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When Lamoni learned of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, he was astonished exceedingly.

The Faithfulness of Ammon

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Ammon is one of the most skillful missionaries and teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ described in scripture or anywhere else. Ammon and the other sons of King Mosiah had been “the very vilest of sinners,” but the Lord “saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them,” and the “Spirit of the Lord [had] work[ed] upon them” (Mosiah 28:4) so that “they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (28:3). Their spiritual transformation bears witness of the rehabilitating power of Christ’s Atonement.¹

This transformation empowered Ammon and his brethren to be “instruments”² in the Lord’s hand in bringing the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth (Mosiah 27:36; Alma 17:9). However, Ammon and his royal brothers were uniquely prepared for the greatness of “the work which they had undertaken” (Alma 17:13) precisely because issues of monarchic legitimacy—the right to rule—were at the heart of Lamanite and Nephite enmity (see 2 Nephi 5:3; Mosiah 10:15) and had worsened Lamanite unbelief. All four sons, former unbelievers themselves, refused to succeed their father as king (see Mosiah 29:3).³ On several occasions, Ammon, like David in his encounters with Saul (see 1 Samuel

24, 26), had the opportunity to take royal power among the Lamanites, but did not (see Alma 17:24; 20:17–27).

The Lamanite mission became a phenomenal success because of the singleness of Ammon's vision as leader of the mission—his faithfulness to the Lord, his love for Lamoni and the Lamanites, and his total self-abnegation. In this paper I will show how the account of the Lamanite conversions in Alma 17–27 evidences intriguing parallels and contrasts between Ammon's and David's biographies. One of the most striking of these is Lamoni's words regarding Ammon's "faithfulness" in Alma 18:10, which recall Ahimelech's words regarding David's faithfulness in 1 Samuel 22:14 almost verbatim. I will further suggest that the description of Ammon's "faithfulness" in Alma 18:10 constitutes a wordplay on Ammon's name, emphasizing that his missionary approach was the perfect remedy for Lamanite unbelief.

Ammon's mission succeeded because he remained true and faithful and utterly refused royal power when presented opportunities to take it, whereas David acquired it to the peril of himself and his family, both temporally and eternally (see 2 Samuel 13–18; D&C 132:39). Ammon, as a royal son, was effective in his missionary service among the Lamanites because he was *unlike* David and his sons with respect to the seeking and unrighteous use of royal power (see also D&C 121:39). The reader will be the final arbiter on whether the parallels to the biblical Hebrew biography of David⁴ proposed here are deliberate;⁵ however, the presentation of Ammon's story with echoes of David's virtues and failings becomes especially meaningful against the backdrop of the Nephites' movement from monarchy and their blended society, which included descendants of David (i.e., the Mulekites; see Mosiah 23:3; Helaman 6:10; 8:21). The "faith of Ammon and his brethren," and Ammon's faithfulness in particular, were sufficient to move the mountain of Lamanite unbelief and hatred (Ether 12:15), which had a seismic impact on Nephite-Lamanite society for good.

The Growth of Antimonarchism from Nephi to Alma

The problems with monarchy in ancient Israel and Judah are well chronicled in the so-called Deuteronomistic history (Deuteronomy–2 Kings)⁶ and the sources which the Deuteronomistic historian(s)⁷ used. The brass plates likely contained versions of many, if not most, of the sources that the Deuteronomistic historian used (see 1 Nephi 13:23), including the stories of Saul, David, Solomon, and the dysfunctional monarchies of the divided

kingdoms of Israel and Judah.⁸ The Hebrew Bible is ambivalent about David. On one hand he is regarded as Israel's greatest military hero and a paragon of religious faithfulness (the "man after [the Lord's] own heart," 1 Samuel 13:14), while on the other hand he is presented as having "despised the commandment of the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:9), even the Lord himself (12:10) in taking Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah. The words of Jacob, the brother of Nephi (see Jacob 2:23–26), suggest that the Nephites were very aware of the negative aspects of David and Solomon's kingships and that it influenced their view and practice of kingship.

In the Book of Mormon, traces of antimonarchism can be detected as early as the time of the Nephites' separation from the Lamanites (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:18) and Jacob's first recorded speech, given at what some consider to have been Nephi's coronation.⁹ In this speech, Jacob calls the land of promise (the Americas) "a land of liberty unto the Gentiles" on which "there shall be no kings . . . who shall raise up unto the Gentiles" (2 Nephi 10:11). Quoting the Lord, Jacob then declares, "For he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words" (2 Nephi 10:14). His words recall Gideon's response to the Israelites who wanted him and his sons to be kings over them: "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you."¹⁰ Gideon's refusal of kingship was more apparent than real (see below). The Lord's words through Jacob also recall the Lord's words to Samuel when Israel "asked" or demanded (*baššō'ālim*) a king (1 Samuel 8:10), who later emerged as Saul (*šā'ul*, meaning "asked" or "demanded"): "And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (8:7). The wordplay emphasizes the appropriateness of Saul's name.

Nephi himself stated his reluctance to be called a king,¹¹ whether the title "king" was an apt title for one who chronicles his own reign¹² and ministry¹³ or not: "And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power" (2 Nephi 5:18). Jacob informs us later, however, that Nephi "anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people" and that because "the people . . . loved Nephi [so] exceedingly" (Jacob 1:9; italics in scriptures throughout signify emphasis added; see

also 1 Samuel 18:16), they “were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, . . . and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would” (Jacob 1:11).

And thus began dynastic kingship among the Nephites. Nephi accepted the mantle, if not the trappings, of kingship even in the apparent act of denying it, in a manner both like and unlike Gideon in Judges 8:22–23.¹⁴ Gideon not only proceeded to act like a king by multiplying gold and wives (see Judges 8:24–27, 30), but even named his son Abimelech (“my father is king,” see 8:31). After the death of Nephi, Jacob addressed problems particularly associated with the reigns of David and Solomon (i.e., the multiplication of gold, illicit wife-taking, and the concomitant mistreatment of women) that began to crop up among the Nephites under the Nephites’ second king (see Jacob 1:15–16; see also Deuteronomy 17:17), possibly Nephi’s own son.

For the Nephites, a discernible movement away from monarchism is evident as early as the time of King Benjamin, who, arguably more than any other ruling king in the Bible or the Book of Mormon, embraces the Deuteronomic model of kingship (see Deuteronomy 17:14–20). This meant placing himself on more equal footing with his people (see Mosiah 2:10–12) and ensuring that his subjects did not consider him divine (see also 2:19).¹⁵ Not long thereafter, when the people of Alma the Elder endeavored to make him a king over them, he refused: “It is not expedient that ye should have a king. Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king” (Mosiah 23:7–8). Alma rejected their overture not because human kingship is inherently evil, but on the evidence of their own experience: “But remember the iniquity of king Noah and his priests; and I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance” (23:9). In other words, human kingship by “just men,” while good and desirable in theory and sometimes in practice, cannot be guaranteed to be maintained from generation to generation.¹⁶

The experiences of Alma, Limhi (son of Noah), and those whom they led were a major factor in the Nephite movement away from monarchism. In the speech in which he declared his intention to dismantle the Nephite monarchy, Mosiah quoted Alma almost verbatim, perhaps from Alma’s own record:

Therefore, *if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings*, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea,

if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then *it would be expedient that ye should always have kings* to rule over you. (Mosiah 29:13; see also 23:8)

But King Mosiah seems to have been persuaded to abandon monarchy not only by those of his subjects (the former peoples of Limhi and Alma) who had suffered the consequences of King Noah’s wickedness and unwise leadership (Mosiah 11–17) and his sons’ refusal to accept the kingdom (see Mosiah 28:10; 29:1–11), but also by the Jaredite record, which he himself read and translated as a “seer” (Mosiah 28:11–18). The Jaredite record highlights not only the problem of secret combinations, but also dynastic families—royal sons attempting to usurp their fathers’ power, brothers vying for the throne, and so forth. The Jaredite record confirms what the stories about David and his sons (2 Samuel 13–18 and 1 Kings 2)¹⁷ demonstrate regarding intrafamilial rivalry for the throne.¹⁸

In the book of Alma, we see that even after Mosiah had dispensed with kingship among the Nephites, nostalgia for monarchy remained. The narratives include the stories of Amlici and Amalickiah, respectively: two insurrectionists who attempt to become king. It is tempting to see in these narratives a play on the similarity in sounds between the names Amlici,¹⁹ Amalickiah,²⁰ and the Hebrew verb *mālak* (“to become king,” “reign [as king]”; also the “king-men”).²¹ Like the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon, the brass plates may have contained the ancient Israelite story of Gideon’s son, Abimelech (“my father is king”), in Judges 9 with its iterative wordplay on **mlk* (to “reign” as king)²² and a first ill-fated attempt to establish dynastic kingship in Israel.²³

It is against the backdrop of the Nephite abandonment of monarchy (see Mosiah 29) and insurrectionists’ attempts to reinstitute it (see Alma 3; 47–63) that the story of the mission of the self-abasing royal sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites takes place. Ammon’s refusal to pursue monarchy or power of any kind is the very thing that keeps their mission on track and paves the way for their success among the Lamanites. In contrast, it is the pursuit of monarchy at all hazards by some Nephites that leads to repeated disasters for the Nephite nation. Thus Ammon and his brothers as royal missionary sons stand in stark contrast to David and his royal sons (Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon) and in contrast to Amlici and Amalickiah, their kingship-seeking contemporaries. Israel’s history shows that monarchy (and

the pursuit of it) is not effective at sustaining, let alone spreading, the proper practice of Israelite religion. Ammon's story shows that the opposite is true.

The Connection of the Name Ammon to Faithfulness

The biblical stories about the rise of the monarchy in Israel exhibit a high degree of concern for the meanings (or perceived meanings) of the names of its principle figures (Saul means "asked" or "demanded," David means "beloved,"²⁴ Absalom means "father is peace"). Do the narratives about Ammon and his refusal of monarchy among the Lamanites amid the Nephites' movement away from monarchy emphasize name meanings as well?

The name Ammon may be a variation on "Amnon" ("faithful")²⁵ or "Amon" ("faithful"),²⁶ a Davidic king who reigned around the time Lehi was born (2 Kings 21:19–26). Both of these names, apparently formed from the root **mn*, appear as Davidic royal names in the Deuteronomistic history. Amnon is the firstborn son (see 1 Samuel 3:2) and heir of David, on whom David's promised "sure house" (1 Samuel 25:28; 2 Samuel 7:16; see also 1 Samuel 2:35; 1 Kings 11:38) might have been built, but who instead "takes" and rapes his half sister Tamar (perhaps in imitation of his father's "taking" of Bathsheba),²⁷ setting off a chain of events that eventuate in Amnon's death and David's near loss of both his kingdom and his life (see 2 Samuel 13–19). The Deuteronomistic historian reports that David's descendant Amon was anything but "faithful" to the Lord and his covenant as king of Judah (2 Kings 21:18–22) and was assassinated "in his own house" (21:23).

Ammon could also be derived from or related to the Akkadian *ummānu* ("craftsman" or "expert"),²⁸ which comes into Hebrew as *'ammān* and *'āmōn*.²⁹ The potential for word association with Hebrew **mn* ("faithful," "sure") on the basis of sound similarity (homophony) is clear. It is less likely that Ammon is the national name *'ammōn*, which is not, as far as I am aware, ever attested as an Israelite personal name and is in fact ascribed highly pejorative connotations in Genesis 19:30–38 (see especially v. 38; see also the ancestral name Ben-ammi, "son of my [near] kin"). Whatever its precise etymology, however, the homophony between the name Ammon and the root **mn* ("faith," "loyalty," and "faithfulness") may have been the basis for a wordplay reinforcing the idea that Ammon's name fit his character: a name he proved entirely in the performance of his mission among the Lamanites and the fruit his faithfulness bore in their lives.

The Exceeding Faithfulness of Ammon: Ammon as Servant in Lamoni's Court

Ammon's going up among the Nephites' traditional enemies, the Lamanites, was both a reflection and a refraction of David's "going over" to the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 27:1–28:2). Although David earlier had been described as the most "faithful" of Saul's servants (22:14), that description was no longer valid when he allied himself with Israel's traditional enemies.

David's motives for going over to the Philistines were (1) for his personal safety and (2) to weaken Saul's kingship, though he refused to attack Saul directly.³⁰ To say that David was a traitor to Israel³¹ is no exaggeration. He was not unlike Nephite dissenters who deserted over to the Lamanites,³² in most cases for their own monarchic ambitions.³³ Ammon, however, went up to the land of Nephi among the Lamanites with no other intent than to "save some few of their souls" (Alma 26:26).

Ammon, unlike David, had no monarchic ambition. Rather, he understood that issues of power and monarchy were at the heart of Lamanite resentment toward the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 5:3; Mosiah 10:15).³⁴ Ammon moved to specifically redress³⁵ three traditional Lamanite grievances against the Nephites³⁶ in his service to Lamoni: (1) taking the ruling out of their hands, (2) abandoning the Lamanites by those who followed Nephi, and (3) Nephi's robbing of the brass plates (i.e., loss of the scriptures).

Ammon's refusal to marry Lamoni's daughter is a key narrative detail. Readers often find it odd that Lamoni offered one of his daughters in marriage to Ammon, forgetting that Ammon was the son of Mosiah, the Nephite king. Although the narrative does not say it explicitly, Lamoni apparently *recognized* Ammon as a Nephite prince.³⁷ In fact, Lamoni wished to make a marriage alliance with the Nephite monarchy (perhaps even for traditional Lamanite monarchic aims). This was a critical moment for Ammon and the success of the mission to the Lamanites. One false move on Ammon's part might have ruined the whole mission.³⁸

At one point, King Saul offered his daughter Merab to David (see 1 Samuel 18:17). David at first appears to decline a marriage (v. 18), but not out of true self-abnegation³⁹—he had his sights set on and had been anointed to take Saul's throne. He declined at first because he discerned Saul's own motives. Later, a second daughter of Saul, Michal, "love[d] David" (David's name means "beloved"; see 1 Samuel 18:20, 27), and David did marry her (18:27), because he was interested in marrying into the royal family as a

means of strengthening his claim on the throne in a post-Saul world (see 2 Samuel 3:12–14).

Ammon's refusal to marry Lamoni's daughter,⁴⁰ however, was based on a different motive: his desire to be a blessing to Lamoni's house and a blessing in the lives of as many Lamanites as possible. Ammon understood deeply and personally what it was like to be captive to "unbelief" (Mosiah 27:8, 10–12). His desire was to bring Lamoni and the Lamanites to Christ, the true king. Ammon's decline of Lamoni's offer and his consistent refusal to assume any authority or power among the Lamanites resolved Lamoni's concern about the Nephites' seeking to take the ruling out of the Lamanites' hands, thus making Lamoni more open to Ammon's teachings. If Ammon's motives had been like those of David, things would likely have gone much differently.

Ammon's entry into Lamoni's service recalls David's entry into Saul's service in other important respects. It is not difficult to see the parallel between David's miraculous defeat of Goliath with the sling and sword and Ammon's use of the sling (see Alma 17:36; 18:16) and sword to defeat the Lamanite sheep stealers at the waters of Sebus. Ammon is like a young David: full of faith in Israel's God and willing and capable to fight the king's enemies (see 1 Samuel 17; also Ahimelech's remark on David's faithfulness in 1 Samuel 22:18 is a reference to his deeds in chapters 17–18). But this very association will also sharpen the contrast between David and Ammon's respective goals and their means of achieving them.

Lamoni here further emerges as a refraction of Saul (as his father will later). After watching David's feat in killing Goliath with his sling and sword, Saul thus commands his servant Abner: "*inquire* [*šē'al*] thou whose son the stripling is" (1 Samuel 17:56). When Lamoni learns of Ammon's feat in killing the Lamanite sheep stealers, Lamoni's reaction echoes Saul's: "And it came to pass that king Lamoni *inquired* [a Hebrew vorlage⁴¹ could have been **šā'al*; see note 4 herein] of his servants, saying: Where is this man that has such great power?" (Alma 18:8). If the verbal echo constitutes wordplay on the name "Saul," it strengthens the literary connection between Saul and Lamoni.

When Lamoni "learn[s] of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him," the narrator states that "he was astonished exceedingly" (Alma 18:2). The self-abnegating Ammon places himself at the king's disposal: "Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of [a Hebrew vorlage

could have been **'ēmūnat*] Ammon, saying: Surely [**'āmnām*] there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful [*ne'ēman*] as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them" (Alma 18:10). Mormon (or his source) reports Lamoni's words so as to evoke Ahimelech's words to Saul in 1 Samuel 22:14: "Then Ahimelech answered the king [Saul], and said, And who is so faithful [*ne'ēman*] among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?"⁴²

The result of this literary allusion is a vivid wordplay which emphasizes that Ammon's name is the sign of his character, "faithful" (*ne'ēman*). In the David story, Ahimelech has to point out David's surpassing faithfulness to Saul, whereas in the story of the Lamanite conversions, Lamoni recognizes Ammon's faithfulness himself. Unlike Saul, who feels threatened by David's growing popularity in his court, Lamoni, though initially intimidated by Ammon's spiritual power, is convicted of his own sins under the influence of Ammon's "faithful" service⁴³ and desires repentance.⁴⁴

The Mountain to Be Moved: Lamanite Unbelief and Desire for Monarchy

To comprehend the magnitude of the miracle wrought through Ammon and his brothers, one must first appreciate how steeped in unbelief the Lamanites had become and the degree to which the Lamanites felt entitled to monarchic power over the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 5:3; Mosiah 10:15). They are, in fact, related problems.

Nephi's account of his family's journey from Jerusalem frequently emphasizes Laman and Lemuel's lack of faith in contrast to his own:⁴⁵ "And thus Laman and Lemuel . . . did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. Neither did they believe [**wēlō' hā'āmīnū*] that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed" (1 Nephi 2:12–13). Nephi constantly exhorts his "brethren to faithfulness [**'ēmūnā*] and diligence" (1 Nephi 17:15) because, for example, "they did not believe [**lō' hā'āmīnū*] that I [Nephi] could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord" (17:18). Nephi contrasts his own approach to problem solving with Laman and Lemuel's "quit quick" approach: "Wherefore, let us be faithful [*ne'āmēnū*] in keeping the commandments of the Lord; therefore let us go down. . . . And it came to pass that after this manner of language did I persuade my brethren, that they might be faithful [*ye'āmēnū*] in keeping the commandments of God" (1 Nephi 3:16, 21); "Yea, and how is it that ye

have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith [**ya'āminū*] in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful [**ne'āmēnū*] to him" (1 Nephi 7:12). Nephi, as opposed to Laman and Lemuel, is blessed for his faith (see 1 Nephi 2:18–19; 11:6). Like David (see 1 Samuel 22:14) and his descendant Ammon (see Alma 18:10), Nephi is “faithful”—a necessary royal quality.

Laman and Lemuel’s refusal to have faith is perfectly captured in Lehi’s description of his dream: “they would not come unto me and partake of the fruit,”⁴⁶ or “they did not *want* to come.”⁴⁷ Nephi sees—and is shown—that Laman and Lemuel’s refusal to have faith and to be faithful (i.e., to partake of the fruit of the tree of life) will have enormously negative consequences for their posterity: “These shall dwindle in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22–23).

The expression “dwindle in unbelief” is hereafter used primarily of the Lamanites.⁴⁸ In fact, this expression may have originally constituted a wordplay on the name “Laman,”⁴⁹ perhaps based on Deuteronomy 32:20. This very old poetic text declares the Lord’s displeasure with rebellious Israelites, speaks of them being cut off from his “face,” i.e., “presence” (*pānīm*): “And he said, I will hide my face [*pānay*] from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is *no faith, lō’ ēmun*, “no faithfulness,”⁵⁰ “unfaithful”⁵¹” (compare especially Numbers 14:11).

Ammon’s grandfather King Benjamin articulated the traditional Nephite view of the Lamanites’ lack of faith and faithfulness. His words are taken from the negative Laman (*lō’ ēmun*) “unbelief” description from 1 Nephi 12:22–23 and elsewhere in Nephi’s writing:

I say unto you, my sons, were it not for these things, which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries, and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have *dwindled in unbelief*, 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. (Mosiah 1:5)

The Spirit had warned Nephi that “a nation [would] dwindle and perish in unbelief” without the scriptures (1 Nephi 4:13),⁵² a prediction that proved remarkably accurate when Lamanites dwindled in unbelief after Nephi took the brass plates and left Laman and Lemuel and incessantly sought to bring the Nephites under Lamanite royal hegemony.

When Ammon opens the scriptures to Lamoni, he not only addresses the traditional Lamanite grievance that Nephi (or perhaps Mosiah I) had “robbed”⁵³ Laman and Lemuel of the brass plates (e.g., Mosiah 10:16), but also begins to redress the effects that the loss of the brass plates—the scriptures—had had on the Lamanites: that the loss of the scriptures and the attendant loss of the Holy Ghost had had a grossly degenerative effect on Lamanite culture.⁵⁴ The Lamanites had been “cut off from the presence of the Lord” by the loss of the scriptures, the priesthood, the gift and reception of the Holy Ghost, the words of living prophets, and the temple. As the Lamanites are taught the scriptures, they are restored to the Lord’s “presence.” The visions and blessings of old return to them, as does the right to rule—in an eternal sense.

Lamoni at the Veil: Faithfulness Begets Faith

The narrative describes in very emotive language how Lamanite “unbelief” was overcome. When Lamoni prays to the Lord and asks the Lord to have mercy on his people in the same way that he has had mercy upon the Nephites, Lamoni is “overcome” and “carried away” by the power of the Spirit and has a theophanic vision. The narrator’s combination of these two expressions, which are used elsewhere to describe Lehi’s⁵⁵ and Nephi’s visions,⁵⁶ suggests that he wants to show us that Lamoni had a vision of the same character and quality that their ancestor Lehi and their “enemy” Nephi had (see 1 Nephi 1; 8; 11–14)—the same spiritual experiences that Laman and Lemuel had refused to ask for (“We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us”; 1 Nephi 15:9).

Lamoni’s willingness to exercise faith in asking (contrast Laman and Lemuel in 1 Nephi 15:8–11) begins a reversal of the Lamanites being cut off from the presence and face of the Lord:

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 this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God. (Alma 19:6)

Ammon wisely⁵⁷ uses this event to engender faith in Lamanites closest to Lamoni. He first teaches Lamoni’s wife, who demonstrates astonishing faith in his words:

And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said.

And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites. (Alma 19:9–10)

Ammon's efforts create a situation which could have easily been exploited for less altruistic purposes. However, he is careful here, as at other times, to avoid exploiting these opportunities for personal power and enrichment, but instead to "win the hearts of . . . [his] fellow-servants" to "lead them to believe in [his] words" (17:29).⁵⁸

The Legitimation of the Holy Ghost: Divine Rebirth through the Spirit

The story of Saul and David illustrates the legitimation of David and his kingship-to-be and the delegitimation of Saul as king by the Spirit of Jehovah, which comes upon⁵⁹ David at his anointing (see 1 Samuel 16:13) as a sign of his legitimation. It also simultaneously withdraws from Saul and is replaced by an "evil spirit" (see 1 Samuel 16:14–16, 23; 18:10) as a sign of his delegitimation⁶⁰ (as pronounced earlier by Samuel; see 1 Samuel 13:14; 15:28).⁶¹ Years earlier, when Saul was first anointed, he too received the Spirit and was "turned into another man" (1 Samuel 10:6). The change manifest in Saul was a sign of his reception of the Spirit of the Lord and thus legitimation as king of Israel and it was the same for David.

Ammon is filled with the Spirit of the Lord, which indicates his divine rebirth (see Alma 18:16). However, unlike David in his interaction with Saul, Ammon does not enjoy the presence of that Spirit to the Lamanites' detriment, but he prays to see that Spirit poured out on Lamoni and all the Lamanites. While Lamoni believes in a "Great Spirit" (Alma 18:2–5), he has never been anointed with that Spirit as Saul was in 1 Samuel 9–10. This situation changes with the coming of Ammon, whose faithfulness results in a flowering of faith among the Lamanites and "the Spirit of the Lord poured out according to his prayers upon the Lamanites" (Alma 19:14).

What we see here is not the legitimation of one king and dynasty to the detriment and delegitimation of another,⁶² but all are "born of God" (see Alma 22:15), i.e., receive a royal rebirth⁶³ or adoption.⁶⁴ Under the Israelite monarchy, the king became a son of God through a divine rebirth or adoption (see Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14). Here, as at the time of King Benjamin's sermon, we see an entire people "becoming [the] sons and daughters" of God

(Mosiah 5:7; 27:25; Ether 3:14) through "faith in [his] name" (Ether 3:14). Just as Saul and David were changed and legitimated through the "anointing" of the Spirit (1 Samuel 10:6, 9–12; 16:13), all of Lamoni's court and house "did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil" (Alma 19:33).

The issue of monarchic power, which for so long had been a wall between the Lamanites and Nephites, begins to be broken down. The converted Lamanites no longer seek for monarchic power over the Nephites; Ammon, through his self-abasing approach, shows them that there is a much higher kingdom for them to inherit and more important issues at stake (namely Christ's kingdom and the salvation of their own souls). Mormon summarizes the situation thus: "And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe [**ya'amin(ú)*] on his name" (Alma 19:36). All of King Benjamin's people are enthroned as sons and daughters "at the right hand of God" through "faith on his name" (Mosiah 5:7–9; see also 5:1–4),⁶⁵ so too are Lamoni's people.

Ammon's Great Love for Lamoni: Lamoni as a Literary Refraction of Jonathan

Previously in the conversion narrative, Lamoni is presented as a refraction of Saul. Beginning in Alma 20, however, the narrator describes the relationship between Ammon and Lamoni as one that is similar to the relationship between Jonathan and David. Lamoni's father is now cast in the role of Saul. The narrative makes more artful comparisons and contrasts between David and Ammon, Lamoni and Jonathan, and Saul and Lamoni's father.

In the David story, the narrator states that Jonathan loved David (see 1 Samuel 18:1, 3; 20:7; 2 Samuel 1:26) and is shown acting repeatedly in David's interest against Saul's interest and even against his own. Saul, fearful of David as a threat to his throne, attempts to kill David and is extremely displeased with the aid that Jonathan gives David.

In Hebrew, the name Jonathan (*Yēhônātān*) means "Yahweh [Jehovah] has given" or "Yahweh has granted" (*Yēhō + nātān*). In the David story, Jonathan is the instrumentality of the Lord's "giving" David the kingdom. Famously, of his love for David, "Jonathan [*Yēhônātān*] stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it [*wayyitnēhū*] to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle" (1 Samuel 18:4

[MT 18:4]). Jonathan literally divests himself of his own royalty and gives it to David.

Alma chapter 20 presents some notable parallels to the David-Jonathan-Saul story. Similar to Saul's view of Jonathan's relationship with David, when Lamoni's father sees the friendship between Lamoni and Ammon, he fears that Lamoni is acting against his (Lamoni's father's) interests and against Lamoni's own interests. He believes Ammon is seeking monarchic power. The scene that ensues begins to resemble Saul's inquiry to Jonathan over coming "to *meat*" (literally "to bread," i.e., to a feast) on the new moon (1 Samuel 20:23–33). Lamoni's father asks Lamoni, "Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people?" (Alma 20:9). This question recalls Saul's question to his son Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:27: "Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day?" Saul knows that David is seeking his kingship, but David carefully and cleverly avoids Saul's attempts on his life.

The biblical narrator notes that "Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan" (1 Samuel 20:30) because he had aided David. Lamoni's father suspects the same of Lamoni: "behold, to his [Lamoni's] astonishment, his father was angry with him" (Alma 20:13). Like Saul, Lamoni's father seeks to inflict physical violence on his son, because he feels that Lamoni is acting against him (and against Lamoni's own interests) on Ammon's behalf, since he assumes Ammon is seeking royal power (see Alma 20:10, 13).

In earlier parts of the narrative, the narrator has already used verbal cues that link this story to the David-Jonathan-Saul cycle.⁶⁶ We have already noted the verbal allusion to 1 Samuel 17:5 in Alma 18:8. The narrator particularly establishes a connection between Jonathan and Lamoni with the latter's reported speech: "And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest *I will give unto thee*; and if it were needed, I would guard thee with my armies; but I know that thou art more powerful than all they; nevertheless, *whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee*" (Alma 18:21). Lamoni would have given all his regalia to Ammon if he had asked (see 1 Samuel 18:4), but Ammon does not ask.

Rather than fleeing from Saul with Jonathan's help, as David does, Ammon intercedes to prevent Lamoni's father from committing further violence towards his son. When Lamoni's father makes an attempt on Ammon's life ("and he stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon," Alma 20:20), Ammon strikes the king's arm so that he cannot use it. Ammon then prevails upon

the king with these words: "Behold, I will smite thee *except thou wilt grant* [a Hebrew vorlage could have been **titēn*; see note 4] unto me that my brethren may be cast out of prison" (Alma 20:22). Lamoni's father, fearful, declares: "If thou wilt spare me, I will grant [**etēn*] thee whatsoever thou wilt ask [**tiš'al*], even to half of the kingdom" (Alma 20:23). The wordplay casts the shadow of Saul on Lamoni's father. Like David, who spared the life of Saul twice (see 1 Samuel 24, 26), Ammon spares Lamoni's father, but with much better results. Saul knows that David will eventually take the kingdom (24:20). Lamoni's father suspects that Ammon also aims to take monarchic power.

Ammon, however, makes demands only for his brothers' release and for Lamoni: "If thou wilt grant that my brethren may be cast out of prison, and also that Lamoni may retain his kingdom, and that ye be not displeased with him, *but grant* that he may do according to his own desires in whatsoever thing he thinketh, then will I spare thee" (Alma 20:24). Ultimately what Ammon and Aaron prevail upon Lamoni's father to do is not merely be willing to "give up all that [he] possess[es]" and "forsake [his] kingdom" to receive the "great joy" of the fruit of the tree of life, but more importantly to "give away all [his] sins to know" God (22:15, 18). Lamoni, Lamoni's household, Lamoni's father, and the other converted Lamanites become so Jonathan-like that they not only make a covenant (see 1 Samuel 18:13; 20:16; 23:18) to give up their earthly "royal" prerogatives (including the age-old desire to rule), but they even covenant to "give up their own lives," rather than sin, i.e., that "rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him" (Alma 24:18).

What really changes Lamoni's father, however, is Ammon's love for Lamoni. Again, Ammon emerges as a refraction of David:

And when he [Lamoni's father] saw that Ammon had no desire to destroy him, and when he also saw the great love he had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Because this is all that thou hast desired, that I would release thy brethren, and suffer that my son Lamoni should retain his kingdom, behold, *I will grant* unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more—And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee. For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken, and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni, therefore he was desirous to learn them. (Alma 20:26–27)

Alma 21:21 reports that because of Ammon's unwillingness to pursue monarchic power, Lamoni's father frees Lamoni's people from his own oppressions and *grants* that Lamoni might reign over a "free people" (21:21). Similarly,

because of Ammon's "love" and "generosity," Lamoni's father *grants* Aaron and Ammon's other brothers their lives (22:3). But most importantly, Ammon's love for Lamoni results in an opportunity to teach Lamoni's father the gospel, and that makes all the difference for many thousands of Lamanites.

The Saul-David story places tremendous emphasis on Jonathan's providential "love" for David (see 1 Samuel 18:1, 3; 20:17; 2 Samuel 1:26), which enables David to escape from Saul's rage-fueled attempts on his life and to eventually accede to the throne. A major point of the biblical narrative is that David is, as his name suggests, "beloved" (see 1 Samuel 16:21; 18:1, 3, 16, 20, 22; 2 Samuel 1:26). In fact, the text is careful to state that David is never the giver of "love" (i.e., the subject of the verb "love"); he is always the object,⁶⁷ except in a single crucial instance prior to Joab's accusation in 2 Samuel 9:6: his enabling "love" for his heir-apparent Ammon,⁶⁸ the consequences of which nearly destroy his "sure house" within his own lifetime.

The narrator here, however, inverts this situation, indicating that Ammon, unlike David, has the capacity to love: Ammon had "great love"—selfless love—for Lamoni. Unlike David's relationship with Jonathan, Ammon's relationship with Lamoni is free of the underlying issue of David's future kingship. David will ascend the throne of Israel and Jonathan will die, and once upon the throne David will leave only a meager remnant of Saul's and Jonathan's descendants alive (see 2 Samuel 9; 21:1–14), making Saul's house "unsure." Ammon repeatedly refuses kingship, and Lamoni makes his people "a free people" (see Alma 21:21; 62:27; 30:24).⁶⁹

Lamoni's father, king of all the Lamanites, offers half his kingdom to Ammon, but Ammon again refuses to assume any royal authority or power (see Alma 20:24–26). Ammon's magnanimity turns a volatile situation into a blessing for both Lamoni and his father: "I will grant unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more" (20:26). His magnanimity further creates an opportunity for Aaron to teach the gospel to Lamoni's father: "And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee" (20:27; see also Alma 22:3).⁷⁰ This opportunity would not have come about if Ammon had pursued a monarchic agenda. Ammon again does the right thing at the right time.

Nonmonarchic Dynasties: Sure Houses for Mosiah and Lamoni's Father

Because of Ammon and Aaron's missionary endeavors, both Mosiah and Lamoni's father will have their kingdoms irrevocably altered. Mosiah's sons refuse to be dynastic sons in the traditional sense (meaning Mosiah's kingdom will no longer be a kingdom), and the dynastic sons of Lamoni's father (Lamoni, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and probably others) will not be able to maintain their father's kingdom as it had previously existed (see Alma 24:2; 27:3–15).

Ammon put his own life at risk by even going up to the land of Nephi among the Lamanites (see Alma 17:6–13), and his life is seemingly in danger thereafter. The narrator describes an attempt on Ammon's life in which further wordplay on the name "Ammon" emphasizes Mosiah's faith in the Lord and the surety of the Lord's promise that he would keep him safe:

Now, one of them, whose brother had been slain with the sword of Ammon, being exceedingly angry with Ammon, drew his sword and went forth that he might let it fall upon Ammon, to slay him; and as he lifted the sword to smite him, behold, he fell dead.

Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith [*ʻēmūnatēkā*]⁷¹—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord. (Alma 19:22–23)

Mosiah exercised great faith in allowing not only Ammon but also his other three sons to undertake this mission. Mosiah, like Lamoni's father later, was willing to "forsake his kingdom" in order to be an heir to a heavenly kingdom, so much so that he was willing to entrust Ammon and his brothers to his Lord (see Alma 22:15). It was Mosiah's faith and faithfulness to the Lord that would ensure his sons' safety. Notably, the narrative here only mentions the connection between Ammon and Mosiah's faith (i.e., the other sons are not mentioned). Seemingly, it was the connotative associations between the name "Ammon" and "faith" (*ʻēmūnā*) that the narrator wished to emphasize (or create). Ammon's faithfulness begat faith among the Lamanites, but it was also Mosiah's sacrifice of faith in letting his sons go up (see Mosiah 27:5–8) that ensured the eternal welfare (the "surety") of numerous Lamanite houses.

Lamoni's father's sacrifice is similar. As noted above, not only was he willing to "forsake [his] kingdom" (Alma 22:15) but he was also willing to "give away all of [his] sins to know" the Lord (Alma 22:18). Lamoni's father dies not long after he converts to the Lord (see 24:4). After his death, his heir Anti-Nephi-Lehi loses hegemony over the unconverted Lamanites and their Amalekite cohorts. Both Anti-Nephi-Lehi and Lamoni are compelled

to leave with those of their subjects who converted. While the loss of dynastic royal power might seem like a large sacrifice, these two sons (like their father) understood that an eternal inheritance in an eternal kingdom is worth more than any earthly sacrifice.

Thus Ammon's faithfulness, though it altered dynastic politics among both the Nephites and Lamanites, begets sure faith and thus sure houses among the Lamanites:

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)

Mormon emphasizes the fact that faith and faithfulness only increased among the children of the first generation of Ammon's converts. They engendered faithfulness among their children just as Ammon had engendered "exceeding faith" among them (see Alma 57:21, 26–27).⁷¹

"A Beloved People of the Lord": Ammon's Legacy of Faith and Faithfulness

Ammon establishes churches (Alma 20:1; 28:1) rather than his own dynasty among the Lamanites, and Aaron establishes churches rather than his own throne (Alma 23:4). There is no indication that the sons of Mosiah have families of their own (wives or children) before or during their ministry among the Lamanites, although we might surmise that they did after. The point seems to be that their eyes were single to the glory of God, and thus they were blessing the lives of the Lamanites whom they served and establishing God's kingdom—not an earthly kingdom—among them. Consequently, their converts are built upon the right foundation, and so never fall away, but become a "favored people of the Lord" (Alma 27:30).

Thus, where love turns to hate in David's house because of his sins (i.e., his "taking" of Bathsheba and murder, and Ammon's imitative rape of his half sister Tamar; see 2 Samuel 13, especially v. 15), Ammon and his brethren, through the pure love (Alma 20:26; 53:11) of Christ, turn the Lamanites' "eternal hatred"⁷² into love, and Ammon is able to thus reflect at the close of his missionary labors: "If we had not come up out of the land of Zarahemla, these our dearly beloved brethren, who have so dearly beloved us, would still have been racked with hatred against us . . . [and have] been strangers to God"

(Alma 26:9). The narrator stresses the depth and mutuality of the love that overcomes the Lamanites' eternal hatred of the Nephites. Ammon and his converts are all royal heirs and beloved, not just David.⁷³

David's sins result in "the sword . . . never depart[ing] from [his] house" (2 Samuel 12:10—in other words, violence will plague the house of David thereafter) and result in a loss of eternal exaltation (see D&C 132:39), whereas Ammon's Lamanite converts had such faith in the Lord that they "never did fall away" (Alma 23:6). Hundreds of years afterward, and after the destruction of the Nephite nation, Moroni still reflected on the greatness of what Ammon's faith had accomplished: "Behold, it was the faith [*ēmūnat*] of Ammon and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites" (Ether 12:15). Ammon's faith in Christ and faithfulness to his mission continue to bear fruit among those who prize the Book of Mormon and strive to internalize the meaning of the account of his missionary labors.

Conclusion: Faithfulness and the Right to Rule

While both David and Ammon could be commended for their "faithfulness" (1 Samuel 22:14, Alma 18:10), it was the purity of Ammon's intent (i.e., a desire to save souls and a lack of monarchic ambition) that made his life's work such a success compared to the decidedly mixed bag that David's life became. Lamoni and his father, while beginning in the mode of Saul, became more Jonathan-like, willing not only to give away their possessions and their kingdoms, but even to give their lives and, perhaps hardest of all, to "give up [their] sins" to know God.

The narrative emphasizes the name Ammon as a symbol of faith and faithfulness, precisely because of the faithfulness that its bearer's labors produced in the Lamanites, who had for so long "dwindled in unbelief." Ammon's efforts, through the scriptures which testify of his faith and faithfulness in Christ, continue to beget faithfulness even at this moment. As beneficiaries of Ammon's efforts, we (like Lamoni) can, through faith, pass through the rent "veil of unbelief," and be "brought into the light" (Ether 4:15; 2 Nephi 32:4), bringing others with us.

Finally, if the right to rule and reign in the house of Israel in some eternal sense is dependent upon our faithfulness, Ammon's self-abnegating approach to our brothers and sisters—like the similar self-emptying approach of the Savior himself (see Philippians 2:5–11)—recommends itself as the best. David's gradual deviation from that approach cost him the right to rule and

reign eternally in the house of Israel (see D&C 132:39), a right available to all through the Atonement of Jesus (see Moses 7:59) that many of Ammon's converts would enjoy. Our right to rule and reign will similarly depend upon our willingness to be and to remain faithful and to instill faith and faithfulness in our brothers and sisters—our missionary work. As the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “There is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things” (D&C 123:15). **RE**

Notes

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1. On the rehabilitative power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, see Bruce C. Hafen, “Beauty for Ashes: The Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 7–13; and Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life's Experiences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 143–54.

2. The terms “instrument” and “weapon” are represented by the same word in Hebrew [kēli] = “implement, instrument”; “weapon.” See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 478–79; hereafter cited as *HALOT*. Note the distribution of instrument/weapon/arms as a motif throughout Alma 17–29: instrument (Alma 17:9, 11; 26:3, 15; 29:9); weapons (23:7, 13; 24:17–19, 25; 25:14; 26:32). As “instruments” in the Lord's hand, Ammon and his brothers succeed in getting many of the Lamanites to lay down their arms and bury their weapons (see especially Alma 23:7).

3. Robert A. Rhees, “Ammon,” *Ensign*, June 1997, 75, notes, “While Ammon apparently was not the eldest of Mosiah's sons (the kingship was first offered to Aaron; see Mosiah 29:1–3), he was ‘chief among them,’ possibly because of his great faith and leadership.”

4. For the purpose of my thesis, I presuppose that the language on the brass plates was Hebrew in character, even if the script was Egyptian (Mosiah 1:2–5). I also presuppose that the Nephites' religious language continued to be essentially Hebrew in character (see Omni 1:16–17) and that many of their records were kept in Hebrew as Moroni indicates (Moroni 9:33). Thus the Lamanite conversion narratives (including Ammon's story) may have originally been chronicled in Nephite Hebrew. The rejoicing of the people of Zarahemla at Mosiah I's bringing them the uncorrupted version of their own language on the brass plates may be further evidence of this.

5. This study is not the first to propose the possible political/literary use of the Saul-David cycle in Nephite writings. See Ben McGuire, “Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 16–31.

6. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981). German original: Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1943).

7. Scholars are divided on the number of “historians” or writers involved in the compilation of the Deuteronomistic history and the number of redactional layers that can (or cannot be) detected in this work (I proceed on the assumption that it is a unified work). It is not my intention to enter into this debate here, and even an attempt at summarizing the arguments falls well outside the scope of this paper. I would, however, note that the Book of Mormon, apart from the “small plates” portion (1 Nephi–Omni), is largely the work of two author-historians (Moroni and Moroni) drawing upon a large number of sources, like the Deuteronomistic historian(s).

8. See also Jacob 2:23–26. The brass plates may have contained royal annals, among other things.

9. See, e.g., John M. Lundquist and John W. Welch, “Kingship and Temple in 2 Nephi 5–10,” *Insights* (1991): 2; also in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 66–68.

10. Frank Crüsemann (*Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: Die antiköniglichen Texte des Alten Testaments und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat*, WMANT 49 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978], 42) writes, “This brief conversation between the men of Israel and Gideon contains, along with Jotham's fable, the clearest and most fundamental repudiation of kingship in the Old Testament.” Gideon, however, undermines his antimonarchic declaration with his subsequent kinglike behavior (assembling a royal harem, establishing an idolatrous cult site, etc.).

11. On the question of whether Nephi actually became king, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 151–89; see also Joseph Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 39–40.

12. Possibly *mālki/mālkō*, “my reign”/“his reign,” an infinitival form of *mālak*, “reign,” and of the same root as *melek*, “king.”

13. See especially the superscription to “The Book of Nephi, his reign and ministry” and 1 Nephi 10:1. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 1: 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 42–44.

14. Katie Heffelfinger, “My Father Is King: Chiefly Politics and the Rise and Fall of Abimelech,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 3 (2009): 277–92.

15. John W. Welch, “Democratizing Forces in King Benjamin's Speech,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 110–26. For the implications of this going forward, see also Spencer, *On Typology*, 124–25.

16. This is a major point of the Deuteronomist, who evaluates all of the kings of Israel as wicked, and most of the kings of Judah. He singles out only a few of the kings of Judah as righteous (e.g., Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah). Kingship in Israel and Judah fails, because human kings are almost always unrighteous (see also D&C 121:39): “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.”

17. I.e., Absalom's attempted usurpation of David (a son-father usurpation), and Adonijah's rivalry with Solomon for the throne of a dying David, which resulted in a monarchic purge (a brother purging a brother and others deemed a threat to the throne). The Jaredite record is replete with intrafamilial rivalry for the throne.

18. The brother of Jared's words regarding the Jaredites' proposed monarchy, “surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (Ether 6:23), anticipated the kinds of troubles that he foresaw

that kingship would bring the Jaredites, i.e., “captivity,” near-extinction, and then (eventually) extinction. However, he might as well have been speaking about Israel and Judah. For Israel, and later Judah, kingship resulted in another kind of “captivity,” i.e., exile.

19. The paronomasia (play on like sounds) involving Amlici and **mlk* occurs in Alma 2:2, 7, 9–10.

20. Some instances of the paronomasia on Amalickiah and **mlk* occur in Alma 46:4–5; 47:1–35; 49:10, 25; 52:3; 54:16; 55:5.

21. The book of Alma also devotes substantial time to the so-called “king-men” who are intent on reestablishing kingship among the Nephites (see Alma 5:1:5–21; 60:16–17; 62:9).

22. See especially Judges 9:8–14, 22. Notably, Abimelech will not use the verb **mlk* of himself, but uses the verb **msl* (Judges 9:2), the very term that the men of Israel and Gideon use in their conversation (Judges 8:22–23). Gideon denies that he or his sons will “rule” over, and yet his son Abimelech (“my father is king”) “reigns” over Israel (Judges 9:22). (Unhelpfully, the KJV uses the word “reign” to translate both **mlk* and **msl* in Judges 9:2).

23. If Amlici and Amalickiah were Mulekite descendants of Zedekiah (and thus of David), this wordplay would be highly suggestive; however, there is no direct text to support this.

24. See, e.g., Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1991), 242. For a discussion of the origin and meaning of “David,” see Baruch Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 266–69.

25. Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 32, 228; see also HALOT, 65.

26. Noth, *Personennamen*, 228; see also HALOT, 62.

27. 2 Samuel 13:3–5 indicates that Amnon’s actions are partly instigated (or abetted) by Jonadab, David’s nephew (the son of his brother Shimeah), who may have had monarchic ambitions of his own.

28. See *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, ed. Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, *SANTAG* 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 422.

29. See HALOT, 64.

30. David, who is transitioning to being “the Lord’s anointed” in more than the king-to-be sense (1 Samuel 16), has a vested interest in not murdering Saul, the still-regnant Lord’s anointed. For David to do so would be for him to set a precedent for his own violent overthrow.

31. On David’s collusion with the Philistines, see Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons*, 304–6.

32. Alma 43:13–14 (emending “descendants” in v. 14 to “dissenter,” see Skousen); 47:35–36.

33. E.g., Amalickiah (Alma 47, see especially v. 1; Alma 57; etc.), Pachus (Alma 61:8; 62:6).

34. See Richard L. Bushman, *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:52–72; Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15–37.

35. Stanley A. Johnson, personal communication, spring 2012.

36. For a fuller list and treatment of these grievances and issues, see Reynolds, “Political Dimension,” 15–37.

37. Lenet H. Read notes that in explaining his intentions to Lamoni, “Ammon was either extremely impressive or King Lamoni possessed much basic goodness, or both—or perhaps Lamoni had learned that Ammon was the son of a king and saw the possibility of some kind of political opportunity.” “King Lamoni,” *Ensign*, August 1977, 61.

38. Alma makes a point of how Corianton’s two false moves negatively affected the Zoramite mission (see Alma 39:2–3), a mission on which Ammon himself served later in life.

39. I.e., David has already been anointed to become king (1 Samuel 16), but he must tread carefully. Thus the David’s rejoinder to Saul (“Who am I? and what is my life, or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king?” 1 Samuel 18:18) is not to be taken at face value. First Samuel 18:19 indicates that David was still supposed to have married Merab, who is instead given to Adriel the Meholathite.

40. Note how Amalickiah married the widowed Lamanite queen in Alma 47:34–35 to lay a foundation for a “legitimate” claim to the Lamanite throne.

41. The term *vorlage* refers to the original text before the word of a translator, editor, or copyist (reconstructed by working backwards from the words of the translation, but in reality unknown).

42. First Samuel 22:14 gives us a control text for Alma 18:10; see also note 4.

43. Henry B. Eyring: “I have always focused before on how mixed up Lamoni was in his doctrine, without seeing the miracle. The miracle was that a spiritual need was created in a man, that he might be taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. His heart was broken. He felt guilt. And it came from the temporal things that Ammon had done. . . . Never, never underestimate the spiritual value of doing temporal things well for those whom you serve.” “The Book of Mormon Will Change Your Life,” *Ensign*, February 2004, 13–14.

44. Although Saul later recognizes David’s “righteousness” versus his own, at this point he is on a trajectory toward personal, familial, and dynastic destruction.

45. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 242–43.

46. See Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit,” 242–43.

47. Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Presence of the Lord,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw*, 130.

48. The first use of “dwindle in belief” occurs in 1 Nephi 4:13, where the broader reference is to all the children of Lehi, but hints at the fate of the Lamanites in particular. Thereafter it is used specifically of the Lamanites in 1 Nephi 12:22–23, the mixture of Lamanite and Nephite dissenters that survive the destruction of the Nephite nation in 1 Nephi 13:35 and 15:13; 26:15, 17, 19; 2 Nephi 1:10. King Benjamin uses it exclusively of the Lamanites in Mosiah 1:5. Alma 45:10, 12 and 50:22 speak of the Nephites dwindling in unbelief like the Lamanites. As the Lamanites become more faithful and righteous than the Nephites, Mormon contrasts the Nephites’ dwindling unbelief with the Lamanites’ belief in Helaman 4:23, 6:34. Samuel the Lamanite infuriates the Nephites of Zarahemla by prophesying that the Lord would bless the Lamanites in spite of their dwindling in unbelief and stating that they never would dwindle in unbelief if they had been shown as many miracles and had been given as much light and knowledge as the Nephites (Helaman 15:11, 15). Third Nephi 2:15, Mormon 9:20, and Ether 4:3 again speak of the Lamanites (and the Nephites who mix with them) dwindling in unbelief, while 4 Nephi 1:34 and 38 emphatically speak of the Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites not merely dwindling in unbelief, but willfully

rebellious against the gospel of Christ (see D&C 3:18). Words translated as “unbelief” are attested some thirty-five times in the Book of Mormon (and fifty-two times in the standard works altogether).

49. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit,” 242–43.

50. So, e.g., New Revised Standard Version, English Standard Version.

51. So, e.g., New International Version.

52. Nephi is finally persuaded to kill Laban in order to obtain the brass plates by the realization that his people would need the scriptures. He reports that the Spirit said to him: “Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13).

53. Later, when Lamoni’s father broaches this subject, he does not nominally identify Nephi as the one who “robbed” the Lamanites of the brass plates. The possibility exists that he could also have been referring to Mosiah I (see Omni 1:12–14).

54. Compare Nephi’s initial, unflattering descriptions of Lamanite degeneracy (e.g., 1 Nephi 12:23; 2 Nephi 5:14, 22–24) and those of his prophetic successors (Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:20; Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 10:20; Alma 17:14; Alma 47:36; Helaman 3:16, etc.). Mormon noted that such descriptions had been “ever . . . among” the Nephites (Mormon 5:15).

55. See especially 1 Nephi 1:7–8, where the two phrases are paired: “And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen. And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.”

56. Nephi consistently speaks of being “carried away” in visions (see 1 Nephi 14:30; 15:1; 2 Nephi 4:25).

57. See also the narrator’s characterization of Ammon in Alma 18:22: “Ammon being wise [Hebrew *hākām*], but harmless,” which echoes the description of Ammon’s friend/cousin Jonadab as a “subtle [literally wise, *hākām*] man” (2 Samuel 13:3). Ammon puts his “wisdom” to much more altruistic purposes than does Jonadab, and with much better results: Ammon’s “wisdom” blesses thousands of lives, whereas Ammon and Jonadab’s scheme results in rape, death, and eventually the near-destruction of David’s “house.”

58. Contrast Amalickiah’s “le[ading] away . . . hearts” (Alma 46:10), “gain[ing] the hearts of the people” by “fraud” (47:30), negatively “inspir[ing] the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi” (48:1), and “stir[ring] up the hearts of the people of the Lamanites against the Nephites” (51:9).

59. Isaiah 61:1 illustrates how the Spirit of the Lord brings “legitimacy” or “legitimation,” i.e., royal or divine authority (“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me”).

60. See David Wagner, *Geist und Tora: Studien zur göttlichen Legitimation und Delegitimation von Herrschaft im Alten Testament anhand der Erzählungen über König Saul*, ABG 15 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 189–216.

61. Samuel declares the end of Saul’s dynasty in 1 Samuel 13:14 (i.e., his sons will not remain on the throne) and the “tearing” of his kingship (1 Samuel 15:28).

62. Later when the Nephites “dwindle in unbelief” (Helaman 6:34), we will see this legitimation/delegitimation phenomenon: “And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts [i.e., delegitimation]. And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the

Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words [i.e., legitimation]” (Helaman 6:35–36).

63. Matthew L. Bowen, “Becoming Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand: King Benjamin’s Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 6–8, 13.

64. See Jennifer Clark Lane, “The Redemption of Abraham,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 169–74; Brian K. Ray, “Adoption and Atonement: Becoming Sons and Daughters of Christ,” *Religious Educator* 6, no. 3 (2005): 129–36.

65. Bowen, “Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand,” 6–8.

66. In advance of their mission, Ammon and his brethren had “fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant [*Yhwh yitēn, similar to the name Jonathan] unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them” (Alma 17:9). They do not want monarchy among the Lamanites, but to “save some few of their souls.” The narrator notes that the king “inquired [*šāal, see Saul] of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people” (Alma 17:22).

67. Dana Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 148–51; see also Tod Linafelt, “Private Poetry and Public Eloquence in 2 Samuel 1:17–27: Hearing and Overhearing David’s Lament for Jonathan and Saul,” *Journal of Religion* 88, no. 4 (2008): 497–526.

68. See the Septuagint (LXX) and Dead Sea Scrolls (4QSam^a) versions of 2 Samuel 13:21.

69. Notably, Korihor strikes at the idea of Ammon’s converts being a “free people” in Alma 30:24.

70. The lead word “grant” occurs six times; forms of “desire” occur seven times in Alma 20.

71. Later narratives depict the faith of the Ammonite “sons” of Helaman as being greater than that of the Nephites in general: “Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith [*emūnatam*] it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them” (Alma 57:21). Helaman further notes how astonishing the Nephites were at their preservation in battle: “And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. 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).

72. So described in Jacob 7:24 and Mosiah 10:27.

73. This stands in stark contrast to Jonathan’s one-way, unreciprocated “love” for David that enables him to accede to the throne (even the plaintive lament of 2 Samuel 1:26 emphasizes that it was Jonathan who “loved” David, not the other way around).