

# SAMUEL THE LAMANITE AND THE ETHICS OF WEALTH IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

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This essay examines Samuel the Lamanite's ethics of wealth and situates them within the larger tradition of ethical discourse relating to wealth in the Book of Mormon.<sup>1</sup> By *ethics of wealth*, I refer broadly to principles regarding the proper attitude toward and use of money and other material resources. This study's intended contribution is twofold. On the one hand, I hope to add to the growing body of knowledge on the figure of Samuel the Lamanite, who is marginalized in both the Book of Mormon<sup>2</sup> and in modern-day scholarship on this sacred text.<sup>3</sup> And on the other, I hope to provide a resource that may inform the individual and communal economic practices of those who view the Book of Mormon as an inspired tool for patterning their thoughts and behavior.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, this essay is also an effort to imagine the role that Latter-days Saints might play in creating a more humane and just world.<sup>5</sup>

My argument proceeds in three parts. Part 1 establishes the historical and theological context of Samuel’s teaching by examining Mormon’s narration of the four decades of Nephite history preceding Samuel’s appearance. I pay particular attention to how moral and economic discourse converge in this period. Part 2 addresses what Samuel and other Book of Mormon authors describe as the proper attitude toward wealth. Part 3 examines what Samuel and other Book of Mormon authors consider to be the proper use of wealth. I argue that Samuel’s ethics of wealth are consonant with a larger tradition of ethical discourse in the Book of Mormon that frames moral character as a prerequisite to ethical economics.

## MORAL AND ECONOMIC DISCOURSE

Samuel’s discussion of wealth occurs in Helaman 13 in the context of his prophecies of the destruction of the Nephite people. Mormon, who narrates Samuel’s ministry, records that “in the eighty and sixth year, the Nephites did still remain in wickedness, yea, in great wickedness” (v. 1). Consequently, God commands Samuel to “prophesy unto the people whatsoever things should come into his heart” (v. 3). His message to the Nephites in chapter 13 may be divided in the following way:

Verses 5–16: prophecies of the Nephites’ destruction if they fail to repent

Verses 17–23: pronouncement of a curse on the land and on the Nephites’ riches

Verses 30–39: warning that future regret will come too late

Part of Samuel’s criticism of the Nephites in these passages relates to their attitude toward and use of wealth. In the English translation of this passage, Samuel does not use the word *wealth*, but I use it here as a shorthand for the terms he does use: *riches*, *substance*, *treasures*, *gold*, *silver*, and *costly apparel*.<sup>6</sup>

To better understand Samuel’s criticisms of the Nephites in Helaman 13, it will be helpful to first address how these people became wicked and of what their wickedness consisted. Mormon writes that in the forty-eighth year of the reign of the judges “war and contentions began to cease”

and that in the following year there was “continual peace established in the land” on account of the people’s righteousness (Helaman 3:22–23). During this time, the Nephites and Lamanites traveled freely, engaged in commerce with one another, and were blessed with “exceeding prosperity” and “exceeding great riches,” consisting of “gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals” (vv. 24, 36; 6:8–9). Subsequently, greed and pride entered the hearts of some of the Nephites, leading them to persecute “many of their brethren[,] . . . the more humble part of the people” (see vv. 33–34). This in turn led to dissension and contention in the Nephite church and society, such that “there was much bloodshed” (4:1).

In ensuing years the Nephites’ righteousness would wax and wane on account of numerous factors. In reporting this history, however, Mormon consistently correlates the Nephites’ moral fluctuations to their temporal prosperity.<sup>7</sup> He thus demonstrates how economic and moral discourse converge in the Book of Mormon. This is perhaps most clearly seen as he reflects on some of the lessons to be learned from years forty through eighty-five of the reign of the Nephite judges. The passage is worth citing in full.

And thus we can behold . . . the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him. Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity. And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and

devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world! Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths! (Helaman 12:1-5)

Human “unsteadiness” is tied directly to God’s “bless[ing] and prosper[ing]” his people, and lest readers misunderstand these verbs in abstract or spiritualized terms, Mormon goes on to clarify the materiality of the blessings in question: fields, flocks, herds, gold, silver, and “all manner of precious things of every kind and art.”

The correlation of temporal prosperity and morality displayed in this passage also permeates Mormon’s other writings in the large plates and may be summarized as follows: (1) God often blesses the righteous with material wealth,<sup>8</sup> (2) material wealth tends to lead to wickedness,<sup>9</sup> (3) wickedness leads to suffering and poverty,<sup>10</sup> (4) suffering and poverty can lead to righteousness.<sup>11</sup> Mormon’s discussion of wealth, therefore, is seldom just about economics; it is also theological.<sup>12</sup> Within his historical narrative, a people’s relationship with wealth is inseparable from their relationship with God and one another. Wealth affects and reflects personal and communal morality in Mormon’s writings, and “exceeding great prosperity” (Helman 3:24) is frequently the catalyst for moral decline.<sup>13</sup>

How should this inform our understanding of Helaman 13? It is important to recognize that Samuel’s criticisms of the Nephites in this chapter relate not just to their use of wealth (i.e., what they do) but to their moral character (i.e., who they are) as well. As I hope to demonstrate, Samuel identifies the Nephites’ primary problem as not just a question of factually possessing wealth<sup>14</sup> or using it improperly (although this is certainly a large part of the matter at hand); rather, it is that their hearts and minds are insufficiently disposed to possess wealth in a way that does not lead to greed, pride, and sin.

## PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD WEALTH

Throughout Helaman 13, Samuel argues that the Nephites do not possess the proper attitude toward wealth. First, he chastises them for having “set their hearts upon” both “riches” and “their riches” (vv. 20–22).<sup>15</sup> To understand the precise nature of their error, the first question we might ask is, What does it mean to “set” one’s “heart” upon wealth, and why is this a bad thing? The word *heart* in the Book of Mormon has a broad semantic range. It most often appears as one of the five constituent parts of the human person, the other four being the spirit, soul, mind, and body/flesh (two terms often used synonymously).<sup>16</sup> The heart functions specifically as a locus of cognition, emotion, and volition.<sup>17</sup> Thus, to have one’s heart “set” upon wealth implies that one’s thoughts, desires, and/or feelings are occupied with acquiring and retaining wealth. That Samuel differentiates between “riches” and “their riches” (v. 20) suggests that the Nephites had unhealthy attitudes toward wealth they did not yet possess (i.e., “riches” in a general sense) as well as toward wealth they did (i.e., “their riches”).

Samuel does not explicitly state whether this was a sin of kind or of degree. In other words, he does not say whether the Nephites’ hearts should not have been set on wealth at all or whether they were set on wealth too much. Other authors in the Book of Mormon favor the former option as an ethical norm. There are no instances in the Book of Mormon in which one’s heart being “set upon” wealth, in any degree, is a good thing.<sup>18</sup> Jacob, for example, explains that having one’s heart set upon wealth is a form of idolatry: one’s “treasure” becomes one’s “god” (2 Nephi 9:30; compare 3 Nephi 13:24). Elsewhere, having one’s heart set upon wealth can inflate the ego, meaning that wealth may come to be viewed by its possessor as a reflection of his or her superiority over others.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, wealth may pervert one’s view of others, leading to the assumption that a person’s lack of wealth is an indication of his or her lack of value as a person or lack of divine favor.<sup>20</sup> These assumptions are consistently shown in the Book of Mormon to be a barrier to ethical economic practices.

According to Samuel, a properly oriented heart must be “drawn out unto the Lord,” something he closely associates with obedience to God, expressing sincere gratitude, and remembering the source of one’s wealth (Helaman 13:22). Samuel explains to the Nephites:

Ye . . . have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them [riches] unto you. Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you, but ye do always remember your riches, not to thank the Lord your God for them; yea, your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord. (13:21–22)<sup>21</sup>

Implicit in Samuel's critique of the Nephites is the notion that possessing wealth is akin to entering a contract with God. God gives wealth and expects, among other things, the heart and mind of the recipient in return.<sup>22</sup>

Samuel's language here, as well as elsewhere in chapter 13, implies that the Nephites fundamentally misunderstood the nature of their relationship to wealth. In the above passage, Samuel identifies the Lord as the source of wealth three times: the Lord gives wealth, blesses with wealth, and deserves thanks for the wealth that the Nephites possess. This repetition reflects Samuel's desire to make clear that the Nephites' wealth is from God.<sup>23</sup> Several verses later, Samuel makes an even stronger claim: that the Nephites' wealth *is* God's. After criticizing the people for their misoriented hearts,<sup>24</sup> he concludes by saying, "Ye have sought all the days of your life for that which ye cannot obtain" (Helaman 13:38).<sup>25</sup> Samuel is not saying here that the Nephites were unable to obtain wealth; their wealth, after all, is part of the problem. Rather, he is saying that the Nephites assumed that their wealth belonged to them. What they could not "obtain," in other words, was ownership of wealth, as opposed to stewardship over it. Samuel thus echoes what King Benjamin taught a century earlier, that wealth "doth not belong to you but to God" (Mosiah 4:22).<sup>26</sup>

Like Samuel's teachings, other statements in the Book of Mormon are similarly predicated on the notion that cultivating one's inner disposition and understanding is an integral aspect of ethical economics. Such statements relate to (1) the desire to obtain wealth, (2) the willingness to part with it, and (3) how those who possess wealth should perceive themselves and others. Book of Mormon authors consistently teach that one is not to lust after, desire, covet, or love the "things of the world," such as gold, silver, glory, silks, scarlets, fine-twined linen, and precious clothing.<sup>27</sup> The implication here is that wealth should not be a principal object of one's affections, nor should it be sought out for its own sake or to increase one's

status. Rather, one is to seek first “the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (3 Nephi 13:33; compare Jacob 2:18–19; 3 Nephi 13:19–21).<sup>28</sup> Only then will a person obtain “a hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19), which enables him or her to “righteously navigate affluence.”<sup>29</sup> Or put another way, one must seek righteousness before one can possess wealth righteously. Jacob explains: “After ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good” (Jacob 2:19; compare Mosiah 18:27). In this sense, wealth should not be valued apart from its potential to help its possessor accomplish what God considers good.

Other passages relate to people’s willingness to part with wealth. The moral exemplar Lehi, for example, is represented as fleeing Jerusalem and leaving behind his “gold and silver, and all manner of riches . . . because of the commandments of the Lord” (1 Nephi 3:16). Amulek similarly forsakes “all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God,” and Lamoni expresses his willingness to “give up all that I possess” and “forsake my kingdom” for God (Alma 15:16; 22:15). In these passages, faithful individuals prioritize the will of God over retaining their material possessions. Jesus adds that people should be willing to give more than is asked of them—to give also a “cloak” when only a “coat” is requested (3 Nephi 12:40, 42). And King Benjamin prescribes ethical guidelines for those who do not have disposable wealth: “I say unto the poor . . . ; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give. And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned” (Mosiah 4:24–25). Here a willingness to part with wealth is required, even if giving is not possible.

Finally, several statements relate to how those who possess wealth should perceive themselves and others. Benjamin instructs his people, rich and poor alike, to see themselves as beggars: “Behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?” (Mosiah 4:19). Elsewhere, Mosiah and Jacob similarly state that one should “think

of [his] brethren like unto [himself]” and “esteem his neighbor as himself” (Jacob 2:17; Mosiah 27:4). Jacob, Benjamin, and Mosiah thus attempt to undermine the tendency to look down on those who solicit help. If those with wealth see themselves as needy, they might also see themselves in the needy, and thus be more inclined to offer them support. In this sense, empathy is a prerequisite to ethical economics.

Relatedly, Benjamin also commands his people to suspend judgment of others and not assume that a poor person “has brought upon himself his misery” or that poverty is a just punishment for sin (Mosiah 4:17). This suggests that while economic prosperity is frequently correlated to righteousness in the Book of Mormon, financial status is ultimately not a reliable metric of divine favor.<sup>30</sup> Moroni will later argue that the poor must be viewed through the lens of love and will suggest that true disciples love “the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted” more than wealth (Mormon 8:37–39). The lens of love, it seems, frames economic practices as expressions of love, whose primary purpose is the care of those in need, regardless of how those needs came about. That the Book of Mormon “emphasizes the directive of love-motivated giving over possible exceptions to the rule suggests that if one is to err in caring for the needy, one would do well to err on the side of mercy.”<sup>31</sup>

Samuel thus participates in a larger tradition of ethical discourse according to which the character of one’s desires, thoughts, feelings, and perception is the root of ethical economics. His criticisms of the Nephites’ disordered hearts and distracted minds reflect his belief that one’s inner disposition is at least as important as one’s actions. As Samuel recounts, without the proper orientation, the Nephites’ hearts “swell[ed] with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities” (Helaman 13:22). Having now addressed how the Book of Mormon represents the proper attitude toward wealth, we are now in a position to examine what Samuel and other Book of Mormon authors teach about the proper use of wealth.



## PROPER USE OF WEALTH

Samuel's criticisms of the Nephites' use of wealth are limited but with a few specifics still worth considering. His most explicit concern is that the people spend their money on those who teach falsehoods. He explains:

But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet. Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel. (Helaman 13:27–28)

Samuel contrasts the Nephites' financial support of these false teachers with their treatment of God's prophets, whom they slander, cast out, and seek to destroy because they teach truth (Helaman 13:26). Samuel never says that the Nephites should financially support prophets—the idea that ecclesiastical authority figures “should labor with their own hands for their support” is common in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 18:24).<sup>32</sup> Rather, his primary contention is that the Nephites misallocate God-given resources. In this sense, Samuel's teachings mirror Jacob's, that one should not “spend money for that which is of no worth” (2 Nephi 9:21). To properly allocate wealth, it would seem, is to “hide it up unto the Lord” (Helaman 13:18), meaning to consecrate it to his various purposes (more on this below).

Samuel also offers another critique of the Nephites that may relate to their use of wealth. In chapters 13 and 15, he praises the Lamanites for obeying the commandments of God “according to the law of Moses” (Helaman 13:1; 15:5). Rhetorically, these statements also function as a censure of the Nephites for failing to do so. This is relevant because the law of Moses contains several injunctions about economic practices.<sup>33</sup> These include the following:

- One should care for the poor and needy (see Exodus 23:10–11; Deuteronomy 14:22–29; 15:7–11; 24:19–22; Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22).
- People should not steal or cheat one another (especially the poor and needy) in economic transactions (see Exodus 20:15; 23:6; Leviticus 19:14, 35–36; 25:14–17; 27:17).
- Poor laborers should be paid their wages on the day they are earned (see Deuteronomy 24:14–15).
- Judges should not favor people based on their financial status (see Exodus 23:6; Deuteronomy 1:17; 23:23; 27:19; Leviticus 19:15).
- Bribes should not be offered or accepted (see Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19).
- The needy should be permitted to offer less expensive sacrifices (see Leviticus 12:8; 14:21–22).
- A ruler should not acquire great quantities of gold and silver for himself (see Deuteronomy 17:17).
- Israelites should not lend to or borrow from non-Israelites (see Deuteronomy 15:6; 28:43–44).
- Israelites may not charge interest on a loan or sell food at a profit to other Israelites (see Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35–37).
- Israelites must cancel debts owed by other Israelites every seven years (see Deuteronomy 15:1–3).
- Israelites must tithe 10 percent of their goods as an offering to the Lord (see Leviticus 27:30–33; Numbers 18:21, 26).
- Israelites may not be enslaved to Israelites (see Leviticus 25:44–46).<sup>34</sup>
- Israelites who sell themselves to non-Israelites may be redeemed by relatives (see Leviticus 25:47–50).
- If family land is sold, it may be reclaimed by the family in the Jubilee year (see Leviticus 25:25–27).

The law of Moses similarly stresses the importance of one's attitude toward wealth. Obeying the command to not "covet" another's wealth, for example, requires a properly calibrated volitional faculty, one that desires the right things in the right degree (Exodus 20:17). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, where the law of Moses is found), individuals are encouraged to distribute wealth "willingly," "ungrudging[ly]," as an expression of gratitude for God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt<sup>35</sup> and to avoid being "hard-hearted" in their giving (Deuteronomy 15:7–8, 10). Such passages relate to one's willingness to part with wealth. Additionally, as Hebrew Bible scholar Bruce Malchow has argued, the law also calls on people "to imitate God's feelings" toward the needy, to cultivate love and care for them.<sup>36</sup>

To be clear, Samuel does not say that the Nephites were failing to do these specific things, but he does imply that they were failing to observe the law of Moses, which includes these things. Additionally, Mormon's descriptions of the Nephites' use of wealth before Samuel's appearance verify that the Nephites had previously broken several of these injunctions. He records that the rich Nephites were "withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek" (Helaman 4:12). They were robbing one another and offering bribes (see 7:20–21; 9:20). And they had hardened their hearts against and had forgotten the Lord (see 12:2).

Samuel's brief statement about the misallocation of wealth is consistent with other ethical principles relating to wealth in the Book of Mormon. Such principles may also provide further insight into Samuel's possible concerns. Several passages in the book speak generally to the moral imperative to give justly and generously, or as Jacob says, to "be familiar with all and free with your substance" (Jacob 2:17).<sup>37</sup> Others specify the classes of people to whom wealth should be distributed. These include the poor, naked, hungry, captive, sick, afflicted, and needy.<sup>38</sup> The Book of Mormon portrays God as consistently invested in these people's welfare and pronounces strict judgment on those who mistreat or marginalize them.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, while the possession of wealth is not a reliable barometer of moral character in the text, an individual's or community's treatment of those in need is. Righteous people are described as "liberal to all, both

old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need” (Alma 1:30). In this sense ethical economics is a way for God’s people to mirror God, who is also described as no “respector to persons” (Moroni 8:12). Samuel clearly discerned that the Nephites failed to meet this standard of discipleship because they preferred to allocate resources to those who shared their ideology, rather than to those who had the most need.

The Book of Mormon also provides guidelines for how to distribute wealth. Benjamin teaches that one should give to the needy “in wisdom and order,” meaning “every man [should give] according to that which he hath” (Mosiah 4:26–27; compare Alma 1:27). He also states that a person should administer to those in need “according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26; compare Alma 35:9).<sup>40</sup> Benjamin thus expects his people to exercise prudence by considering both their own financial situation and the specific needs of those who are less fortunate. He appears to acknowledge the danger of giving too much when he says, “It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength[;] . . . all things must be done in order” (Mosiah 4:27). Alma adds to Benjamin’s teaching that if a person should “have more abundantly he should impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given” (Mosiah 18:27). On the basis of Samuel’s critique, the affluent Nephites of his day did not just fail to allocate resources to the right people but neglected their responsibility to give in proportion to their abundance.

Other principles throughout the Book of Mormon relate more specifically to the responsibilities of religious and civic authorities and are founded on the same fundamental idea that is discernible in Helaman 13—God intends wealth to always move toward those in need, and he wants his people to govern their economic practices in accordance with its force of motion.<sup>41</sup> For instance, priests and teachers should not depend on laity for their support, except in the case of sickness or “much want” (Mosiah 27:5).<sup>42</sup> Nephi suggests that one should not “rob the poor” for the sake of maintaining “fine sanctuaries” (2 Nephi 28:13). Mormon describes righteous members of Christ’s church as sharing the word of God “without

money and without price” (Alma 1:20). Moroni argues that religious authorities should not charge money for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>43</sup> Apart from this, a consistent theme in the large plates is that civic authorities should not exact wealth or taxes of their subjects,<sup>44</sup> except during times of war.<sup>45</sup> Whereas taxation in the modern age is sometimes a mechanism for distributing wealth and eliminating some forms of inequality, this does not seem to have been the case in the Book of Mormon.

Finally, some passages in the Book of Mormon allude to the end goals of divinely prescribed economic practices.<sup>46</sup> For example, Benjamin teaches that one should care for the needy “for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God” (Mosiah 4:26). Here charitable giving is framed as a way to maintain the moral purity of the giver.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere the purpose of wealth is to eliminate poverty from society. Whereas Jacob encourages his people to give freely so that others “may be rich like unto you,” Mormon speaks of an ideal according to which there are no “rich and poor” and people have “all things in common” (Jacob 2:17; 3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3). In both instances, the distribution of wealth functions as a mechanism to eradicate inequality based on financial status.<sup>48</sup> In the latter case, however, Mormon does not see the end goal as all people living in abundance, but as everyone having sufficient resources for their needs. This is a hallmark of a godly society in the Book of Mormon and gestures toward the kind of community Samuel was likely trying to create among the Nephites in Helaman 13. This, however, does not become a reality until the coming of Jesus Christ, about forty years after Samuel’s ministry.<sup>49</sup>

By reading Samuel’s criticism of the Nephites within the larger context of ethical discourse in the Book of Mormon, one sees what is at stake in their misallocation of wealth. It is not only that they spend their wealth supporting false teachers; it is also that by doing so they fail to distribute wealth according to God’s will and are thus unable to experience the individual and communal blessings of wealth’s proper distribution. They are unable to realize God’s economic vision for his people. Furthermore, their moral and economic failures have brought God’s condemnation on them. Samuel warns: “The sword of justice hangeth over this people; . . . yea, heavy destruction awaiteth this people” (Helaman 13:5–6).<sup>50</sup> God intends

wealth to eliminate social inequalities, not to create them. He intends wealth to alleviate suffering, not perpetuate it. He intends wealth to contribute to the remission of sins, not to lead to sin. If wealth is not being used in these ways, then it is being misused.

## CONCLUSION

Samuel's critique of the Nephites and Mormon's narrative of their history are informed by a question that has echoed throughout the ages: Can God's people "stand wealth"?<sup>51</sup> The Book of Mormon provides both a cautionary tale and a valuable resource for understanding the relationship between morality and economics.<sup>52</sup> It challenges disciples to acknowledge the dangers of wealth, to wrestle with concerns over individual and communal welfare, to be reflective about the disparity between one's character and one's conduct, and to consider both the historical situatedness and universal applicability of moral discourse. Ethical economics in the Book of Mormon is an expression of properly oriented hearts and minds. Because God is the owner of wealth, proper stewardship over it requires a godlike disposition: an attentiveness to the needs and wants of others, discernment, love, prudence, and a desire to accomplish good. Samuel's prophetic counsel thus demands that disciples look inward, upward, and outward in their efforts to create a more humane and just world.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Nicole Gurley, Kristian Heal, John Hilton III, Nick Frederick, Danny Nelson, Avram Shannon, and Charles Swift for their feedback and research assistance.
2. See, for example, the Nephites' rejection of Samuel in Helaman 13:4 and 16:6 and Jesus's rebuke of the Nephites for failing to record Samuel's teachings in 3 Nephi 23:9–14.
3. Comparatively little work has been done on the figure of Samuel the Lamanite in the last several decades. For those works that relate most directly to Samuel's ethics of wealth, see S. Kent Brown, "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 163–80.
4. For other articles on the Book of Mormon's relevance to the economic practices of modern Latter-day Saints, see Susan Easton Black, "'Lest Ye Become as

- the Nephites of Old,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 256–68; Kristin Matthews, “Come into the Fold of God: Caring for the Poor and Needy,” Laura F. Willes Book of Mormon Lecture (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015), 1–26; and Chauncey C. Riddle, “Pride and Riches,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 221–34. See also Lindon J. Robison, “Economic Insights from the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 35–53; and Warner P. Woodworth, “The Socioeconomics of Zion,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 337–52.
5. As Kristin Matthews has argued, “The stories of the Book of Mormon, according to its own narrative, have two audiences: the people of *its* day and the people of *our* day.” See Matthews, “Come into the Fold of God,” 2. For a general introduction to Latter-day Saint attitudes toward wealth, see R. Thyne Robson, “Wealth, Attitudes Towards,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1551–53.
  6. See Helaman 13:18–23, 28, 31, 33, 35.
  7. See, for example, Helaman 3:36; 4:11–12; 6:8–31; 7:20–21.
  8. See, for example, Mosiah 2:41; 21:16; 23:19–20; 27:7; Alma 1:29–31; 50:18; 62:48–50; 4 Nephi 1:23; Ether 9:16–17; 10:22–24, 28.
  9. See, for example, Alma 4:8; Helaman 3:36; 4:12; 3 Nephi 6:10, 12, 15.
  10. See, for example, Mosiah 4:23; Helaman 13:20–21, 31–35.
  11. See, for example, Alma 32:2–5, 12, 15.
  12. On the intersection of economics and theology in the Book of Mormon broadly, see Black, ““Lest Ye Become as the Nephites of Old,”” 256–68.
  13. The Nephites’ struggles with wealth, greed, and pride are first mentioned by Jacob in Jacob 2:12–22, demonstrating that this is not a new problem for the Nephites.
  14. The Book of Mormon does not seem to suggest that wealth is inherently evil.
  15. The verse reads: “And the day shall come that they shall hide up their treasures, because they have set their hearts upon riches; and because they have set their hearts upon their riches, and will hide up their treasures when they shall flee before their enemies; because they will not hide them up unto me, cursed be

- they and also their treasures; and in that day shall they be smitten, saith the Lord” (Helaman 13:20).
16. On the heart in the Book of Mormon, see Daniel Becerra, *3rd, 4th Nephi: a brief theological introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020); Loren Blake Spendlove and Tina Spendlove, “Turning to the Lord with the Whole Heart: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 20 (2016): 236–38.
  17. For representative examples, see, on cognition, 3 Nephi 1:22; 17:17; 19:33; on emotion, 3 Nephi 1:10; 4:33; 4 Nephi 1:15; on volition, 3 Nephi 5:5; 12:24, 28. The heart has similar functionality in the Hebrew Bible. See “leb” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 7:399–437.
  18. This phrase appears only in the large plates. See Mosiah 12:29; Alma 1:30; 4:8; 5:53; 7:6; 17:14; 31:24, 28; Helaman 6:17; 7:21; 12:4; 13:20–21; Ether 8:7. Phrases with variant wording appear in 2 Nephi 9:30 and Mosiah 11:14. In the Book of Mormon the metaphor of “setting” or “placing” the heart on something has an almost exclusively negative connotation. The only positive instance of a heart being placed or set on something is Alma 37:36—“let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.”
  19. The phrased “lifted up in pride” appears frequently. See, for example, Alma 1:6; 4:6, 8, 12; 3 Nephi 6:10.
  20. See, for example, Alma 4:12; 32:2, 9, 12; 3 Nephi 6:13.
  21. The only other instance of hearts being “drawn out” to the Lord in the Book of Mormon appears in Alma 34:27, which similarly correlates the heart’s orientation to the Lord to sincere prayer. Amulek urges the Zoramites to pray, saying, “Ye must pour out your souls. . . . Cry unto the Lord, let you your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you” (vv. 26–27).
  22. Compare Deuteronomy 5–6.
  23. Samuel does not say that all wealth obtained by a person, regardless of the means by which it is obtained (e.g., through theft or other immoral means), is given by God to that person. Rather, the Nephites’ wealth was given to them as a “blessing” when they were righteous. Elsewhere, people are described as obtaining wealth “by their industry,” which certainly implies individual effort but does not preclude God’s agency (Alma 4:6).



24. The critique appears in the form of Samuel's prophetic telling of the Nephites' future lament of their sins: "Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us. . . . Yea, we have hid up our treasures and they have slipped away from us, because of the curse of the land. O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us; for behold the land is cursed, and all things are become slippery, and we cannot hold them" (Helaman 13:33, 35–36).
25. There are at least two possible ways to interpret this verse. One is how I am interpreting it here: what is sought but not obtained by the Nephites is wealth. In this case, the passage refers to what comes before it in Helaman 13:33–36. Another interpretation would be to equate what is sought but not obtained as "happiness in doing iniquity" (v. 38). In this case, the passage refers to what comes after it. The full passage reads: "But behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late, and your destruction is made sure; yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain; and ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head."
26. On ideas in the Hebrew Bible about the origins of wealth, see Joel S. Kaminsky, "The Might of My Own Hand Hath Gotten Me This Wealth': Reflections on Wealth and Poverty in the Hebrew Bible and Today," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 73 (2019): 7–17.
27. See 1 Nephi 3:25–26; 8:26–27; 13:7–8; 2 Nephi 9:30; 27:16; Mosiah 2:12; 4:25; 11:14; 12:29; 13:24; Alma 1:20, 30; 4:6, 8; 5:54–55; 7:6; 11:24; Alma 17:14; 31:27–28; 39:14; 60:32; Helaman 3:36; 6:17; 7:20–21; 3 Nephi 6:15; Mormon 8:36–37.
28. Kristin Matthews writes, "The desire for riches and power leads to the corruption of nations, individuals, and the church throughout the Book of Mormon and could be called the fatal flaw that catalyzes the text's central action and instruction." Matthews, "Come into the Fold of God," 2.
29. Becerra, *3rd, 4th Nephi*, 70.
30. See Becerra, *3rd, 4th Nephi*, 70. See also Black, "Lest Ye Become as the Nephites of Old," 256–57.
31. Becerra, *3rd, 4th Nephi*, 74.

32. See also Mosiah 18:26; 27:4–5; Alma 1:3, 20; 30:27–35. Nehor and Korihor, both of whom are portrayed as evil men, advocate against this position.
33. For more on the ethics of wealth in the Pentateuch, see David Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 15–315; and Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What Is New and What Is Old* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 20–30. See also John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values? What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 171–88.
34. Exodus 21:1–11 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18, however, do allow Israelites to have Israelite slaves.
35. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 28. See also Deuteronomy 15:5–15; 24:18; Leviticus 25:38.
36. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 28. See also Exodus 22:27; Deuteronomy 10:17–18.
37. See Mosiah 4:23; Alma 1:30; 5:55; 16:16; 3 Nephi 26:19.
38. See Jacob 2:18–19; Mosiah 2:14–16; 21:17; Alma 4:12–13; 5:55; 34:28–29; 35:9; Helaman 4:11–12; 3 Nephi 12:42; Mormon 8:39–40.
39. See, for example, 2 Nephi 9:30; 20:2–3; 21:4; 24:32; 26:20; 28:13; Jacob 2:12–14; Alma 5:54–55; 32:4–5; Helaman 4:11–12.
40. The word *wants* here is likely synonymous with *needs* and *deficiencies* rather than with *desires*, which are not born of actual need. Elsewhere, Alma states that people should give in accordance with the “needs and wants” of others, rather than just the “wants” (Mosiah 4:26; 18:29).
41. I make a statement like this in Becerra, *3rd, 4th Nephi*, 70.
42. See also Mosiah 18:26–28; Alma 1:3; 30:27–35. The Book of Mormon is here distinct from the law of Moses, which mandates the support of priests (see Deuteronomy 18:3–5). I am indebted to Avram Shannon for bringing this to my attention.
43. See Mormon 8:32–33.
44. See Mosiah 2:12, 14–15; 7:15, 22; 9:12; 11:3–4, 8–13; 29:40; Ether 10:5–7.
45. See Alma 27:22, 24.
46. For more on the socioeconomic characteristics of late Nephite society, see Woodworth, “Socioeconomics of Zion,” 337–52.
47. In Alma 34:28 caring for the needy is correlated with the efficacy of prayer.
48. Brant Gardner refers to idealized Nephite society as “horizontal and egalitarian” in his *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of*

- Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:54. Numerous places in the Book of Mormon speak negatively of inequality—for example, Mosiah 29:32; Alma 4:12, 15; 16:16; 28:13; 3 Nephi 6:14.
49. The first mention of the people having “all things common” following Samuel’s ministry is 3 Nephi 26:19.
  50. On Samuel’s use of biblical language here, see Shon Hopkin and John Hilton III, “Samuel’s Reliance on Biblical Language,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 48–50.
  51. Speaking of the Saints of his day, Brigham Young taught that “this people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greater fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth.” Quoted in Preston Nibley, *Brigham Young: The Man and His Work* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1936), 128.
  52. Kristin Matthew writes, “Mormon is speaking to us too, and he is warning us of the ways that we might corrupt our doctrine to justify the pursuit of wealth and power at the expense of the poor among us.” Matthews, “Come into the Fold of God,” 2–3.