied verbatim from Zeniff's record. Chapters 11 through 22 continue to use that source, although Mormon retells the story rather than quoting it. In the header, Mormon told his readers that this record would cover the time from the beginning of the people of Zeniff to the time when they escaped the Lamanites and returned to Zarahemla. As indicated, the material taken from that source ends with the reunion of these people with those in Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:12–14). Mormon was reasonably consistent when moving to a new source, but he did not similarly mark when he returned to the large plates as his source.[5]

The largest number of chapter headings is found in the book of Alma, concentrated between chapter 5 and the end of chapter 42. Alma chapters 1–4 and 42–63 reflect material contained on the large plates. The early chapters deal with Alma the Younger as the first chief judge, and chapters 42–63 record war—so much war that even when the major wars are over, the third to last sentence in the book of Alma says that the Lamanites "in this same year . . . came down with a numerous army" (Alma 63:15). Both in the record of Alma as the first chief judge and the record of the wars, these chapters follow the charter for the large plates.

The first chapter header before Alma 5 isn't clear that it introduces a new record. It describes the content, not the source. It reads: "The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout

the land." However, the next header, prior to Alma 7, is explicit: "The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, *according to his own record*" (emphasis added throughout).

Similarly, the header prior to Alma 9 reads: "The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which were declared unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, *according to the record of Alma*." Why indicate that these chapters were taken from the record of Alma if we are reading them in the book of Alma?

The events that begin to be recorded in Alma 5 occur after Alma abdicated his position as the chief judge. Where Mormon typically copies very little from the large plates, preferring to write his own narrative to summarize events, the material he includes from "the record of Alma" is copied more often than narrated. I suggest that the reason that Mormon declares that he is taking these chapters from the record of Alma is precisely because they contain material that was not recorded on the large plate book of Alma. From Alma 5 through 15 and 17 through 42, Mormon preserved information from Alma's personal record.[6]

The next header, before Alma 17, introduces yet another sub-record: "An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance— according to the record of Alma." The original came from the sons of Mosiah, even though this account was recorded on Alma's record. This new header follows Alma 16, for which Mormon returned to the large plates as his source. Mormon did not indicate that he ceased using Alma's personal record at the end of chapter 15, but he did mark his return to Alma's record at Alma 17.

Nephi's original plates recorded the reigns of the rulers and wars and contentions. He created a different set to be devoted to more spiritual things. That essential division continued to Mormon's day. Mormon did not find the sermons and doctrinal expositions in the

correct chronological position on the large plates, but rather had to search through the archives to find them, and then find a way to include them. A simple verse teaches more about what Mormon had to do to create his text. Mosiah 17:4 speaks of Alma: "But he fled from before them and hid himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken."

This is the final verse of an aside Mormon inserted into his record of Abinadi before Noah. Verses 2 and 3 simply tell that Alma believed Abinadi and was cast out. It is possible that the information written in verses 2 and 3 could have come from the official court records. However, what Alma did after he had been cast out required that Mormon had already found and read Alma the Elder's personal record that Mormon would more completely discuss only later. Mormon did not integrate information as he found it, but first searched through all the records to find the stories that would best communicate the messages he wanted to tell. Mormon did not just record history, he manipulated the records of history into subtle lessons.

Mormon's Explanation for the Nephite Demise

It is inconceivable that the events Mormon had personally witnessed did not influence both his worldview and his message. How many times did Mormon ask himself how a people with such promise came to such an end? Along with his testimony of the Savior, Mormon wrote to provide his answer to that question.

For Mormon, it was impossible to understand the end without understanding the beginning. Hence, he began with the story of Lehi and his family leaving Jerusalem and coming to the New World. After that beginning he used history as the natural framework for his story. Although we do not have Mormon's version of early Nephite history, we can be certain that specific things were included. One that he surely emphasized was the Nephite foundational promise. Nephi recorded that his father said:

> Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever. (2 Nephi 1:9)

When we finally read that promise in Mormon's writings, it is a reference and not new information. In the story of Alma and Amulek at Ammonihah, Mormon quotes Alma, saying: "Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 9:13). Alma clarifies what he means by being cut off from the presence of the Lord:

> But behold, I say unto you that if ye persist in your wickedness that your days shall not be prolonged in the land, for the Lamanites shall be sent upon you; and if ye repent not they shall come in a time when you know not, and ye shall be visited with utter destruction; and it shall be according to the fierce anger of the Lord. For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people. I say unto you, Nay; he would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God. (Alma 9:18–19)

One reason Mormon includes the story of Alma and Amulek at Ammonihah is to stand as historical confirmation of the fulfillment

of the negative side of the Nephite foundational promise. On the one hand, it did promise peace and prosperity. However, peace and prosperity were the blessings for following God's teachings. The negative aspect of the foundational promise was that the failure to follow God's teachings would result in destruction. Mormon includes the fulfillment of the negative part of the promise when he recounts the Lamanite destruction of Ammonihah. It is such an important lesson that he tells of the destruction of Ammonihah twice; once from the Lamanite perspective and once from the Nephite perspective. Mormon didn't need to tell the tale twice.

If repetition signals something to which Mormon wanted his readers to pay attention, then the story of the plates of Ether was particularly important. Mormon recounts the basic story three different times. The first recounting is when Ammon meets Limhi, and Limhi brings records to Ammon—records "which contained the record of his people from the time that they left the land of Zarahemla" (Mosiah 8:5), and he also "brought twenty-four plates which are filled with engravings" (8:9). At that time, Limhi asks if Ammon knows someone who might translate (8:12).

The second story is found in Mosiah 21 where Mormon tells how those twenty-four plates were obtained (Mosiah 21:25–27). That recounting also indicates the statement that "Limhi was again filled with joy on learning from the mouth of Ammon that king Mosiah had a gift from God, whereby he could interpret such engravings" (21:28).

Finally, we get the plates of Ether again when Mosiah translates with the "two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow" (Mosiah 28:13). Mormon could have found a more compact way to tell this story: instead he told it three times in three different settings. The record of Ether is at the heart of Mormon's subtheme, explaining how and why the Nephites would be destroyed.

The development of historical Christianity included the elaboration of the role of Satan to the point where all wrongness might be attributed to Satan. Mormon does not blame Nephite woes on

Satan—he blames the Jaredites.[7] They were the model from history of how a nation might be utterly destroyed. More than simply being a model for destruction, Mormon asserts that Jaredite history actively affected the Nephites. Mormon carefully links the Jaredite secret combinations to destruction, then links both Jaredites and the destruction of governments to the secret combination he calls the Gadianton robbers.

This thread that will run through Mormon's account begins, and highlights, the translation of the plates of Ether. Note how Mormon describes the translated record that Mosiah read to his people: "Now after Mosiah had finished translating these records, behold, it gave an account of the people who were destroyed, from the time that they were destroyed back to the building of the great tower" (Mosiah 28:17). Mormon copies this text to make explicit the important lesson of those twenty-four plates. They were "an account of the people who were destroyed."

How did Mormon make these connections? It is possible that Mormon's association between destruction and the Jaredites was triggered by one of the statements Alma the Younger made to his son Helaman:

> And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, all their murders, and robbings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters. For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness, yea, work secret murders and abominations; therefore the Lord said, if they did not repent they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth. (Alma 37:21–22)

As Mormon elaborated in his text, these descriptions are associated with the Gadianton robbers. In Mormon's turning of history into story, the Gadianton robbers personified the Jaredite secret combinations. The ties between the Jaredites are reinforced by similar language, such as murders, robbings, and plunderings, but most importantly by linking both the Gadiantons and the Jaredites to the same geography. The Nephite's ancestral enemies, the Lamanites, always entered Nephite lands from the south. Mormon links the Gadiantons with the land northward—the Jaredite homeland. This was a conceptual homeland. Although he will describe the north so that he can declare the ultimate source of the Nephite demise, we should not expect that he was dealing with historical geography. That both the Gadiantons and Jaredites came from the lands northward was the connection. Our modern interests in locating Book of Mormon peoples on a map were not Mormon's concerns, and we should not assume that the historical geography of the Jaredites was the equivalent of the lands northward that Mormon describes. His purpose was not accurate geography, but rather symbolic geography.

The Land Northward and the Gadianton Robbers

Mormon gives us glimpses into his thought processes when we see him inserting information into text he is copying from another writer. Fortunately for us, Mormon used an ancient technique for these insertions, a technique known as repetitive resumption. As David Bokovoy explained: "Repetitive resumption refers to an editor's return to an original narrative following a deliberate interlude. Old Testament writers accomplished this by repeating a key word or phrase that immediately preceded the textual interruption."[8] Repetitive resumption was not unique to the Bible. Tzvi Abusch recognized this technique in some Mesopotamian incantations and was able to use it to show where newer sections had been added to earlier material.[9] Mormon uses it when he inserts something he wants to say that was triggered by the text he was copying.[10]

The first incident of repetitive resumption I will examine reveals Mormon's intent to link the Gadiantons with the land northward. While copying material from Alma's personal record, Mormon came to Alma 22:27: "And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land." He stopped copying and inserted his own information. He marked his return to Alma's record by repeating this information in Alma 22:35: "And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren." After a chapter break, he continued: "Behold, now it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation among all his people" (Alma 23:1). Mormon both declared that he was returning to the original text and used the repetition of the departure point as he reengaged the copied text.

In between the repeated information, Mormon provides a geography lesson. Part of the intent was to help his readers understand the physical extent covered when the proclamation was sent among all the Lamanite king's lands. However, Mormon also provides an essential definition. He wrote: "The land which they called Bountiful . . . bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla" (Alma 22:29–30). The land Desolation is directly tied, not only to the Jaredites, but specifically to the *destroyed* Jaredites.

We can see that Mormon's inserted explanation was triggered by the need to explain Lamanite lands, but it expanded to a general description of the lands pertinent to the Nephites. For Mormon, that included a description of the place and association of the northern lands. I consider it probable that it was Mormon who created the name Desolation for the land northward. It is a word he used before in a parallel context. In Alma 16, a chapter Mormon wrote using the large plates rather than Alma's personal record, Mormon says, "And

now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate" (Alma 16:11). Mormon used his authorial license to rename Ammonihah to the more symbolic "Desolation of Nehors." Mormon clearly intends for his readers to see Desolation—whether Ammonihah or the land northward—as a land of a destroyed people.

During the great war discussed at the end of the book of Alma, Mormon tells of a people led by a man named Morianton. Mormon reports that what they intended to do was something very dangerous, and so he reports that they were stopped. Without telling us why, Mormon writes, "Therefore, Morianton put it into their hearts that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water, and take possession of the land which was northward. And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (*which would have been a cause to have been lamented*)" (Alma 50:29–30).

Mormon gives his readers no hint about why these people going north would have been much lamented. However, he drops a geographic hint that he will later elaborate. He says that northward there was a land "which was covered with large bodies of water." We see that phrase in another passage where Mormon reports Nephites heading to northward lands.

The departure phrase comes in Helaman 3:3: "*And it came to pass in the forty and sixth, yea, there was much contention and many dissensions*; in the which there were an exceedingly great many who departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land."

The return is declared explicitly and repeats the information that marked the departure point for the insertion:

> And now I return again to mine account; therefore, what I have spoken had passed after there had been great contentions, and

disturbances, and wars, and dissensions, among the people of Nephi. The forty and sixth year of the reign of the judges ended; And it came to pass that there was still great contention in the land, yea, even in the forty and seventh year, and also in the forty and eighth year. (Helaman 3:17–19)

In between, Mormon inserted specific descriptions of both the geographic and ecological features of the land northward. It was a land of many waters, and it was a land so devoid of trees that buildings were made of cement. Significantly, Mormon also says of the land northward,

And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them. But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building of temples, and of synagogues and their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work.

But behold, there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites. And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites, even until they have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites. (Helaman 3:13–16)

When Mormon speaks of "this people," we might think that he is referring to the Nephites under the reign of Helaman. I suggest that "this people" specifically refers to those who have gone north. Mormon notes that there is much that could be said about them, and that there are histories. Those texts specifically speak of "their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations." Those are themes associated with the north and with the Gadianton robbers.

Mormon noted that many of the people of Ammon had gone north. Those were known as a particularly righteous people, and he has them at least symbolically carry northward the ability to record history. However, Mormon then significantly describes what happens to Nephites in the north: "They have fallen into transgression and have been murdered, plundered, and hunted, and driven forth, and slain, and scattered upon the face of the earth, and mixed with the Lamanites until they are no more called the Nephites, becoming wicked, and wild, and ferocious, yea, even becoming Lamanites" (Helaman 3:16).

Later in the book of Helaman, Mormon reports on efforts to preach the gospel in the land northward:

> Behold, now it came to pass in the sixty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of the Nephites, that Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward. For he had been forth among the people who were in the land northward, and did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them; and they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity. (Helaman 7:1–3)

The dangerous nature of the lands northward is reiterated in 3 Nephi:

And the land which was appointed was the land of Zarahemla, and the land which was between the land Zarahemla and the land Bountiful, yea, to the line which was between the land Bountiful and the land Desolation. And there were a great many thousand people who were called Nephites, who did gather themselves together in this land. Now Lachoneus did cause that they should gather themselves together in the land southward, because of the great curse which was upon the land northward. (3 Nephi 3:23–24)

Although little Nephite history involved the lands northward, Mormon nevertheless made sure to emphasize them. When he did, it was their dangerous aspects that were important. Not only does he generally see the lands northward as cursed, but they bring the curse of the destruction of civilizations with them. Attempts to preach the word of God fail in the north. Even when good people go north, they are not heard from again (such as the people of Hagoth), or they are described as having become as corrupt as the others in that dangerous land.

Regardless of the actual history behind what Mormon wrote, he wrote so that his readers would understand that he saw danger in the land northward. He also specifically provided geographic clues so that his assumed readers, those he believed would have had some of his own cultural understanding, would be able to identify the particular north-people who would become Mormon's Gadianton robbers at the end of Nephite history. They were a people from the north bringing with them the destruction of society.[11] In Mormon's mind, it was no coincidence that the Nephite nation met its end after it had been forced into the land northward. Moroni understood the symbolism when he equated the hill Ramah, around which the Jaredites gathered to meet their final destruction, and Cumorah, which fulfilled that very same function for the Nephites.

Mormon's Manipulation of Names

Desolation may or may not have designated the land northward be-fore Mormon wrote. Mormon's use of names was often not related to history, but to narrative effect. The best passage for understanding how Mormon manipulated names is found in yet another inserted section marked by repetitive resumption. This case is a little harder to recognize because Orson Pratt split one of Mormon's original chapters right after the phrase that marked the departure point for Mormon's insertion:

To see the repetition, we must append the end of Alma 10 to the beginning of Alma 11. The departure is, "Now *the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ*" (Alma 10:32). Then comes the modern chapter break and the mate-rial Mormon inserted in the otherwise copied text. Mormon marked the return to his text at Alma 11:20: "Now, it was *for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ.*"

In between the repeated phrases Mormon inserted information that not only was not in Alma's original text but should not have been. Alma 11 introduces Book of Mormon readers to the Nephite names for their weights and measures. Authentic historical documents do not explain the obvious. There was no reason for Alma to explain a system of weights and measures that would have been obvious to a contemporary audience. However, Mormon was not only not con-temporary, he was writing for an even more distant future audience. Mormon understood that the future audience wouldn't correctly understand important aspects of the story without this information, so he inserted it into a section he was otherwise copying from Alma's personal record.

The immediate purpose was to communicate the value of the bribe Zeezrom offered Amulek, but that might not have required such a complete description. A more important reason was first elu-cidated by Gordon C. Thomasson in 1994. Thomasson noted: "In secularized Western societies we often take names far too lightly. As

a result, we miss much of what a truly polysemous text (having multiple meanings or significations) such as the Book of Mormon may communicate."[12] He further suggested that many Book of Mormon names were the result of

> *Metonymy* or *metonymic naming* [which] involves "naming by association," a metaphoric process of linking two concepts or persons together in such a way as to tell us more about the latter by means of what we already know about the former. For example, to call a potential scandal a "Watergate" is to suggest volumes in a single word. Similarly, if we call an individual a Judas or a Quisling, rather than giving his or her proper name, we can in one word convey an immense amount of information about how we at least feel toward that person.[13]

In the case of this insertion of weights and measures in Alma 11, Thomasson suggested that one of the functions was to allow future readers to understand the metonymy behind some of the names Mormon used for individuals or cities involved in the story.

> Immediately after the discussion of money we find the person who is called *Zeezrom*. . . . Zeezrom is distinguished by having offered 10.5 *ezrom* of silver to Alma and Amulek if they would deny their testimonies. Zeezrom is a lawyer of dubious repute—today we might call him a bag-man, or a "fixer"—one who offers bribes, and his name entirely fits his life before he repents (Alma 11:12). His name would translate "this is a unit of silver." Besides linking him with his actions, the name links him into a typological complex with those who would sell their signs and tokens for money and to Judas's selling/betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver. . . . Lest the likelihood of *Zeezrom* being a metonym be underrated, I subsequently noted that the largest Nephite weights and units of measure, the *antion* of gold (Alma 11:19), appears in later chapters of the text of Alma, first in referring to a chief ruler

of Ammonihah—one Antionah (a big man in status and self-esteem, Alma 12:20)—and later to the big-money town or pride-in-wealth city of Antionum (Alma 31:3).[14]

Just as it is likely that Mormon used Desolation for the land northward even if it had been known by a different name, Mormon uses the names Zeezrom, Antionah, and Antionum to underscore the moral of the history he recounted. The men and the city existed but were probably known contemporaneously by different names. When Alma wrote, it is probable that he used the person's actual name. When Mormon copied what Alma wrote, he changed the name so that it had a greater meaning. While it would not be correct to claim that all names Mormon used were metonymic, he used that technique so often that it should always be considered when looking at any name in Mormon's edited text, whether it is Mormon's narration or even when he is copying what another writer recorded.

At this point, several of Mormon's literary techniques converge to explain why we speak of Gadianton robbers, but not Kishkumen robbers. Throughout Mormon's text, alternate political parties are known for their first founder. For example, Alma 2:11 notes: "Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites." Similarly, we find in Alma 46:28 that those who followed Amalickiah were called Amalickiahites. The basic naming precedent suggests that we might have expected Kishkumenites—but we get Gadiantons.

Kishkumen might have been a personal name, but the fact that it is a Jaredite name makes it at least suspicious. Understanding that Mormon inserts names for narrative functions, we can recognize anyone with a Jaredite name as a person of questionable character at the very least. For Mormon, providing a person with a Jaredite name was the equivalent of the old Western trope of giving the bad guy a black hat.

Further, John W. Welch provides a tempting etymology that might help us understand why Kishkumen's band becomes the Gadianton

robbers. He suggested that the *Gad-* root of Gadianton might derive from the Hebrew for band/bandits, *gedud*, or a *gdd* root. The early spelling in the original manuscript is Gaddianton, with a doubled *d*.[15]

The ending of the word parallels similar Jaredite names with an *-ianton* ending. A tempting textual meaning would be something like "Jaredite robbers." Why then would Mormon name them Gadiantons instead of Kishkumenites? Mormon wanted a generic title that could be used to cover the many times that he mentions northern destroyers. The differences in the timing of their appearances tells us that they could not have been a single historical group. Nevertheless, Mormon intends that his readers see them as a continuing influence with inherited ties to the Jaredites—both groups representing secret combinations that destroyed nations.

Mormon's Inclusion of Alma's Instructions to His Three Sons

Mormon's connection between Gadiantons and Jaredites, as well as the way he used names in his text, finally allow us to turn to the specific issue of why Mormon included the three original chapters dealing with Alma's instructions to his sons. They were found on Alma's personal record, not on the large plates, and so we can be certain that Mormon intentionally included them for a reason more important than simply being the next thing in his source material. When Mormon copied the text from Alma, he made small changes that allow us to see why he chose those texts. Just as Zeezrom and Antionah referred to real people who probably were not known by those names, Mormon replaced the names of Alma's sons with metonyms that reinforced the intended lesson.

The oldest son, Helaman, bears a name previously given to one of King Benjamin's sons (Mosiah 1:2). It is a good Nephite name. Helaman received the plates, and nothing in the instructions Alma gives him suggests that he was anything less than a faithful Nephite. As already noted, one of the reasons Mormon was interested in this

instruction to Helaman was that it contained warnings about the plates of Ether. If those warnings did not trigger Mormon's elaboration of the Jaredites as destroyers of civilizations, they certainly supported his premise.

The next son is Shiblon. Shiblon has an ambiguous name. It is the name of a unit of measure (Alma 11:15), and therefore has a positive connotation. However, Shiblon was also the name of a Jaredite king (Ether 1:11–12). Shiblon is basically a good son, but in Alma's final blessing, note how Alma suggests that Shiblon might be spiritually ambiguous:

> And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things. See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength. Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.
>
> Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom. Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times. (Alma 38:10–14)

Right after the admonition to be diligent and temperate, Alma lists the things that might tempt Shiblon to not be diligent or temperate. Those things are descriptions of apostasy. Apparently, Shiblon was a good son, but with the possibility of being tempted into apostasy.

The third son bears the name Corianton. That name is not otherwise attested in the Book of Mormon, but it is clearly related to Coriantum, a Jaredite king (Ether 1:13–14). Similarly, Coriantor was also a Jaredite king (Ether 1:6–7). Of course, there is also Coriantumr, who was the last Jaredite king as well as the name of a prominent Nephite dissenter (Helaman 1:15).

As suggested by his name, Corianton is the son who did apostatize (for a time). Alma tells Corianton that one of the things he did wrong was to "go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom" (Alma 39:2). That doesn't seem so bad, but it is also the very thing Alma warned Shiblon against (Alma 38:11). As the child with the most obviously Jaredite name, it is unsurprising that he was the one to cause the greatest problem and to become an actual apostate rather than only have the potential to become one as is suggested for Shiblon.

The names of Alma's sons so directly correspond with the information we read about them that it would require an incredible coincidence to have those be the names their parents gave them. Given that we see Mormon intentionally creating names in other places, and even including a description of weights and measures so that we might understand them, it is best to see these names for their metonymic function.

Conclusion

Mormon's main source for the Book of Mormon was the large plates of Nephi. However, he was familiar with many more records that were kept in the Nephite archive. At some point as he searched those other records, he found Alma's personal record. Mormon clearly valued the sermons and teachings he found in that record. Also on that record were Alma's instructions or blessings to his sons. Mormon read them and recognized the value of the pattern in the story.

Mormon intended the sons to be types for future readers. The future readers might be faithful, as was Helaman. They might be basically good but with the need to be cautious of faults that might overtake us, as was Shiblon. They might also stray from the path entirely, as did Corianton. While Alma's sons might present a similar scenario as the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, 14–20; Luke 8:4–15), it has a different moral. By selecting these stories and altering the names to become more clearly a type,

Mormon didn't only describe how we might respond initially, but he lays the foundation to help us understand that a beginning need not define the end. Helaman began righteously and persisted. Shiblon was tempted but resisted. Corianton fell away but repented and later preached the word of God alongside Helaman and Shiblon (Alma 49:30).

When Alma warned Helaman "concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people" (Alma 37:21), he set the tone for Mormon's purposeful elucidation of the danger in Jaredite secret combinations and their incarnation in the Gadianton robbers. Even when Mormon did not overtly speak of the dangers of the peoples from the northern land of destruction, he echoed their danger in his use of Jaredite names.

Mormon's insertion of the symbolically charged names for Alma's three sons foreshadowed and underscored the nature of their individual experiences. Their individual experiences foreshadow ways in which the brothers may become models for future generations. Shiblon might have been susceptible to temptation, but he overcame it. Corianton had been in apostasy, but he repented. Corianton even joined Helaman and Shiblon in leading many to God: "There was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent forth to preach among the people" (Alma 49:30).

Each brother has a favorable end to his story. The names Mormon gave them might have foreshadowed an episode in their future, but they did not dictate the outcome of their lives. In addition to the dire warnings of those things that would eventually destroy the Nephite nation, Mormon was not without a positive vision for the future. We,

his future readers, may enjoy the benefits of the Nephite promise of the land. It can be enacted in our personal lives and lead to the Lord's blessings. Regardless of how we begin, Mormon uses Alma's sons to endow us with hope.

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Notes

1. Brant A. Gardner, "Mormon's Editorial Method and Meta-Message," *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 87–90.
2. In Words of Mormon, Mormon says: "And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi" (Words of Mormon 1:3). Benjamin, the son of Mosiah, would have had the record of his reign written in the book of Mosiah. If Mormon was searching for more records, that would indicate that the book of Mosiah consisted of at least two sets of physical plates.
3. The exception is the book of Mosiah. It would have had a header, but the original chapter (if not more) was lost with the 116 manuscript pages.
4. Grant Hardy noticed that the first verse of 2 Nephi 6, "The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, which he spake unto the people of Nephi," should have been typeset as a chapter synoptic heading. Although it is the only time we see this in Nephi's writings, it is also the only real opportunity for such a header. See 2 Nephi 6:1, note e, in Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Christ, Maxwell Institute Study Edition* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018), 71.

5. Alma chapter 16 returns to the large plates as a source, but Mormon doesn't mark it in any way. The telling sign is the beginning that states: "And it came to pass in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi" (Alma 16:1). The annalistic structure Mormon followed from the beginning of the book of Alma through the end of his large plate material is highlighted by marking the years, something that happens much less frequently in the sources other than the large plates.

6. Alma 16 returns to the large plates for its material, without marking the return. The structure and content declare the source to be the large plates.

7. Mormon does use Satan as a means of the reappearance of the Gadianton robbers after they had been removed from the land. "Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down the people unto destruction. Now behold, those secret oaths and covenants did not come forth unto Gadianton from the records which were delivered unto Helaman; but behold, they were put into the heart of Gadianton by that same being who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit" (Helaman 6:25–26).

8. David E. Bokovoy, "Repetitive Resumption in the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 27, no. 1 (2007): 2. See also David E. Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes, *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (Tooele, UT: Heritage Distribution, 2003), 117–31. Bokovoy and Tvedtnes describe repetitive resumption and provide a number of examples. I note that I disagree with some of their examples. There is clearly repetition, but little evidence of an inserted text that is not part of the flow of the narrative. I would see these as more of a stylistic repetition than a marking of inserted text (following Abusch's definition cited right after the quotation from Bokovoy above).

9. Tzvi Abusch, "Maqlû III 1–30: Internal Analysis and Manuscript Evidence for the Revision of an Incantation," *Studia Orientalia* 106 (2009): 307.

10. Tzvi Abusch, "The Revision of Babylonian Anti-witchcraft Incantations: The Critical Analysis of Incantations in the Ceremonial Series *Maqlû*," in *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition*, ed. Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and Shaul Shaked (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 39: "Where there

are other reasons to believe that the text has been redacted, the repetitive resumption should be treated as part of a revision and not as original."

11. Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 325–42.

12. Gordon C. Thomasson, "What's in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1994): 8.

13. Thomasson, "What's in a Name?," 10.

14. Thomasson, "What's in a Name?," 16.

15. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, The Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies, https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/GADIANTON.