

Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy

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Adam and Eve's choice to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had enduring consequences for themselves and their posterity. Similarly, Laman and Lemuel's choice *not* to partake of the tree of life resulted in long-lasting bitter consequences for themselves and their posterity. In both instances, the consequence of the decision was being "cut off"¹ or "cast off"² from the presence of the Lord. Adam and Eve subjected their posterity to physical death; Laman and Lemuel subjected generations of their posterity to spiritual death.

The generational consequences of Laman and Lemuel's unwillingness to partake seem to have been uppermost in Lehi's mind when he related his vision of the tree of life to his family. Nephi prefaces the account with his father's statement, "But behold, Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you" (1 Nephi 8:4). Nephi punctuates the account with two summative comments: "And Laman and Lemuel *partook not* of the fruit, said my father," (v. 35; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine) and "he exceedingly feared

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for Laman and Lemuel; yea, he feared lest *they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord*" (v. 36).

The statements "Laman and Lemuel, I fear exceedingly because of you" (v. 4) and "he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel" (v. 36) constitute a framing device known as an *inclusio*, or envelope figure.³ This framing repetition places the entire dream in the context of Lehi's fear for his sons, their families, and their families' posterity: Laman and Lemuel were choosing not to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which would inevitably lead to their being cut off from the Lord's presence. As Lehi knew, this was the "curse" that would—like the consequences of the Fall—be passed on to their posterity and perpetuated for generations (see Alma 3:19; 2 Nephi 4:3–9, especially vv. 5–6).

Nephi's twofold declaration that he saw "the things which [his] father saw" (1 Nephi 11:3; 14:29) provides a similar *inclusio* for his own vision, a framework which recommends 1 Nephi 11–14 as a reliable guide for interpreting Lehi's vision and his exceeding fear for Laman and Lemuel. Nephi explicitly states that he saw his posterity and the posterity of his brothers, who eventually overpowered his own descendants (1 Nephi 12:19). He was then told by his angelic guide that "these [would] dwindle in unbelief" (v. 22), and he saw the far-reaching cultural and spiritual consequences of this unbelief on his brothers' posterity (v. 23; see also 2 Nephi 5).

In this essay, I will examine how the term *unbelief*, as used among the Nephites, alluded back to Laman and Lemuel's choice *not* to partake of the fruit of the tree and to its spiritual impact on their posterity (see Alma 56:4). I will also show how prophets who were critical of Nephite pride—the "pride of the world" which eventually falls⁴—exercised great faith in the Lord, secured promises regarding Laman and Lemuel's posterity, and eventually wrought a miraculous change among them. Through their prayers and faithful efforts, many of those who "dwindl[ed] in unbelief" (1 Nephi 12:22) became the unshakable faithful.

The Book of Mormon is not only a chronicle of the tragic consequences of choosing unbelief,⁵ but also powerful evidence of the fruits of faith. *Faithfulness*—enduring and unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ—emerges as the only means of remedying the generational consequences of unbelief, a remedy which sometimes has its desired effect only after long periods of time. The faithfulness of Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Enos, and the holy men who followed (whose faith was typical of the faith of the patriarchs and ultimately of the

Savior himself) eventually helped reverse the consequences of Laman and Lemuel's choice. Their examples emerge as ones fully worthy of our emulation. Although the tragic final chapters of Mormon's history suggest that he constructed his story to show the final and complete fulfillment of Lehi's and Nephi's visions, his record and the record on the small plates show how the Lord's people are to help remedy the almost universal sin of unbelief, so that "faith . . . might increase in the earth" (D&C 1:21) and eventually prevail (see Jacob 5:66, 75).

"Children in Whom Is No Faith"

Nephi's account of his family's departure from Jerusalem depicts his oldest brothers struggling to have faith and to be faithful: "And thus Laman and Lemuel . . . did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them, *neither did they believe* that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed" (1 Nephi 2:12–13). Despite Nephi's having "exhort[ed] his brethren to *faithfulness* and diligence" (1 Nephi 17:15), he reports that when he undertook to build a ship in which to cross the great waters, they complained against him, "for *they did not believe* that I could build a ship; *neither would they believe* that I was instructed of the Lord" (1 Nephi 17:18). He repeatedly exhorts them to faithfulness (1 Nephi 3:16–21; 7:8–12), with little success. Nephi, on the other hand, is blessed for his faith (1 Nephi 2:18–19; 11:6). Such scenes illustrate Laman's and Lemuel's ongoing lack of faith, represented in Lehi's dream by their refusal to partake of the fruit of the tree, which is literally demonstrated with the departure of Nephi (and those who followed him) from Laman and Lemuel and their followers (see 2 Nephi 5).

When Nephi is granted his own vision of the tree of life, his angelic guide says in 1 Nephi 12:22 that Laman and his posterity will "dwindle in unbelief." The unique phrase "dwindle in unbelief" occurs numerous times in the Book of Mormon with reference to groups of people but overwhelmingly with direct or indirect reference to "Lamanites."⁶

The angel's words in 1 Nephi 12:22 may have had reference to Deuteronomy 32:20, part of a Hebrew poetic text called the Song of Moses. Rebellious Israelites are there characterized as "children in whom is *no faith*" [Hebrew *bānīm lō'-'emun bām*], or, rendered differently, "children in whom there is *unbelief*," from whom the Lord would "hide [his] face," that is, cut off from his presence (Deuteronomy 32:30).⁷ The phrase *lō'-'emun* (unvowelled *l' 'mn*) may

have been the basis of, or catalyzed the formation of, a negative pun on the name “Laman” among the early Nephites. If so, this pun may have imbued the term “Lamanites” with the meaning of “unfaithful” or “unbelieving ones.” In any case, as Mormon reported centuries later, the term *unbelief* was part of an unflattering description of the Lamanites that originated in Nephi’s account of his vision and was “ever among” the Nephites (Mormon 5:15; see also 1 Nephi 12:23 and 2 Nephi 5:21–24).⁸

“They Would Not Come unto [Us] and Partake of the Fruit”

Lehi foresaw the division of his family in his dream. When he looked around to find his family, he saw Sariah, Sam, and Nephi at the head of the river, but he did not at first see Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 8:13–14). Sariah, Sam, and Nephi responded to his calling to them to come to him and partake of the fruit of the tree of life (see vv. 15–16). Not until after these three had partaken of the fruit of the tree did Lehi look again for Laman and Lemuel, at which time he saw them at the head of the river, separated from the rest of the family and unwilling to come to their father and partake of the fruit of the tree of life (see vv. 17–18, 35). It is evident throughout Nephi’s account that Laman and Lemuel were already making choices that were leading them away from the rod of iron and the tree of life. Sadly, Lehi’s spurned invitations to his eldest sons augured generations of failed attempts by his righteous posterity to reclaim and restore his eldest sons’ posterity to the true faith.

At the time of their separation from the Lamanites, Nephi describes his people as “those who *believed* in the warnings and revelations of God” (2 Nephi 5:6), in contrast to “the people who were now called *Lamanites*” (v. 14). Based on Nephi’s designation of his people as those who believed, it stands to reason that the Lamanites included those who did *not believe* warnings and revelations of God and who could be distinguished by “their hatred towards [Nephi] and [his] children and those who were called [his] people” (v. 14). Thus, we are presented with a people who are not just defined by their genetic affiliations, but by their animosity to a set of believers. The reason for their unfaithfulness was revealed years earlier when Nephi asked his brothers a simple but poignant question about their willingness to seek revelation from the Lord through faith: “Have ye inquired of the Lord?” (1 Nephi 15:8). Their response—“We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us”

(v. 9)—became one of the saddest self-fulfilling non-prophecies ever uttered. Because Laman and Lemuel hardened their hearts and would not “ask [the Lord] in faith, believing that [they would] receive” (v. 11), they, their families, and many thousands of their posterity perished (cf. v. 10), that is, “dwindle[d] in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22–23; compare 1 Nephi 4:13).

Nevertheless, Nephite missionary efforts had begun or had been conceived even within that first generation, as indicated by Nephi’s remark: “For *we labor diligently* to write, to persuade our children, *and also our brethren, to believe in Christ*, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). This passage, often cited in discussions of Latter-day Saint views on saving grace, is usually cut loose from its contextual moorings. The diligent labor of writing (that is, record keeping on plates) and persuasion (i.e., preaching, missionary work) that Nephi speaks of was directed toward the rising generation of Nephites *and* Lamanites. They were still inviting the Lamanites to come and partake of the tree of life.

Jacob, perhaps recapitulating Nephi’s earlier remark, puts it similarly: “And *we labor diligently* to engraven these words upon plates, *hoping that our beloved brethren and our children will receive them* with thankful hearts” (Jacob 4:3). Jacob’s words show his faith and hope that his “beloved brethren” (the Lamanites) would receive his words at some future time and also suggest that the missionary labor of which Nephi spoke was ongoing, though unsuccessful. That this was the case is confirmed by Jacob late in his life: “And it came to pass that *many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth*; but it all was vain, for they delighted in wars and bloodshed, and they had an eternal hatred against us, their brethren. And they sought . . . to destroy us continually” (Jacob 7:24). Jacob came to realize that no change would be effected among the Lamanites during his lifetime. His frustration is evident as he evokes Nephi’s unflattering description of Lamanite culture (1 Nephi 12:23; 2 Nephi 5:14, 22–24) to explain why their diligent labors and many means had failed. The Lamanites’ delight in wars and bloodshed and their eternal hatred were among the worst of the consequences of their ancestors’ decision not to partake of the tree of life.

Still, Jacob, unlike many of his Nephite contemporaries, could see what was commendable in Lamanite culture—and this was a basis for hope. When many of the Nephites were seeking to skirt the Lord’s commandments on

monogamy and chastity, Jacob declared to the Nephites: “The Lamanites . . . are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them” (Jacob 3:5). Jacob notes that because of this obedience the Lamanites would one day become a “blessed people” (v. 6). Then he criticizes the Nephites’ pride and self-perception as “good ones” or “fair ones,”⁹ declaring, “their *unbelief* and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much *better* [literally, good¹⁰] are you than they in the sight of your great Creator?” (v. 7). Just as his father, Lehi, was unwilling to give up on his eldest sons, until the end of his life Jacob was unwilling to give up on the Lamanites, and he continued to invite his “beloved brethren” to come and partake of the tree of life.

Enos’s record shows that the Nephites continued to try to “restore the Lamanites unto the true faith” throughout his lifetime as well:

And I bear record that the people of Nephi did *seek diligently* to restore *the Lamanites* unto the *true faith* in God. But *our labors were vain*; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20)

After faithfully wrestling (Hebrew: *yē’ābēq*) (v. 2; see also Genesis 32:24) or “struggling” (vv. 10–11, 14) on behalf of the Lamanites,¹¹ Enos, like Jacob,¹² is downhearted about the prospects of such efforts succeeding immediately. He, like Jacob, uses an unflattering description of the Lamanites reminiscent of what Nephi said he saw in his tree of life vision (1 Nephi 12:23; 2 Nephi 5:24). This description conveyed in concrete terms the aggregate spiritual effects of Laman and Lemuel’s not partaking of the tree of life on their posterity.

Yet, like his own story of repentance, Enos’s vision regarding the Lamanites is ultimately one of faith (see Enos 1:8, 11–12, 15–16, 18). His faithfulness secures the blessing he desires most: a covenant that the records of

his people—their scriptures—would be brought forth to the Lamanites in a future day (vv. 13, 16). Here we learn that Lehi and Jacob had also besought the Lord for this blessing: “Thy fathers have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their *faith*; for their *faith* was like unto thine” (v. 18). The Lord promised that their faithfulness would bear the desired fruit among the Lamanites “in his own due time” (v. 16).

When Enos’s son Jarom writes, he does not mention any active Nephite missionary efforts among the Lamanites, though he explicitly states that the small plates were being written and kept “for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the *Lamanites*” (Jarom 1:2). He too, however, gives an unflattering description of the Lamanites that evokes Nephi’s tree of life vision, “they loved murder and would drink the blood of beasts” (v. 6), thus illustrating the persistence of the awful spiritual and cultural consequences of Laman and Lemuel’s choice not to partake of the fruit of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 12:23, 2 Nephi 5:24).

The laconic accounts of Omni, Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom present an even grimmer picture. The Nephites’ desperate struggle for self-preservation precluded any missionary activity. No longer were righteous men with the gift of prophecy keeping the small plates, but battle-hardened warriors (see Omni 1:2, 10). Many of the Nephites themselves had ceased to partake of the tree of life. Amaron notes that “the Lord did visit [the Nephites] in great judgment” (v. 7), such that “the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed” (v. 5), while a righteous remnant were spared (v. 7). Amaleki notes that these Nephites were “warned of the Lord [to] flee out of the land of Nephi” into the wilderness (v. 12), a picture eerily reminiscent of the initial Nephite departure from the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5). This is the first intimation that many Nephites had been dissenting to the Lamanites (see Alma 47:35).¹³ The consequences of Laman and Lemuel’s choosing unbelief were having an increasingly direct and catastrophic effect on Nephi’s own descendants. They were becoming subject to the same kind of “spiritual death” that their less enlightened brethren were suffering.

“But When I Saw That Which Was Good among Them”

Though the scriptures above suggest that the Lamanites were doomed to an existence of spiritual ignorance, Nephi, in his later revelation, envisioned the descendants of his brother eventually coming to the tree. We

often associate Nephi's prophecy with Lamanite restoration in this dispensation, but the Book of Mormon recounts Lamanite spiritual transformation beginning in the Nephite–Lamanite interaction described near the end of the book of Mosiah. Although he could not have appreciated it at the time, Zeniff's self-described "over-zealous" (Mosiah 7:21; 9:1) attempts to reinherit the land of Nephi would eventually lead to the "language of Nephi [being] taught among all the people of the Lamanites" (Mosiah 24:4).¹⁴ Unlike other Nephites in his recolonization party, Zeniff's humanity would not allow him to participate in a preemptive slaughter of Lamanites. Zeniff was even willing to contend with his own people rather than launch a preemptive attack on the Lamanites (see Mosiah 9:2; contrast Omni 1:28). In the self-introduction that prefaces his record, he declares: "I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the *Nephites*, and having had a knowledge of the land of *Nephi*, or the land of our fathers' first inheritance, and having been sent as a spy among the Lamanites that I might spy out their forces, that our army might come upon them and destroy them—but when I saw that which was good among them I was desirous that they should not be destroyed" (Mosiah 9:1). Zeniff's recognition of the good among the Lamanites would eventually allow them to learn the language of Nephi, which would prepare them for later Nephite ministrations and the opportunity to partake of the goodness of God¹⁵—the tree of life.

Unfortunately, as it had Jacob and Enos, frustration overtook Zeniff after years of bloody war with the Lamanites precipitated by a hatred rooted in tradition—hatred that was the fruit of Laman and Lemuel's refusal to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, manifest in trenchant unbelief. Although Zeniff had once seen and appreciated "that which was good among [the Lamanites]," at the end of his life he would report:

They were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, *believing* in the tradition of their fathers, which is this—*Believing* that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea;

And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea, and all this because that *Nephi was more faithful* in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers

and answered them, and he took the lead of their journey in the wilderness. . . .

And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness as the Lord had commanded him, and took the records which were engraven on the plates of brass, for they said that he robbed them.

And thus *they have taught their children that they should hate them, and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them; therefore they have an eternal hatred towards the children of Nephi.* (Mosiah 10:12–13; 17)

Zeniff, like earlier Nephite writers, adapts Nephi’s description of the Lamanites as “a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations” and their “dwindl[ing] in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:23), characterizing Lamanite unbelief as a firm *belief* in false traditions, as opposed to Nephite faithfulness.¹⁶

In bearing the brunt of the Lamanites’ tradition-rooted, “eternal” hatred, Zeniff experienced something akin to what the Prophet Joseph Smith would later describe as “creeds of the fathers” (traditions) being “so strongly riveted . . . upon the hearts of the children” (D&C 123:7). Zeniff had learned through painful experience that a *belief* in incorrect traditions could be the worst kind of *unbelief* in which a nation might dwindle. What Nephi foresaw in 1 Nephi 12:22–23 must have seemed bitterly true to Zeniff, but he himself had witnessed a basis for hope. Zeniff’s compassion for the Lamanites (Mosiah 9:1) eventuated in the Lamanite’s being taught the language of Nephi (24:4). This charity would have eternal consequences.

“So Great a Miracle”!

When Ammon and his brothers announced their intention to undertake a mission to the Lamanites, their fellow Nephites “laughed [them] to scorn” (Alma 26:23). Every previous invitation to the Lamanites to come and partake of the tree of life had been a miserable failure. The resistance from fellow Nephites that Ammon recalls receiving was hardly surprising (see Alma 26:24). The argument against this mission recalled the worst aspects of Lamanite culture (Alma 26:24). More disturbing, however, were the arguments of some Nephites that a mission of genocide be undertaken instead (v. 25).

Fortunately, Ammon was the right man to preside over this mission.¹⁷ Ammon himself (as one of the unbelievers who had worked to destroy the Nephite church) knew what it was like to be captive to unbelief (Mosiah 27:8–10). He could thus empathize with the Lamanites in ways that perhaps previous missionaries could not. Just as an angel had been sent to turn him and his brethren from their iniquities (vv. 11–18), he was now being sent by the Lord as an angel to the Lamanites (see Alma 27:4). He became the servant of a Lamanite king named Lamoni and immediately sought for opportunities to, in his words, “win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to *believe* my words” (Alma 17:29). He immediately impressed Lamoni with his faithful acts of service, who when “he had learned of the *faithfulness* of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power . . . was astonished exceedingly, and said: *Surely* this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit” (Alma 18:2). Ammon’s fellow-servants asserted that they did “*not believe* that a man has such great power” (v. 3). They believed Ammon’s power was divine.

Mormon here pauses to make an important comment on Lamanite (un)belief and tradition: “Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit. Notwithstanding *they believed* in a Great Spirit, they supposed that whatsoever they did was right” (v. 5). Lamoni believed that Ammon was “the Great Spirit” and yet was still faithfully serving Lamoni: “Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the *faithfulness* of Ammon, saying: *Surely* there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so *faithful* as this man” (v. 10).

Faithfulness begat faith as Lamoni allowed Ammon to teach him the gospel according to Nephite traditions, declaring, “*Yea, I will believe* all thy words” (v. 23). At this point in the narrative, the reader witnesses a proliferation of the word *belief*, as the verb *believe* occurs no less than thirteen times throughout Alma 18–19, together with other potentially related words, *faith* (used at least four times) and *true* (used once).¹⁸ Ammon is moved to exclaim to Lamoni’s wife, who so readily believed what she was taught: “Blessed art thou because of thy *exceeding faith*; . . . there has not been *such great faith* among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10).

At this important moment in the narrative history, Lamanite “unbelief” and tradition give way to faith and faithfulness as Lamoni “believe[s] all

[Ammon’s] words” (Alma 18:40), cries unto the Lord for mercy, and falls to the earth (18:41) like those in Lehi’s vision who “came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30). Lamoni then partook of the fruit. “Now, this was what Ammon desired, for he knew that king Lamoni was under the power of God; he knew that *the dark veil of unbelief* was being cast away from his mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness—yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul, yea, he knew that . . . he was carried away in God” (Alma 19:6).

The “dark veil of unbelief” mentioned here is analogous to the mist of darkness in Lehi’s vision that had to be overcome through faithfulness (see 1 Nephi 8:23–24; 12:17). Thus, the removal of the “dark veil of unbelief” suggests that Lamoni had, in a sense, come into the presence of God and partaken of the fruit of the tree of life—“the light of everlasting life.” The joy that had been infused into his soul was the same that Lehi and Nephi both describe. Key to this transformation was Ammon’s use of the scriptures:

[Ammon] began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people. . . .

And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness. . . .

And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time. (Alma 18:36–38)¹⁹

Both Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions make it clear that without a rod of iron to hold fast to, there is no access to the tree of life. When Nephi was compelled to depart with the plates of brass and the other records (see 2 Nephi 5:12), “robbing” Laman and Lemuel according to Lamanite tradition (Mosiah 10:16), the two oldest brothers had, in fact, deprived their own posterity of direct access to the words of eternal life—the scriptures. In losing access to the word of

God, they had been “cut off from the presence of the Lord” as foretold (see 2 Nephi 5:20).

When Nephi later speaks of “press[ing] forward *with a steadfastness* in Christ,” that is, “press[ing] forward, *feasting* upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20; 32:3), he is addressing himself to people who have access to scriptures and revelation—a rod of iron (1 Nephi 11:25; 13:23–24).²⁰ Without a rod like Moses’s rod of God (Exodus 4:20, 17:9)²¹ to stave off or “divide asunder all the cunning and snares of the devil, and lead the man [or woman] of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery” (Helaman 3:29; compare D&C 8:1–3),²² the posterity of Laman and Lemuel could hardly exhibit any “*steadfastness* in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20; see also 25:24; 26:8) and stood no chance of “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) or partaking of the fruit of the tree of life. It was as the Spirit had stated to Nephi when he slew Laban: a nation had “dwindle[d] . . . in unbelief” without scriptures (1 Nephi 4:13).²³

King Benjamin was keenly aware of the value of scriptures. He and his father, Mosiah, had experienced the difficulties of integrating a scripture-less society (the Mulekites of Zarahemla) into their own. He understood that access to the scriptures had given his fathers the opportunity to partake of the tree of life—an opportunity that Laman and Lemuel had denied their children:

Were it not for [these records], . . . even our fathers would have dwindled in *unbelief* [see especially 1 Nephi 4:13 and 12:22–23], and we should have been like unto our brethren, the Lamanites, who know nothing concerning these things, or even do *not believe* them when they are taught them, because of the traditions of their fathers, which are *not correct*.

O my sons, . . . remember that these sayings are *true*, and also that these records are *true*. And behold, also the plates of Nephi, . . . they are *true*, and we can know of their *surety* because we have them before our eyes. (Mosiah 1:5–6)

Benjamin’s words to his sons also demonstrate how ensconced the description of Lamanites as those who dwindled in unbelief had become by his time. Benjamin places strong emphasis on the unbelief of the Lamanites and the incorrectness of their traditions, while pointing at the truth or surety of the Nephite records.²⁴ In light of this, it is no surprise to find that the conversions

of Lamoni and Lamoni's father (as well as those who were within hearing), from states of unbelief to believing, are the result of the Nephite missionaries' efforts and their application of the scriptures (the iron rod).

Because of Ammon's and his brothers' faithfulness and Lamoni's faithful response to their teaching, many of the Lamanites partake of the fruit of the tree: "And as *sure* as the Lord liveth, so *sure* as many as *believed*, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the *truth*, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, *as many of the Lamanites as believed* in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, *never did fall away*" (Alma 23:6). Not even persecution could shake the faithfulness of these Lamanites: "And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to *believe* and to know the *truth*, they were *firm*, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin" (Alma 24:19). "Many of [these] *Lamanites* should perish by fire because of their *belief*" (Alma 25:5), even "all those that *believed*" (Alma 25:7). Nevertheless, many Lamanites "began to *disbelieve* the traditions of their fathers, and to *believe* in the Lord" (Alma 25:6). They partook of the fruit of the tree of life and neither became ashamed nor fell away.²⁵

Mormon further notes that these Lamanites became known as the "people of Ammon," and that "they were distinguished by that name ever after" (Alma 27:26), and that they "were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and *they were firm in the faith of Christ*, even unto the end" (v. 27). At this time, the faithfulness of earlier Nephite holy men was realized in Ammon and his brethren, whose faithfulness in turn begot unsurpassed faithfulness in the Lamanites.

Mormon illustrates how this faithfulness only increased among the next generation of these Lamanites. When called upon to defend the Nephites whose faith they shared, more than two thousand of their sons saved the day. Helaman states that they were "*firm and undaunted*. Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even *according to their faith* it was done unto them" (Alma 57:20–21). These young men ascribed their faithfulness to the teaching of their mothers (see Alma 57:21; 56:47–48). Miraculously, not one of these young men was killed in battle, a fact to which Helaman appends this remarkable comment: "And we do

justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of *their exceeding faith* in that which *they had been taught to believe*—that there was a just God, and whosoever did *not doubt*, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power. Now this was the *faith* of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are *firm*, and *they do put their trust in God continually*” (Alma 57:26–27). Mormon includes this firsthand account in his history to show that just as unbelief is taught and perpetuated generationally, so too are faith and faithfulness. The mothers of these young men had helped them come to the tree of life and to partake of its fruit. The faithfulness of Lamanite mothers again showed that Lamanites could be the *most faithful* of all people. This faithfulness was the fruit of Ammon’s faithfulness a generation earlier. As Moroni noted long after regarding these events, “Behold, it was the *faith* of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (Ether 12:15). Many Lamanites were now partakers of the fruit of the tree of life, in pleasing contrast to what Lehi (see 1 Nephi 8:13, 35) and Nephi (see 1 Nephi 12:22–23) had seen in vision.

“They Are More Righteous Than You”

Given the history presented up to this point, Mormon makes another truly remarkable observation when he notes that, not too many years later, “*the Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief*, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the *Lamanites* began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in *truth* and uprightness before him” (Helaman 6:34). Where “the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, . . . the Lord began to pour out his spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and *willingness to believe* in his words” (Helaman vv. 35–36). Mormon’s point is clear: the Lamanites were no longer the unfaithful who had dwindled in unbelief; they were the *very faithful*. The Lamanites were partaking freely of the fruit of the tree of life, while the Nephites were refusing it (compare 1 Nephi 8:13, 35).

Samuel the Lamanite’s prophetic address to the Nephites of Zarahemla further illustrates this development. The content of Samuel’s speech recommends it as one of the best prophetic speeches in the Book of Mormon.²⁶ Samuel seems to play off of traditional notions of Nephite goodness and Lamanite unbelief to emphasize that the reverse had become true:

And behold, ye do know of yourselves . . . that *as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them—*

Therefore, as many as have come to this . . . are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing wherewith they have been made free.

And ye know also that they have buried their weapons of war, and they fear to take them up lest by any means they should sin; yea, ye can see that they fear to sin—for behold they will suffer themselves that they be trodden down and slain by their enemies, and will not lift their swords against them, and *this because of their faith in Christ.*

And now, *because of their steadfastness when they do believe in that thing which they do believe, for because of their firmness when they are once enlightened, behold, the Lord shall bless them and prolong their days, notwithstanding their iniquity—*

Yea, even if they should dwindle in unbelief the Lord shall prolong their days, until the time shall come which hath been spoken of by our fathers, and also by the prophet Zenos, and many other prophets, concerning the restoration of our brethren, the Lamanites, again to the knowledge of the truth—

Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites . . .

And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall again be brought to the *true* knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep.

Therefore I say unto you, it shall be better [see Jacob 3:5; Helaman 7:23] for them than for you except ye repent.

For behold, had the mighty works been shown unto them which have been shown unto you, *yea, unto them who have dwindled in unbelief because of the traditions of their fathers, ye can see of yourselves that they never would again have dwindled in unbelief.*

Therefore, saith the Lord: I will not utterly destroy them, but I will cause that in the day of my wisdom they shall return again unto me, saith the Lord.

And now behold, saith the Lord, concerning the people of the Nephites: If they will not repent, and observe to do my will, I will utterly destroy them, saith the Lord, *because of their unbelief notwithstanding the many mighty works which I have done among them*; and as surely as the Lord liveth shall these things be, saith the Lord (Helaman 15:7–17)

S. Kent Brown has identified elements of ancient Israelite lamentation in Samuel's speech,²⁷ and Donald W. Parry has demonstrated that Samuel made extensive use of Israelite prophetic speech forms.²⁸ David Bokovoy has shown that Samuel's use of *love* and *hate* in Helaman 15:1–4 conforms to the meaning of these terms in ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties (as evident in Hosea 9:15 and elsewhere).²⁹ Samuel's familiarity with Israelite prophetic tradition probably suggests a thorough knowledge of the corpus of Nephite prophetic tradition, including Lehi's and Nephi's visions of the tree of life. Samuel evidently refers to the stereotype of Lamanite unbelief from Nephi's vision (1 Nephi 12:22–23, familiar to his Nephite audience) in order to show that converted Lamanites had become the most steadfast of believers and that the state of Nephite spirituality had become very precarious.

When descendants of Laman and Lemuel were able to overcome the mists of darkness (the dark veil of unbelief, the traditions of their fathers), they—unlike those apostate Nephites who “tasted of the fruit [and] were ashamed” (1 Nephi 8:28)—“never did fall away” (Alma 23:6; compare Mormon 6:17–19). On the contrary, the Nephites (the “fair ones” or “goodly ones”³⁰) who supposed themselves better than the Lamanites would be utterly destroyed because of their unbelief—a lack of faith in spite of centuries of miraculous deliverances in fulfillment of Alma's prophecy to Helaman (Alma 45:9–14).

During this period and at other times of widespread apostasy, Nephites believed that their “goodness” or “chosenness” was inherent,³¹ but such beliefs were a sure sign of pride and an imminent fall. They were now choosing unbelief and refusing to partake of the fruit of the tree of life. The Nephites had, in large measure, become the kind of unbelievers that exemplified the worst aspects of what they—in their own pride—had always detested about Lamanite unbelief and culture. For a time, this trend would only get worse.

Mormon reports that amid a general fracturing of society, “the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land *save it were among a few of the Lamanites* who were converted unto the *true faith*; and they would not depart from it, for they were *firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence* to keep the commandments of the Lord” (3 Nephi 6:14).³² The Lamanites, not the Nephites, were the very faithful. It was as Nephi had said to the wicked Nephites not many years earlier: “For behold, they [the Lamanites] are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received” (Helaman 7:24; see especially Jacob 3:5). Fortunately for the righteous, the Savior would come “with healing in his wings” (2 Nephi 25:13) just four years later. At that time, all the children of Lehi would have access to the fruit of the tree of life in an unprecedented way.

They All “Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree”

The account of the Savior’s ministry in 3 Nephi is, among many things, a chronicle of how “the people of Nephi . . . and also those who had been called Lamanites” (3 Nephi 10:18) together “came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree [of life]” (1 Nephi 8:30; see also 3 Nephi 11:12–19; 17:9–10). This account offers the best picture of what having full access to the tree of life would mean for a people.

Mormon reports that “they had all things common among them” and that “there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and *partakers of the heavenly gift*” (4 Nephi 1:3)—the Second Comforter, even the Savior himself (see Ether 12:8–9; John 14:16–18). In other words, all were *partakers* of the tree of life—the full measure of the blessings of the Atonement. He also notes that “there was no contention in the land because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15). This is what Nephi envisioned when he saw that the tree of life signified “the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” (1 Nephi 11:22). Mormon even declares that “surely there could not be a happier people” (4 Nephi 1:16), because there were no “Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” (v. 17).

The “first generation from Christ” of righteous Lamanites and Nephites (4 Nephi 1:18) fits Lehi’s description of those who had passed through “a mist

of darkness” (1 Nephi 8:23; see also 12:4), or a “vapor of darkness” (3 Nephi 8:10; see also 8:3–10:14), and “press[ed] their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30). Moroni states that “it was *by faith* that Christ showed himself unto [the Lamanites and Nephites], after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself *until after they had faith in him*” (Ether 12:7). This statement suggests an equivalence between having faith and pressing one’s way forward, holding fast to the rod or (as Nephi put it) “press[ing] forward with a steadfastness in Christ” and “press[ing] forward, feasting upon the word” (2 Nephi 31:20).

Most of the second generation was heir to their great faithfulness (see 4 Nephi 1:19–22). Sadly, at the end of that generation, many entered into the great and spacious building (1 Nephi 8:31–33) and indulged themselves in its desires (4 Nephi 1:24; see also 1 Nephi 8:27; 13:7–8).

“They Did Willfully Rebel”

Mormon suggests that the splintering of this unified Zion society and the reemergence of the old ethnic and religious divisions among the descendants of Lehi was a lasting consequence of Laman and Lemuel’s initial choice. It was a reenactment of the scene in Lehi’s dream that caused him such exceeding fear. Mormon, however, describes the situation as being worse than when Laman and Lemuel initially refused the blessings of the gospel: “And it came to pass that they who rejected the gospel were called *Lamanites*, and *Lemuelites*, and *Ishmaelites*; and *they did not dwindle in unbelief*, but they did wilfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and *they did teach their children that they should not believe, even as their fathers, from the beginning, did dwindle*. And it was because of the wickedness and abomination of their fathers, even as it was in the beginning. And they were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning” (4 Nephi 1:38–39). Mormon seems to imply that if Laman and Lemuel had not chosen unbelief from the beginning, events would not have come to pass as they did at this much later time, fulfilling anew the angel’s and Nephi’s words in 1 Nephi 12:22–23. The Lamanites hatred of the Nephites had strong, deep roots. It was the worst of the consequences of Laman and Lemuel’s choice, resulting in the loss of countless lives and the misery of many souls.

Unfortunately, this extreme manifestation of unfaithfulness and rebellion “against the gospel of Christ” was surpassed almost immediately by Nephite pride (4 Nephi 1:24; see also 1 Nephi 11:36), leading to the rapid deterioration of society (see Mormon 8:27). Alma had foreseen that the Nephites themselves would “dwindle in unbelief” (Alma 45:12) and would, by and large, become like the Lamanites with the exception of “a few who [would] be called the disciples of the Lord” (Alma 45:14). Those who were pressing forward to partake of the fruit of the tree were few by that time. Yet the remedy then was the same as it had always been: faith and faithfulness in Christ.

Faithfulness amid Deteriorating Faith

When Mormon and Moroni stated the need to have faith, hope, and charity (see Moroni 7) they knew what they spoke of. Like Nephi, they saw the final consequences of Laman and Lemuel’s unbelief; they witnessed the genocide (the final fall) of their own people, yet they could write about the promises that were still extended to the Lamanites if they would repent (see Alma 17:15; see also Enos 1:16; Alma 9:16; Helaman 15:12). Until the end of his life, Moroni continued to refer to the Lamanites as his brethren (see Moroni 1:4, 10:1), even his “beloved brethren” (see Moroni 10:18–19).

Ranging from hope and joy (see Mormon 2:12) to hopelessness (see Mormon 2:13; 5:2), Mormon and Moroni knew that they had “a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay” (Moroni 9:6). Even though their faithful efforts seemed to bear little or no fruit in their time, those efforts are bearing plentiful fruit today. The entire Book of Mormon can be said to be the fruit of their faithfulness, as well as the millions of lives their record has touched and the Christ-centered faithfulness that record continues to inspire. They have afforded millions a rod of iron—a means of accessing the tree of life that would be otherwise unavailable.

We too are living in what appear to be times of deteriorating faith and faithfulness, and it may seem to us that our best efforts to bring our brothers and sisters to Christ are in vain. We need only, however, to look to such examples as Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Ammon, the sons of Mosiah, the Lamanite converts, Mormon, and Moroni to see that our faithful efforts will bear fruit in the Lord’s own due time (see Enos 1:16). Their faithfulness is similar to the Savior’s, who wrought an infinite atonement—the full effects of which still have yet to be realized. We are living in the times of the

prophesied “gather[ing] together in one” (see Ephesians 1:10; Jacob 5:74; John 11:52). Although the harvest is truly great and the laborers are few (see Jacob 5:70), each faithful act of service helps to prepare or clear the way (see Jacob 5:61, 65–66) so that eventually “the good shall overcome the bad” (Jacob 5:66). Though the reverse may seem true at the moment, the Atonement of Jesus Christ will one day have its intended effect (see Jacob 5:75).

“Ye Know Not but What They Will Return and Repent” (3 Nephi 18:32)

Like Mormon and Moroni, we too “have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay” (Moroni 9:6). First, as the “peaceable followers of Christ” ours must be a “peaceable walk with the children of men” (Moroni 7:3–4), even as the mists of darkness and wickedness grow thicker all around us. Second, we have the responsibility to “invite all to come unto Christ” (D&C 20:59) and “partake of his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:28, 33) even as he invites all to come and partake. Third, we (like Lehi and others) are not to give up on people or write people off (especially our own family), even when they seem to spurn every invitation to partake of the fruit of the tree of life. Elder Robert D. Hales, alluding to the scene in Lehi’s vision, noted the following: “*The greatest rescue, the greatest activation will be in our homes. If someone in your family is wandering in strange paths, you are a rescuer, engaged in the greatest rescue effort the Church has ever known. I testify from personal experience: There is no failure except in giving up. It is never too early or too late to begin. Do not worry about what has happened in the past.*”³³ Our faithfulness will beget faith in those around us, but so will our unfaithfulness beget unfaithfulness. Our immediate responsibility is, through our faithfulness in Jesus Christ, to beget faith in the rising generation (D&C 123:11), our own families, and especially our posterity.

The Book of Mormon’s lesson about the long-term consequences of unbelief on posterity is indeed a lesson for us today. Even Mormon and Moroni, who as the record’s editors and compilers were well situated to appreciate the historical significance of the Lamanites again dwindling in unbelief in the manner that Nephi had seen (1 Nephi 12:22–23), had hope for their brethren (Mormon 9:35–37). We are living in the days of the complete fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to the Lamanites. They (and all so-called unbelievers) can still become the *exceedingly faithful* by repenting and choosing to experience

(taste) the love of God as manifest in the Savior. As the Savior himself said, “Ye know not but what they will return and repent” (3 Nephi 18:32) and partake of the fruit of the tree of life. The promises of the Lord, like the rod of iron³⁴ and (more importantly) the arms of the Savior, remain extended.³⁵ In the Lord’s own due time, his Atonement, in no small part through our faithfulness, will eventually reach all with its full intended embrace.

Notes

This paper is dedicated to my wife, Suzy, and to the memory of our son Nathan Lon Bowen. Nathan has given his mother, father, and brother (Zachariah) all the more reason to press forward in faith and endure to the end. We look forward with hope to the day when we shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life with him and all the faithful.

1. “Cut off from the presence of the Lord”: varieties of this collocation (combination of terms) describe the condition of the Lamanites in 2 Nephi 5:20 and Alma 9:13–14. It is first used in 1 Nephi 2:21; 2 Nephi 1:20; 4:4, warning of the Lamanites’ future condition. The original form of the Lord’s promise to Lehi is evidently preserved in Alma 50:20: “Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.” Originally, this promise was directed toward Lehi’s posterity generally and not towards the Lamanites in particular. Alma understood the implications of this, as is evident in his counsel to each of his sons (see Alma 36:30; 37:13; and 38:1). This collocation is also used to describe Adam and Eve (and their posterity) in 2 Nephi 9:6 and Alma 42:7–11 (see also Ether 2:15).

2. For examples of “cast off” and “cast out,” see 1 Nephi 8:36; 2 Nephi 25:29; and Helaman 12:25.

3. For a survey of the varieties of *inclusio* in Hebrew poetry and prose, see *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 323–25.

4. See 1 Nephi 12:18–19. Nephite pride was the pride of “the great and spacious building.” Compare 1 Nephi 11:36; Alma 5:53, 7:6; 3 Nephi 6:15; 4 Nephi 1:24.

5. N. Eldon Tanner framed the issue of unbelief as a matter of choice. See N. Eldon Tanner, “The Consequences of Choosing Unbelief,” *Ensign*, December 1979, 2.

6. See especially 1 Nephi 13:35; 15:13; 2 Nephi 1:10; 26:15; Mosiah 1:5; Alma 46:10–14; 50:22; Helaman 6:34; 15:11; 3 Nephi 25:5; 4 Nephi 1:34–38; Mormon 9:20; Ether 4:3.

7. The Hebrew *pānim* (literally *faces*) denotes both an individual’s physical face and his or her presence.

8. Similar descriptions of the Lamanites based on Nephi’s characterization can be found in Enos 1:20; Jacob 7:24; Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 9:12. Mormon 5:15 indicates that the Nephites had characterized the Lamanites this way for much of their shared history.

9. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name *Nephi*” *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2; “Wordplay on the Name ‘Enos,’” *Insights* 26, no. 3 (2006): 2; “‘And He Was a Young Man’: The Literary Preservation of Alma’s Autobiographical Wordplay,” *Insights* 30, no. 4 (2010): 2–3n8.

10. A possible wordplay on (or play on the meaning of) *Nephi*. Hebrew and Egyptian both create a two-member comparative construction using a regular adjective with a preposition (*m-* or *min* in Hebrew, *r* in Egyptian). See Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:522–23; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 47.

11. There is good evidence that Enos saw this struggle in terms of the Jacob–Esau conflict. See John A. Tvedtnes and Matthew Roper, “Jacob and Enos: Wrestling before God,” *Insights* 21, no. 5 (2001): 2–3.

12. Enos’s use of the term *wrestle* in Enos 1:2 is a deliberate paronomasia on the name of his own father, Jacob, and his ancestor, Jacob, borrowed from the interplay of the river Jabbok *yabbōq* (Genesis 32:23), Jacob (*yā^aqōb*), the verb “to wrestle” (*yē^aābēq* / *b^ehē^aāb^eqō*, Genesis 32:25–26), and the verb “embrace” (*way^ehābēqēhū*, Genesis 33:4). Enos must have taken heart in the fact that Jacob and Esau’s broken brotherly relationship was ultimately reconciled—“at-one-ed.”

13. Commenting on Amalickiah’s rise to power among the Lamanites, Mormon notes that “the people of the Lamanites . . . were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of *Nephites*, from the reign of *Nephi* down to the present time” (Alma 47:35).

14. Although Zeniff may not have appreciated the significance of these events, Mormon did. When Mormon reports that because of Noah’s ex-priest Amulon and his henchmen, “the language of *Nephi* began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites” (Mosiah 24:4), he may have been alluding to Zeniff’s own explanation of why he was in the party that went up to reinherit the land of *Nephi*: “I, Zeniff, having been taught in all the language of the *Nephites*” (Mosiah 9:1).

15. See Alma 24:7; 2 *Nephi* 26:28, 33; 33:14; Jacob 1:7.

16. Zeniff’s description suggests a thorough familiarity with the contents of the small plates.

17. Interestingly, Ammon’s name could have meant—or was thought to mean—“faithful.” “Ammon” could be an alternative spelling of the Hebrew name Amon (אֲמוֹן), which Martin Noth thought meant “faithful” or “trustworthy,” that is, “[The Lord is] faithful” or “[The Lord is] trustworthy.” See Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 228. See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Brill: 2001), 1:62. Another, although less likely, possibility is that it is a biform of Amnon (אֲמֹנָה or אֲמֹנָה), which also means “faithful” (Noth, *Israelitischen Personennamen*, 38, 228). See *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1:65. Still less likely is that it is *Ammon* with an initial *ayin* (עֲמוֹן), since that gentilic name was not traditionally held in high esteem by the Israelites. See Genesis 19:30–38, where it is associated with incest.

18. This would imply that the Nephite language of Ammon's time (and still later, Mormon's—see Mormon 9:32–33) was still Hebrew at its base (which is possible, but far from certain). The words *believe*, *faith*, and *true* might then still derive from Hebrew **mn*.

19. Similarly, Aaron's success among the Lamanites may also be attributed to his familiarity with and use of the scriptures (see Alma 22:12–14).

20. For more on the word of God as a rod or sword, see Hugh W. Nibley "Ezekiel 37:15–23 as Evidence for the Book of Mormon," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 311–28; John A. Tvedtnes, "Rod and Sword as the Word of God," *JBMS* 5, no. 2 (1996): 148–55. Matthew L. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod?," *Insights* 25, no. 2 (2005): 2–3.

21. "Rod of God"—Hebrew, *matteh ha-elohim*. Compare Egyptian *mdw*, "rod," "word." See also 1 Nephi 17:26, 29. For "word of God," compare Egyptian *mdw-ntr*, literally "word of God," or "sacred writings," "scripture." The meaning of *mdw-ntr* ranges from "word of God [or] divine decree" to "sacred writings" (scriptures), and even to the "written characters [and] script" in which such "sacred writings" and "divine decrees" were written. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 122.

22. Mormon's description of the word of God in Helaman 3:29–30 is a creative blending of imagery from Lehi's vision and the Exodus.

23. Nephi's inclusion of the Spirit's statement, "It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13), is probably meant to be understood in the wider context of Lamanite dwindling in unbelief without the scriptures. In Nephi's mind, the Lamanites had proven that a nation does dwindle in unbelief without the scriptures, thus further justifying his actions against Laban on that occasion.

24. The root **mn* has the basic meaning "to be firm, trustworthy," with related meanings "reliable," "faithful," "to believe," "to have trust in," "surety," "faithfulness," "steadfastness," and "truth" (*mt* < **mnt*). See *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1:62–65.

25. In contrast to apostate Nephites (see 1 Nephi 8:25).

26. See S. Kent Brown, "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 163–80; Donald W. Parry, "'Thus Saith the Lord': Prophetic Language in Samuel's Speech," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992) 181–83. David E. Bokovoy, "Love vs. Hate: An Analysis of Helaman 15:1–4," *Insights* 22, no. 2 (2002): 2–3.

27. Brown, "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite," 163–80.

28. Parry, "Thus Saith the Lord," 181–83.

29. Bokovoy, "Love vs. Hate," 2–3.

30. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones,'" 2.

31. It is hardly surprising that the Nephites were so enraged by Samuel's turning things upside down that they immediately set about trying to kill him. The emphasis on Lamanite faithfulness and Nephite unbelief continues in Mormon's description of the aftermath of Samuel's speech: after his speech some Nephites "believed on his word" and sought baptism (Helaman 16:1). Amid the attempts of the many Nephites who did *not* believe Samuel's words to kill him, a few others *did* believe on his words and also sought

Nephi for baptism. However, “the more part of [the Nephites] *did not believe* the words of Samuel,” even after witnessing these miracles (v. 6).

32. “Firm, and steadfast, and immovable.” The only other place where this phrase occurs is in Lehi’s counsel to his son Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 2:10). It would seem, then, that Mormon’s allusion is deliberate. The descendants of Laman and Lemuel were now fully living up to Lehi’s counsel to Laman and Lemuel: “continually running into the fountain of all righteousness” like an *’ētān* (a perennial stream). And, like a valley (*’ēmeq*), they were “firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:9–10). For the possibility of wordplay in Lehi’s counsel, see John Tvedtnes, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, October 1986, 64–67.

33. Robert D. Hales, “Our Duty to God: The Mission of Parents and Leaders to the Rising Generation,” *Ensign*, May 2010: 95–98. He continues, “Pick up the phone. Write a note. Make a visit. Extend the invitation to come home. Don’t be afraid or embarrassed. Your child is Heavenly Father’s child. You are about His work. He has promised to gather His children, and He is with you.”

34. 1 Nephi 8:19: “And I beheld a rod [Hebrew *maṭṭeh*] of iron, and it *extended* [Hebrew *nāṭāh*] along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood.” Lehi’s statement may contain a play on words. In any case, a rod is a beautiful metaphor for an ever-extended blessing, as is the extended or outstretched arm.

35. Compare Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 16:12; 29:20; Alma 5:33; 19:36; 29:10; 3 Nephi 9:14.