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# MORMON'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE LITERARY JUSTICE FOR GIDEON

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Nathan J. Arp

**Abstract:** *Although unable to write more than a hundredth part of his people's history, Mormon seemingly found the time and plate-space to deliver literary justice on behalf of Gideon, who suffered a martyr's death at the hand of the wicked Nehor. This article applies a literary approach buttressed by evidence from the Book of Mormon to suggest that Mormon intentionally supplied tightly-controlled repetitive elements, like the repetition of names, to point the reader to discover multiple literary sub-narratives connected by a carefully crafted network of themes running under the main narratives of the scriptures. The theories espoused in this work may have begun with the recognition of the reader-arresting repetition of Gideon's name in Alma 6:7-8, but driven by scriptural data points soon connected Gideon with Abinadi, the Ammonites, and others. The repetitive and referential use of the moniker Nehor, Gideon's murderer, on various peoples by Mormon seemed to connect thematically and organically to a justice prophesied by Abinadi. In parallel with the theme of justice laid upon the Nehor-populations, evidence is marshaled to also suggest that Mormon referenced the place-name of Gideon to intentionally hearken back to the man Gideon. Following the role of Gideon, as a place, we propose Mormon constructed a path for the martyr Gideon via proxy to meet the resurrected Lord in Bountiful. Mormon's concern for the individual and his technique for rewriting Gideon's story through proxy ultimately symbolizes the role Christ's atoning power can take in each of our lives to save us.*

Under the hands of its authors, the Book of Mormon creatively blends stringent didacticism and literary artistry into a piercing message of hope in the face of the tragedy of its own narrative. Mormon, the principle of three main authors of the book that bears his name, lived at the end-time of his people, a time of harsh brutality where he was

exposed to “a continual scene of wickedness” (Mormon 2:18) and “blood and carnage” (Mormon 4:11). Somehow, surrounded by a people who “[had] lost their love, one towards another” and were “without mercy” (Moroni 9:5, 18), Mormon, in contrast, was miraculously “filled with charity” (Moroni 8:17). Rising above the cruel injustices of his own time, Mormon was able to revisit the records of his ancestors and pity their comparatively lesser injustices. On at least one occasion, this paper will suggest that Mormon’s sentimentality and compassion may have even moved him to mete out justice through literary means for injustices met on a man named Gideon. It is in this spirit of a narrator-focused approach that I attempt to discover the meaning behind Mormon’s repeated references to Gideon’s martyrdom at the hands of Nehor.

Increased attention to the narrators of the Book of Mormon has been a noteworthy trend in Book of Mormon scholarship since roughly 2010.<sup>1</sup> This paper proposes that Mormon’s repetition of the names of Gideon and Nehor throughout the Book of Mormon are not coincidental, but serve as markers for the reader to discover authorial intent. Therefore, these repetitive and possibly intentional markers are catalogued as part of a methodology to read the Book of Mormon as the narrators intended and to uncover as much meaning as possible. These findings suggest that these narrators, like Mormon, built layers of meaning into their carefully crafted narratives that seem intended to take the reader beyond

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1. In 2010, Oxford Press published Grant Hardy’s book *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), which heralded in a “turning point in the field” of Book of Mormon scholarship, according to Kimberly Matheson. Previous to this tome, a major emphasis of Book of Mormon scholarship was directed at proving links between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world in support of the Book’s own claims or proving connections between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s language or culture to argue for a 19th century American authorship. Amy Easton-Flake views Hardy’s work as a “jumping-off point” from the previous focus to “a narrative-critical approach to the Book of Mormon.” Hardy’s book applied scholarship on narrative strategy in the Hebrew Bible to focus the attention of Book of Mormon readers on the three main narrators of the Book of Mormon. See Kimberly Matheson, “Emboldened and Embarrassed: The Tenor of Contemporary Book of Mormon Studies and the Role of Grant Hardy,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 31 (2022): 75–99, and Amy Easton-Flake, “Beyond Understanding: Narrative Theory as Expansion in Book of Mormon Exegesis,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 25, no. 1 (2016): 116, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol25/iss1/10/>.

the assumed surface-level content interrupted with the overt didactic comments preceded by “and thus we see.”<sup>2</sup>

Gideon was a minor character in the Book of Mormon who has generally received little attention apart from the basic description of his role as a faithful man in the Zeniffite colony in the City of Nephi, surrounded by Lamanites. There Gideon opposed Noah and helped the Zeniffites escape their Lamanite captivity. After bringing his people back to the Nephite nation, in his old age, he opposed the wicked power-seeker, Nehor, who slew Gideon with a sword. But Mormon's treatment of Gideon suggests there is much more we should consider.

After the death of Gideon in Alma 1, Mormon alludes to that event on two more occasions (Alma 2, 6) with an identical frequency of repetitions of the names Gideon and Nehor. These initial and blatant allusions are possible evidence of authorial intent and seem intended to lead the reader to find thematic connections with the later repetitions of those names. Throughout the book of Alma, Mormon's treatment of Gideon, Nehor, and peoples associated with Nehor may create a subtle message about justice and serve as a personal literary response to the unjust deaths of Gideon and Abinadi, the Ammonites, and others. The narrative-focused approach here is carried out in four sections:

Part 1, “Repetition and Intention,” the repetition of the name Gideon and Nehor in Alma 1, 2, and 6 are explored and proposed to be both significant and intended by Mormon. This is motivated in part by the general brevity of the Book of Mormon and the tendency to follow Hebrew literary norms, suggesting that patterns of repetition should be considered for possible meaning.

Part 2, “Repeating Nehor and Gideon, Messages of Justice and Salvation,” proposes that Mormon's editorial strategy in using repeated references to Gideon brings out themes of justice as well as a path to salvation in Christ's appearance to the Nephites. While Gideon is introduced in Mosiah 19 and is killed in Alma 1, in a sense, his life via proxy begins in Alma 2 and doesn't end at least until 3 Nephi 9. Allusions to Abinadi's prophecies provide evidence suggesting that Mormon intended to link the four populations that Mormon names “Nehors” to his sub-narrative plot regarding justice. The narratives grouped in the theme of justice are discussed in the section, “Nehor's Road to Ruin,” while the narratives connected to Gideon-related geography that form

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2. Kylie Turley, “Alma's Hell: Repentance, Consequence, and the Lake of Fire and Brimstone,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 40, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol28/iss1/2/>.

a path to Christ are discussed in the section, “Geographic Reiteration of Gideon: Gideon’s Path to the Prince of Peace.”

Part 3, “Gideon as a Peacemaker,” explores the narratives in Mosiah 19–21, 25 and Alma 1 to suggest that Mormon presents Gideon as a peacemaker, a potentially ironic touch given Gideon’s initial act of chasing King Noah with his sword. This presentation of Gideon as a peacemaker culminates in Gideon’s tragic death. Though speculative, an objective behind the peacemaker theme may have been to fill the reader with outrage and lead one to wonder if an unjust death really could be the reward for a peaceful life. The tension could then prime the reader to find the proposed sub-narrative plots of justice and salvation.

Part 4, “Mormon’s Preference for Peacemakers,” contextualizes Gideon with how Mormon treated other characters that he labeled as peacemakers. Like Part 3, this section seeks to present further evidence to potentially answer why Mormon may have written this literary second chance for Gideon and others. In other words, this section showcases Mormon’s affection for peacemakers. Mormon knew that in Christ’s post-mortem appearance to the Nephites, Jesus taught:

And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. And blessed are all they which are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (3 Nephi 12:9–10)

Mormon’s narrative strategy appears to portray a somber and sensitive editor, who not only learned of and likely mourned the injustices met upon his ancestors, but may have also found an innovative way to teach his future readers about eventual divine justice and salvation. In his role as an editor, he may have channeled a love for peacemakers into a creative literary reproduction using repetitive phraseology to create a sub-narrative to encourage peacemakers and all those believers who are persecuted in this life, showing that they will return to their Heavenly Father and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Part 1: Repetition and Intention**

In this section, a discussion regarding the glaring and exact repetition of Gideon’s name in the first few chapters of Alma begins our exploration into authorial intent. Here I suggest that Mormon’s repeated allusions to Gideon’s death interrupt his narratives so conspicuously that these interruptions, noted by multiple scholars, are themselves possibly evidence of authorial intent. Authorial intent is important to this study,

because this paper attempts to discover how Mormon may have intended us to read his record. The approach utilized here began by looking for conspicuous repetitions, omissions, and connecting phrases in the text, posit reasons for their existence, and apply these possible reasons towards a greater understanding of this authentic ancient volume of scripture, the Book of Mormon.

**Initial Markers of Authorial Intent in Alma 1, 2, and 6**

A potentially significant pattern occurs in the way the names of Nehor and Gideon are repeated in the Book of Mormon starting with allusions to Gideon’s murder, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Initial repetitions of “Nehor” and “Gideon” in connection with Gideon’s murder in the Book of Mormon.

Topical Context	Scripture References	References to Nehor	References to Gideon
Gideon martyred	Nehor: Alma 1:15 Gideon: Alma 1:8–9	1	4
Amlici	Nehor: Alma 2:20 Gideon: Alma 2:1, 20, 26	1	4
Alma preaches to the city of Gideon	Nehor: Alma 6:7 Gideon: Alma 6:7, 8	1	4

I argue that these repetitions, as shown in Table 1, serve as an initial marker provided by Mormon, presumably the last editorial hand to shape these accounts in question,<sup>3</sup> to focus the reader’s attention on Nehor and Gideon and prepare us to see their repetition throughout the Book of Mormon as an indicator that something beyond a surface-level association with these characters is at play. The very fact that Mormon chose to remind the reader in two later episodes (Alma 2 and 6) is a possible indication of authorial intent. The methodology used here to suggest authorial intent is summarized by Amy Easton-Flake:

By deciding what to place first and what to place last, what to repeat and what to omit, what to convey rapidly, and what to dwell at length on, the author guides readers’ interpretation of

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3. Authorship in the Book of Mormon, like other books with multiple known authors and editors, is a complex subject, one which one can appreciate more fully with John W. Welch’s discussion in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 48–51, 140–45.

the text. Thus by making explicit these authorial decisions, we are better able to determine authorial intent.<sup>4</sup>

Although Gideon dies at the hand of Nehor as the first narrated event in the book of Alma, he makes a literary reappearance in the very next episode through a series of references. Mormon introduces the next antagonist, Amlici, with the ominous description of “being after the order of the man that slew Gideon” (Alma 2:1). This comment from Mormon invites the reader to look for possible thematic comparisons between Amlici and Nehor. Although others have attempted to find connections between Nehor and Amlici, Kylie Turley views this commentary as a “baffling” interruption and finds no real connection between Amlici and Nehor apart from this comment that Amlici was “after the order of the man that slew Gideon.”<sup>5</sup> According to Easton-Flake, commentary such as this slows down a narrative, can evince authorial intent, and even “produce an alternative story line.”<sup>6</sup> It is proposed that Mormon’s commentaries and repetitions of the name Nehor and Gideon also produce an alternative story line, described here as a sub-narrative.

Amlici attempts to take over the reins of the government from the voice of the people. When the voice of the people denies him of his aspiration, he turns to violence to take Nephite governance by force. Coincidentally, Alma<sub>2</sub>’s forces at one point pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon. Mormon reminds the reader that the valley was “called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor” (Alma 2:20). This is now the second time that Gideon’s death has been referenced. The preponderance of references to the name of Gideon, four in total, and his death seems out of context in a struggle between Amlici and Alma<sub>2</sub>, until we realize that Mormon might be reorienting the reader to read Nehor and Gideon into the account of this conflict. As Alma<sub>2</sub> slays Amlici with the sword, Mormon aids the reader to see Gideon slaying Nehor. Thus, through literary means, Mormon could creatively award the victory denied to Gideon in life.

This idea may seem farfetched; however, there is evidence in the text that suggests this scenario. It is significant that Mormon does not just repeat the names of Gideon and Nehor in this narrative to help reorient

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4. Amy Easton-Flake, “Seeing Moroni and the Book of Ether through a Study of Narrative Time,” in *Illuminating the Jaredite Records*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Study Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020), 129–30.

5. Turley, “Alma’s Hell,” 23n52.

6. Easton-Flake, “Seeing Moroni,” 145 (see also 145–47).



the reader. In the account of Gideon's tragic death in Alma 1, the name of Nehor appears once and the name of Gideon is mentioned four times, exactly the number appearing in the account of Amlici in Alma 2. Mormon is not finished reminding the reader of Nehor and Gideon. Mormon has dealt the same hand twice (4 Gideons and 1 Nehor) to the reader, and now will deal us the same hand a third time in Alma 6 as Mormon is narrating Alma<sub>2</sub>'s visit to the people of Gideon:

Alma ... went over upon the east of the river Sidon into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword. And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon ... (Alma 6:7–8)<sup>7</sup>

These verses and the repetitive appearances of the name Gideon in such close proximity sparked the exploration that led to this paper. The repetition of the name Gideon, like that of Nehor, have been observed by others. Grant Hardy noted the repetition of the phrase *valley of Gideon* in Alma 2 and 6, for example.<sup>8</sup> Biblical scholars leverage these sorts of repetitions, which seem excessive or unnecessary but are sometimes, according to Amy Easton-Flake, markers to discover authorial intent:

“If we follow Elliot’s advice and ‘attend most closely to moments in the text that are not easily assimilated into the coherent and comprehensive (comprehensible story),’ we will further discover issues are significant to the implied author.”<sup>9</sup>

While Mormon does not explicitly state his editorial intentions with respect to Gideon, making the topic inherently speculative and debatable, the evidence presented here is believed to support the hypothesis that some references to Gideon and Nehor, presumably all edited by Mormon, were intentionally crafted and may be used to extract additional meaning from the text. Indications that Mormon was acting intentionally can be

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7. All quotes from the Book of Mormon are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022). I have used this version of the Book of Mormon because it is currently “the definitive scholarly version of the Book of Mormon,” as defined by Grant Hardy in its introduction. Grant Hardy, introduction to *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), xvii.

8. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 150–51.

9. Easton-Flake, “Beyond Understanding,” 124–25.

found in the meaning that comes through his decisions regarding what is repeated as well as what is omitted.

Repetition itself is a common occurrence in the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible and is frequently meaningful. Alan Goff points out that “Repetitions are not just one element in the biblical writing style, but an essential, foundational building block that makes biblical plot and characterization possible.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, follows a “norm of economy” in its descriptions of its settings and characters;<sup>11</sup> therefore, when there is repetition, it is reasonable to assume that it has a purpose, in other words, the author intended it to be there.

Consideration of apparent excess or apparent omission of expected information can be a key for better understanding scripture. For example, in the episode of Gideon’s death (Alma 1), Mormon begins the narrative with a telling omission. He delays naming Nehor, the main antagonist and character in this narrative. He passes up on over 20 occasions where it would be logical to refer to Nehor by his name, but delays naming him until his “ignominious death” (Alma 1:15). This technique of delaying an antagonist’s naming, which Mormon is using in Alma 1, is similar to that used in Egyptian literature. According to James Hoffmeier, the enemy of the Pharaoh was not named in Egyptian records, but in the few times when an enemy is named, “it seems to have been because that chieftain or king was captured and taken prisoner.”<sup>12</sup> This is precisely the case with Nehor, he is not named until after he is captured and sentenced to death.

In addition to this delay, Mormon also slightly delays the re-introduction of a previous character, the hero Gideon. These delays may have been intentional. Mormon may have delayed naming both these characters so that he could control the number of times he used

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10. Alan Goff, “Types of Repetition and Shadows of History in Hebraic Narrative,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 263–318, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/types-of-repetition-and-shadows-of-history-in-hebraic-narrative/>.

11. This characteristic of the Bible is documented in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011) and in Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

12. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 110. Although we know that the Nephites had brought records with them as well as created and preserved records, we don’t know all that they had brought from the Old World, so an Egyptian literary influence on this narrative can only be theoretical.

their names in this episode (Alma 1:1–15), which is four times for Gideon and only once for Nehor (v. 15). This is a pattern that occurs in two other occasions as shown in Table 1. Mormon may have both repeated and omitted these names to urge the reader to pay attention to the further use of these names throughout the rest of the narrative.

Literary justice is not foreign to the Bible; in fact, the Biblical Gideon is portrayed as the victim of murder and receives justice posthumously as well.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that the Biblical story of Gideon's misfortune and the delivery of a postmortem vengeance via proxy<sup>14</sup> inspired Mormon with the idea to provide the Nephite Gideon literary justice and salvation posthumously as well.

The complicated network of associations proposed in the rest of this paper follow from application of literary analysis developed by Biblical scholars in the mid- to late-20th century<sup>15</sup> and only recently introduced into Book of Mormon studies this century through the work of scholars like Grant and Heather Hardy.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, some of these proposed connections, and suggested sub-narrative meaning, may have been overlooked by previous Book of Mormon scholarship.

## Part 2: Repeating Nehor and Gideon, Justice and Salvation

Here we consider two important meanings that may be behind Mormon's subtle treatment of Gideon and Nehor. First, we consider the issue of justice for Gideon and others, and then the path to salvation through Christ that can be seen in Mormon's apparently careful references to Gideon. The suggestion that these themes of justice and salvation were intended for the reader to discover by Mormon was a product of an analysis described in this section.

### Nehor's Road to Ruin: Justice for Gideon and Others

References to the name Nehor after his execution and throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, appear as an introductory epithet

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13. In Judges 9:56, the Biblical narrator connects Abimelech's death to the injustice done to Gideon (Jerubaal) by slaying Gideon's children.

14. Daniel I. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6–9," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (September 1997): 357.

15. A good introduction to this history can be found in Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1–24.

16. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* and Heather Hardy, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ: Mormon's Poetics," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 16–27, 93–95, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss2/4/>.

for antagonists on whom the sword of justice will fall. Subsequently, Mormon marks four different populations as Nehors: Amlicites (already referenced above), Ammonihahites, Amalekites, and Amulonites, as shown in Table 2. All these groups meet divine justice for violent acts against believers and their ends fulfill prophecies from Abinadi. Not only are there textual connections between Abinadi and the Nehors, but there are textual and thematic connections between Abinadi and Gideon, who seems to be the literary sword of justice destined to fall upon these Nehor populations. Such a role may allude to the famous biblical story when Gideon and just 100 men frightened and scattered a large enemy army as they suddenly revealed their torches and shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” (Judges 7: 18, 20). Gideon is introduced in Mosiah 19:4 with a sword raised against wicked King Noah, and when his life ends in Alma 1:9, “he was slain by the sword.”

**Table 2.** Population groups associated with Nehor’s teachings.

Nehor Populations	Cause for destruction	Justice met
Amlicites	According to Mormon, it was [Amlici’s] intent to destroy the church of God” (Alma 2:4). After failing to win the voice of the people, in an election, his followers proclaim him king and he begins a war in order to “subject [the rest of the Nephites] to him” (Alma 2:10).	The Amlicites are “driven”, “slain”, and then “devoured” by “wild beasts” and “vultures of the air” (Alma 2:37–38), just like Abinadi’s prophecies (see Mosiah 12:2, 17:7).
Ammonihahites	The Ammonihahites torture God’s messengers (Alma <sub>2</sub> and Amulek) and kill their believers through fire (see Alma 14:8–25).	The Lord, through the pronouncement of his prophet Alma <sub>2</sub> brings down the walls of the prison upon the chief judge and lawyers (see Alma 14:25–28). The Lamanites wipe out the populace of Ammonihah in a single day (see Alma 16:1–3 and Alma 25).
Amulonites	Slew the unarmed Ammonites (the new believers) in Alma 24:28 and put believers to death by fire (see Alma 25:3–12).	Killed in battles with the Nephites and burned to death by Lamanites (see Alma 25:3–12) as prophesied by Abinadi. The rest of the Amulonites are destroyed between Alma 43 and 47.

Nehor Populations	Cause for destruction	Justice met
Amalekites	Slew the unarmed Ammonites (the new believers) in Alma 24:28 and Alma 27:2–4. Also see Alma 21:4.	The Amalekites are destroyed between Alma 43 and 47.

The meaning of Gideon’s name may have prompted Mormon in his narrative strategy involving the use of Gideon and Nehor, and particularly, the justice that would come to the rebellious peoples Mormon associated with the name of Nehor. The name Gideon comes from the Hebrew verb *gâda’* (גדג) meaning “hew, hew down or off.”<sup>17</sup> Moshe Garsiel has observed that the Biblical author “makes especial homiletic use of [Gideon]’s name” in the book of Judges.<sup>18</sup> The metaphorical associations of Gideon’s name, as someone who hews, “accord well with Gideon’s activity in smiting the Midianites.”<sup>19</sup> Mormon may also have decided that Gideon’s linguistic association with the action of hewing accorded well with the posthumous use of the name Nehor as a label for those who would be slain by God’s justice. (See Table 2 for further details.) Further, in light of “the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon” from Judges 7, Gideon’s death by being hewn down by the sword of a wicked man is deeply tragic, if not bitterly ironic, and seems to have drawn Mormon’s personal attention. Indeed, this could even be a further example of the subtle irony that Robert Rees has observed in his study of a sophisticated literary tool in the Book of Mormon.<sup>20</sup>

17. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), s.v. “גדג,” 154. Alternatively, Gideon might also mean “mutilated” or “young man” according to Stephen D. Ricks, Paul Y. Hoskisson, Robert F. Smith, and John Gee, *Dictionary of Proper Names & Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2022), 124.

18. Moshe Garsiel, “Homiletic Name-Derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI–VIII,” *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. 3 (1993): 305.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Robert A. Rees enumerates a number of examples of dramatic and verbal ironies in “Irony in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 20–31, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol12/iss2/4/>.

## Gideon as Abinadi's Sword of Justice against Noah and the Nehors

A close study of Gideon's textual association with Nehor reveals an additional association with Abinadi and an association between Abinadi and Nehor. From the moment that Gideon steps onto the stage of the Book of Mormon, Mormon ties him to Abinadi and his prophecies through identical introductions: "There was a man among them whose name was ..."<sup>21</sup> These are the only two people who Mormon introduces this way. This identical introduction leads the reader to find the contextual connection between Gideon and Abinadi's prophecies starting with Gideon's first recorded act: he threatens King Noah's life. Abinadi foresaw that "the life of king Noah [would] be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace" (Mosiah 12:3). It is not surprising, then, that Gideon's arrival in the narrative comes at a time when an outraged minority "began to breathe out threatenings against the king" (Mosiah 19:3) in accordance with Abinadi's prediction.

Gideon is part of the angry current against the king, but the reasons for the opposition are not clearly explained by Mormon. The opposition is introduced in Mosiah 19:2 with this terse statement: "And now behold, the forces of the king were small, having been reduced, and there began to be a division among the remainder of the people." We tend to assume that the opposition was due to Noah's wickedness, perhaps due to killing Abinadi and seeking to kill Alma and his people, but there may have been many problems brought upon that society through the wickedness and incompetence of their rulers. One hint is the reduction in the size of the king's forces mentioned immediately before introducing the opposition movement. Was this reduction in the Zeniffite army due to a massive loss of soldiers in a mismanaged battle? This could refer to something like the scene in Mosiah 11:16–17, when Noah failed to send a sufficient number of guards to ward off a Lamanite attack, resulting in heavy casualties.

Another option which fits the context is that King Noah, through his misplaced priorities, directly or indirectly reduced the size of the army in

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21. Compare Mosiah 19:4 and Mosiah 11:20. Gideon and Abinadi are the only characters that share this identical introduction. Alma<sub>1</sub> and Zeezrom share an identical introduction that is similar to Gideon and Abinadi's (reference Mosiah 17:2 and Alma 10:31), but the subtle difference between these two sets of identical introductions may suggest separate thematic connections. Aminadab also has a similar introduction in Helaman 5:35, which may also suggest that his story is connected to these others somehow.

order to apply resources elsewhere. When Mormon paints his unpleasant portrait of the wicked King Noah, he describes in detail Noah's taxing investments in massive building projects and in riotous living. To some modern economies, a 20% tax may not seem like much, but according to Mormon this made the people "labor exceedingly to support iniquity" (Mosiah 11:6).<sup>22</sup> These details do not just convince the reader that Noah deserves what is coming to him, but build the rationale for igniting the people's brewing discontent. After all, it is his own people, who are the arm that throws Noah to the flames (see Mosiah 11:1–15).

Regardless of the reason they are angry at Noah, Gideon is so indignant that he physically threatens Noah's life in hand-to-hand combat. Gideon does not ultimately kill Noah, but he does eventually ensure that justice comes to Noah, indirectly. Once in a position to end Noah's life, Gideon ultimately spares him in order to give his people the best chance at surviving a Lamanite surprise-attack, which Noah conveniently spots right before Gideon is ready to strike him down. Instead of helping the people, Noah flees with a small group of men to save their own lives, abandoning their wives and children in the process. However, Noah's boundless selfishness soon turns his group against him and his priests. In accordance with Abinadi's prophecy (Mosiah 17:15–19), Noah then suffers his own fiery execution at the hands of the men who had fled with King Noah (Mosiah 19:19–20).

When the Zeniffites surrendered to the Lamanites, with their wives and daughters pleading before the Lamanites for mercy, the Lamanites had compassion and stopped the slaughter, but required that they deliver

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22. Alternatively, Daniel Belnap reads against Mormon's commentary suggesting that Noah's building projects "would have strengthened the local economy, rewarding skilled artisans and common laborers alike" and that "nothing in the text suggests that the people themselves felt they were under a particularly onerous hardship, Mormon's comments notwithstanding." Daniel L. Belnap, "The Abinadi Narrative, Redemption, and the Struggle for Nephite Identity," in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkins (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 37. Also reading against Mormon's commentary, Brant Gardner hypothesizes that the people may have looked at Noah's reign as a "golden age." Gardner applies a presentism lens to this circumstance by commenting that a "20 percent tax, on mostly luxury or trade items, would actually provide a tax relief to many Americans." Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 3, *Enos-Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 254.



King Noah to them, as well as pay an ongoing tribute of one half of their possessions (Mosiah 19:15).

Although “not ignorant of his father’s iniquities,” Noah’s successor, his son Limhi, did not want his father to be “destroyed” (Mosiah 19:17). So, in order to appease the Lamanite conditions and perhaps for justice’s sake alone, Gideon “secretly” sends out men to search for King Noah and his men (Mosiah 19:18). This suggests that this search party went out unbeknownst to Limhi. Further, when Gideon’s men meet Noah’s men, the ones who executed Noah, Noah’s demise is reported to Gideon’s men and then reported to Gideon. No report is presented to King Limhi in the Book of Mormon text.

Ultimately, the report of Noah’s death to the Lamanites satisfies their conditions for the surrender, thus preserving the lives of the Zeniffites and administering justice for Abinadi’s martyrdom. In the case of Noah, Gideon acts as the sword of justice on behalf of Abinadi’s prophecies. I am suggesting that literarily, Gideon, via the repeated application of the name Nehor to various people, also plays the role of justice for Abinadi’s prophecies against those who kill believers.

### **The Nehor-Amlicites**

After Nehor’s execution in Alma 1, Alma 2 introduces the first literary “Nehor,” Amlici:

[T]here began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law — Now this Amlici had by his cunning drawn away much people after him, even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people. (Alma 2:1–2)

Mormon omits the name Nehor, but what will be labeled as “the order of the Nehors” is certainly implied. Nehor may have been a figurehead or the originator of that movement,<sup>23</sup> but thematically, Mormon could

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23. Studies on Nehor as a religious movement include A. Keith Thompson, “Apostate Religion in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 191–226, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/apostate-religion-in-the-book-of-mormon/>; and Mark Alan Wright and Brant A. Gardner, “The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon*



also employ him and his order as symbols to illustrate divine justice falling upon different people.<sup>24</sup> After the encounter with the Amlicites, the next literary Nehors are the wicked people of Ammonihah. After killing or casting out the faithful, the entire population of Ammonihah is slaughtered by a surprise Lamanite attack. The remaining scene of carnage remained uninhabitable for years and was “called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate” (Alma 16:11). Then the Amulonites and Amalekites are explicitly said to be of “the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4, 24:28).

“Nehors,” at the hands of Mormon, seems to be an ominous label foreshadowing a just end for cruelty and wickedness against believers as well as rebelling against the truth, which they once knew. Kylie Nielson Turley also sees a connection between the tenets and behaviors of these Nehor populations, but ties them to the “unbelievers” described in Mosiah 26 and 27.<sup>25</sup> Alma<sub>2</sub> himself was a part of, or even a leader of, the unbelievers. The repetition of the Nehor label becomes so rampant that in response to the destruction of the city of Ammonihah and its subsequent label as the destruction of the Nehors, Daniel Belnap queried whether “the presence of ‘Nehor’ had become the Nephite explanation behind any and every misfortune, whether historically accurate or not.”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, here we consider the hypothesis that the repeated label of Nehor signified a thematic association rather than an actual religious or political association.

Turley has also observed that “the connection between Nehor and these dissenters is somewhat baffling” and Mormon’s “reasoning for claiming these dissenters are ‘Nehorite’ is unclear.”<sup>27</sup> I argue that these

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*Scripture* 1 (2012): 25–55, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-cultural-context-of-nephite-apostasy/>. It is also possible that Nehor and these other groups are related by blood to the actual “seed” of those who killed Abinadi. This seed is referenced by Abinadi in Mosiah 17:15.

24. Benjamin McMurtry also describes the use of the name “Nehor” as symbolic in his “The Amlicites and Amalekites: Are They the Same People?,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 272, 279n14, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-amlicites-and-amalekites-are-they-the-same-people/>.

25. Kylie Nielson Turley, *Alma 1–29: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 43–46.

26. Daniel L. Belnap, “‘And It Came to Pass ...’: The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 128n35, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5441&context=facpub>.

27. Turley, “Alma’s Hell,” 23n52.

odd connections between Nehor and these specific populations are evidence of authorial intent, and as such, were part of Mormon's strategy to lead the reader to Gideon and Abinadi. In each of these cases, Mormon fashions specific textual clues to signal that the divine justice met on the Nehor populations also symbolizes a recompense for the injustices perpetrated against Abinadi and Gideon.

In the case of the Amlicites and Amalekites, it is possible that Mormon's methods for connecting these populations thematically may have been so successful that it has blurred any distinctions between them, and may have led some readers to see these two peoples as a single population. Additionally, examination of Book of Mormon manuscripts and consideration of the mysterious origins and ends of the two groups led J. Christopher Conkling to propose that the two peoples are one, with the distinction arising only from Oliver Cowdery's variable spelling of "Amlicites."<sup>28</sup> However, Benjamin McMurtry offers a reasonable rebuttal, proposing that they are two different groups.<sup>29</sup> It is revealing to realize that Mormon may have selectively sculpted their narratives so we would see them as the same "type" of people earning the same type of reward for their actions. This could also explain why they came into and out of the narrative without much information about them.<sup>30</sup>

Returning to the Amlicites, Amlici and his dissenting followers inspire the Lamanites to attack the Nephites with the purpose to "subject them" (Alma 2:10) and ultimately "destroy the church" (Alma 2:4). As will be seen with the other Nehor populations, compulsion and violence against believers is a common theme. Mormon ensures that the setting of the valley of Gideon (Alma 2:20) conspicuously contextualizes the battle, so we can see Amlici and his forces as Nehor and Alma<sub>2</sub>'s defenders as a subtle reference to the man Gideon. The label of Nehor

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28. J. Christopher Conkling, "Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–17, 130–32, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1395&context=jbms>. Royal Skousen agrees with Conkling's conclusion and states that "the apostate Amalekites are actually the Amlicites who are mentioned earlier in Alma 2–3, which means that we replace Amalekite(s) with Amlicite(s). The name Amalekite is a biblical name that was accidentally introduced into the text by Oliver Cowdery when he copied from [the original manuscript into the printer's manuscript]." Skousen, *Earliest Text*, xiii.

29. McMurtry, "Amlicites and Amalekites," 269–81.

30. Although I agree with McMurtry's analysis that the Amlicites are a separate people from the Amalekites, the analysis on the use of these Nehor populations as referents to Gideon is not conditioned upon them being separate peoples.

seems to be a death sentence earned by killing the innocent and forcing one's ideology on others through violence. This battle marks a symbolic end, if not an actual end, to the Nehor-lead Amlicites. Upon this occasion of their defeat, Mormon signals to the reader that justice has been served to the Amlicites by inserting the detailed afterward about curses and by the insertion of textual ties to Abinadi's prophecies.

After the sword of justice falls upon the Amlicites, Mormon reminds the reader that the Amlicites unwittingly marked themselves for destruction by alluding to the curses and blessings that Nephi<sub>1</sub> recorded originally (Alma 3:4–19). When the Amlicites chose to separate themselves from the safety of God's covenants and his covenant people, choosing rather to come out in "open rebellion," they opened themselves up to elimination. In addition to describing their defeat in battle, Mormon details how the Amlicites are "driven," "slain," and then "devoured" by "wild beasts" and "vultures of the air."<sup>31</sup> These details seem to be lifted directly from Abinadi's prophecies, but not specifically identified as a fulfillment of the prophecies. The occurrences of some of these phrases, common to Abinadi and the Amlicites, are uncommon elsewhere in the Book of Mormon with the animal "vulture" only appearing in these two accounts. The insertion of these unique phrases strongly suggest that Mormon intended to highlight a connection between Abinadi's prophecies and the destruction of the Amlicites, a trend we will also see with the other "Nehor" populations.

Mormon also describes in vivid imagery how the dead from the battle with the Amlicites were cast into the waters of Sidon, which carried their bones into "the depths of the sea" (Alma 3:3). Mormon will repeat this same scenario with the defeat of the Nehor-Amalekites in the battle described in Alma 43 and 44 (with Alma 43:6 noting the role of the Amalekites), resulting in "cast[ing] their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea" (Alma 44:22), an end nearly unique to the battles of these two "Nehor" populations.<sup>32</sup>

Then, typical of Mormon's approach to the war chapters, he follows the death of dissenters with the birth of converts, as they are baptized in

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31. Compare these terms used to describe the Amlicites in Alma 2:37–38 with the same terms used by Abinadi in Mosiah 12:2 and 17:17.

32. There is only one other battle where the dead are cast into the sea, but this occurrence in Mormon 3:8 does not include the waters of Sidon.

the same waters.<sup>33</sup> Mormon beautifully interlaces war scenes brought about by dissenters with preaching that brings about conversion as a backdrop to his accounts of the “Nehors.” Mormon even extends this weave of contrasting narratives between war and conversion to show how self-destructive dissension from God was.<sup>34</sup> In fact, as we shall see, Mormon reports the destruction of the Ammonihahites twice to make this point (Alma 16:1–3, 25:1–2).<sup>35</sup>

### Nehor-Ammonihahites

In our next narrative sequence (Alma 14–16), Alma<sub>2</sub>, a second-generation disciple of Abinadi, actually performs the part of Abinadi in the condemnation of the “Nehors” in Ammonihah. Grant Hardy has listed various phrases and themes unique to Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek’s preaching in Ammonihah and to Abinadi’s preaching to King Noah and his people suggesting that Mormon intended these two narratives to read as parallel accounts.<sup>36</sup> Like Abinadi, Alma<sub>2</sub> has a message of repentance, which incites the people enough to bind him and deliver him and his preaching companion Amulek up to the local leaders for judgement. And also like Abinadi, who saw that future believers would be killed by fire because of their belief (Mosiah 17:15), Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek watch as the wicked in Ammonihah throw their believers, their converts, into the fire.<sup>37</sup> It is after the believers are consumed by fire that Mormon describes the chief judge of Ammonihah as someone who “was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon” (Alma 14:16).

Applying methodology espoused by Easton-Flake, this break in narrative time to hearken back to Nehor and Gideon presents possible evidence for authorial intent;<sup>38</sup> namely, that Mormon intends for the reader to connect Ammonihah with Nehor and Gideon. This interruptive commentary is conspicuous. Regarding this specific interruption, Turley notes, “Mormon’s decision to label the judge as a Nehorite shifts the focus to Nehor, and the ill-timed intrusion ensures that readers will

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33. Compare the baptisms described in Alma 4:4 with the removal of the dead in Alma 3:3 and Alma 2:34.

34. Michael F. Perry, “The Supremacy of the Word: Alma’s Mission to the Zoramites and the Conversion of the Lamanites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 119–37.

35. See the discussion in Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 115–19.

36. *Ibid.*, 160–62.

37. For a sensitive analysis of this traumatic event, please see Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 87–94.

38. Easton-Flake, “Seeing Moroni,” 134–37.

notice.”<sup>39</sup> This intent is made more pronounced by the interruptive nature of the text's repeated association between Ammonihahites and Nehor. Turley has observed, “It seems impossible that readers could miss the interruptions and forceful linking of Ammonihah to Nehor.”<sup>40</sup> These repetitive associations seem meant to wrest the reader's attention from the main narrative to something else. I argue that this “something else” is the sub-narrative plot outlined in this article.

After Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek are cast into prison they are visited by “many lawyers and judges and priests and teachers which were of the profession of Nehor” (Alma 14:18). During their incarceration, these Nehors smote Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek on their cheeks multiple times (Alma 14:14–27). In Mosiah 12:2, Abinadi included “bondage” and being “smitten on the cheek” as part of his prophecies. Three tortuous days pass for Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek in prison before God's power comes upon them, delivers them from their bonds, and brings down the prison walls upon the “Nehors,” killing the chief judge and many of his lawyers, priests, and teachers. Before Mormon narrates the death of these Nehors, he ties their deaths to this same wording from Abinadi, noting that those “who smote upon Alma and Amulek were slain” (Alma 14:27).

An additional prophecy from Abinadi also comes to life through the suffering of Zeezrom, the adversarial lawyer-turned-believer by the words of Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek. As Abinadi was dying by fire, he prophesied that people would “be afflicted with all manner of diseases” and that some believers would suffer the “pains of death by fire” (Mosiah 17:16, 18). After Zeezrom becomes convinced of the truth of the words of Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek, he is struck with an unidentified disease that burns him with a fever. The description of Zeezrom's fever also sounds like he is literally burning, suffering the “pains of death by fire,” just as Abinadi prophesied as well as experienced. Fittingly, Mormon vividly describes Zeezrom's fever as him being “scorched with a burning heat” (Alma 15:3). This unique verb scorch is only used in two places in the Book of Mormon, here with Zeezrom and in the death of Abinadi (Mosiah 17:13–14).<sup>41</sup> This unique verbal and similar thematic connection between

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39. Turley, “Alma's Hell,” 22.

40. *Ibid.*, 23n50.

41. Our current printing of the Book of Mormon has “scourged” in Mosiah 17:13 (contrasting with “scorched” in Mosiah 17:14), but Skousen argues that it should also be “scorched.” See Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 761, and Royal Skousen, “Do We Need to Make Changes to the Book of Mormon Text?” (presentation, 2012 FAIRMormon Conference, Sandy, UT, August 2–3, 2012), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2012/do-we-need-to-make-changes-to-the-book-of-mormon-text>.

Zeezrom and Abinadi suggests that Mormon intended the reader to see Abinadi's prophecies and experience in Zeezrom's fever.

After exterminating the believers, who were most likely their best chance of surviving the wrath of God to come, the remaining unrepentant Ammonihahites soon came under the crosshairs of two prophetic promises. Abinadi promised that justice would fall upon those who would put believers to death and God promised Nephi<sub>1</sub> that the Lamanites would destroy the Nephites, if they became wicked.<sup>42</sup> This is exactly what happens. As part of a campaign against the Nephites, the Lamanites invade Ammonihah, completely destroying the city and all its inhabitants in one day. The destruction was so complete that the Nephites at the time referred to this annihilated and uninhabitable land as the "Desolation of the Nehors" (Alma 16:12). This destruction revisited in Alma 25 is almost wholly owed to the Amalekites and Amulonites' murderous disposition and wrath against the converted Ammonites.

When Mormon first recounts the annihilation of the Ammonihahites in Alma 16, he leaves out the motives behind the Lamanite's attack. The absence of an explanation incidentally emphasizes the role God plays in using this attack to mete out justice.<sup>43</sup> It also plays into Mormon's overall rhetoric to convince the reader that the wicked bring the justice of God upon themselves, when they choose to rebel against God.

After this account, Mormon intentionally fractures his narrative chronology to guide the reader back in time to traverse the more complicated background to this destruction. This second version of the destruction of Ammonihah reported in Alma 25:1–2 includes the participation of another population of "Nehors" mingled with the descendants of the priests of Noah. Mormon's representation of these

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42. The Lord forewarned Nephi<sub>1</sub> that if his descendants "rebel against me, [the descendants of Laman] shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance" (1 Nephi 2:23–24). This prophecy is rehashed with an emphasis on destruction in 2 Nephi 5:25. Before Abinadi dies by fire, he prophesies that the descendants of Noah, the priests, and/or the Zeniffites in general (it is hard to determine how specific Abinadi intended the phrase "thy seed") would cause that many believers should be put to death by fire. Abinadi lists a plethora of calamities that would befall them due to their iniquities. He begins with a cursing specifically for a certain "seed" or people, but finishes with "thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy [God's] people" (Mosiah 17:15–19). Abinadi may not have intended this curse specifically for the future Ammonihahites, but I argue here that Mormon interprets the just desserts of the Ammonihahites through the lens of this prophecy.

43. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 118–19.

events nuances the previous lesson that the wicked bring their own curses upon themselves by emphasizing the self-destructive nature of the “Nehor” dissenters. In the second account, it is the acts of one “Nehor” population that unwittingly destroys the other.

### **Nehor-Amulonites and Amalekites**

These other “Nehors” are the Amalekites and the familiar Amulonites, the descendants and followers of the high priests of Noah. These two groups co-inhabited the city of Jerusalem in the land of the Lamanites and had established churches “after the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4). They were aggressively resistant to the preaching from the sons of Mosiah during their watershed mission to the Lamanites. After the great missionary successes with the Lamanites, it is the Amalekites and Amulonites who drive the Lamanites to attack the Lamanite converts. Their unconscionable murder of the innocent unarmed believers qualifies them for Abinadi’s promise of divine justice (Mosiah 17:19) and further promises specially reserved for the Amulonites.<sup>44</sup> This traumatic mass martyrdom of the Lamanite converts (Ammonites) is central to Mormon’s subtextual narrative about Gideon.

As described previously, Mormon may have intended for his portrayal of Gideon’s wrongful death to echo in the similar deaths of the Ammonites, who were struck down as they were defenseless in a prostrated position of prayer (Alma 24:19–26). Mormon labels the Amalekites and Amulonites, who were the motivation behind the ruthless slaughter, as “Nehors” (Alma 24:28–29). This opens the door for the reader to reimagine the Ammonites as “Gideons.” Therefore, Mormon’s suggestions about the Ammonites’ salvation arguably can also be extended to Gideon in the same way that the justified deaths of the Amalekites and Amulonites are extended to Nehor in vindication of Gideon’s death at his hands. When Mormon comments that the recently “slain were righteous people; therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved” (Alma 24:26), we can see this also as a commentary on Gideon, who Alma<sub>2</sub> also called a “righteous man” (Alma 1:14). The intentionality of this connection between the Ammonites and Gideon is suggested by the fact that the designations of a “righteous people” and a “righteous man” are not common in a book that values righteousness.<sup>45</sup>

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44. In Mosiah 17:15–19 the prophetic cursing Abinadi pronounces on “the seed” of those who killed him certainly included Amulon and the other wicked priests.

45. There are only 12 instances of “righteous people” occurring in the Book of Mormon, 9 of these are from Mormon, and 4 out of these 9 are references to the



Although not suggested in the narrative about Gideon's death, Mormon's comment about the Ammonites' salvation can also be read as a comment about Gideon; the reader should "have no reason to doubt but what [he] was saved."

Mormon's account of the traumatic mass martyrdom of the Ammonites not only emphasizes their goodness, but the unrepenting and unrelenting cruelty of the "Nehors." However, Mormon no longer refers to the Amalekites or Amulonites as "Nehors." Even so, Mormon's narration directs us to see the self-destructive nature of the "Nehors" and how they bring upon themselves their own curses, anyway. Mormon seems anxious for us to grasp the consequences for rebellion against God. Through the second narration of the Ammonihah annihilation, Mormon precisely angles the reader to witness how the Amalekites and Amulonites' use of the Lamanites to target the Ammonites backfires. This results in the complete destruction of the Nehors, first destroying the Ammonihahites in a single day and then the exterminating of all the rest of the Amalekites and Amulonites over the course of time.

After clearly linking the destruction of the Ammonihahites to the actions of the Amalekites and Amulonites (see Alma 24:1–25:2), Mormon turns our attention to the Amulonites. Not only does the aggression against the Ammonites bleed over into the annihilation of Ammonihah and its resident "Nehor" population, it leads to "many battles" where "almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, which were the priests of Noah" are slain (Alma 25:3–4). Mormon will return to these glossed-over "many battles" to hint that the destruction of the Amalekites happens in concert with that of the seed of Amulon, but first he summarizes these battles and inserts additional content to emphasize the fulfillment of prophecy in the events leading up to the destruction of the Amulonites.

Mormon further emphasizes his commentary about apostates (see Alma 24:30) by showing the two polarized reactions of the Lamanites and the Amulonites to their successive losses at the hands of the Nephites. Many of the Lamanites become converted by the ordeal, which enrages the still unrepentant Amulonites who begin to put the Lamanite believers to death by fire as prophesied by Abinadi. Accordingly, the descendants of the priests of Noah transform from predator to prey as

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Ammonites (Alma 19:35, Alma 23:7, Alma 24:26, and Alma 25:14). There are only two actual men labeled as a "righteous man" in the Book of Mormon: Gideon and Alma<sub>2</sub> (compare Alma 1:14 and Alma 45:19). The only other reference to a "righteous man" occurs in Helaman 13:18, but this does not refer to a specific person.



Abinadi's prophecy continues to move the narrative. In response to the cruelty of the seed of the priests of Noah, the angered Lamanites begin to hunt down these descendants, a practice Mormon states lasts until his time (some three hundred years later, though this may be a quotation from the primary sources Mormon was using). Mormon's commentary makes it more difficult for the reader to miss the tie between the doom imposed on the descendants of the wicked priests and Abinadi's prophecies (Alma 25:3–12). After Mormon has explicitly told us the end of the Amulonites, or at least the beginning of their end, he can now more subtly show the reader how the Amalekites meet the same end with the Amulonites.

In Alma 27, Mormon parallels the activities of the Amulonites, the descendants of the priests of Noah, with those of the Amalekites, who respond to the losses against the Nephites in a very similar fashion as the Amulonites. They persecute the Ammonites, the Lamanite converts of the sons of Mosiah. In response to the violence against the Ammonites, the Nephites adopt their population in its entirety by giving them the city of Jershon and protecting them with Nephite forces. Mormon summarizes what he terms as an unprecedented "tremendous battle" (Alma 28:2) and then interleaves some more stories about spiritual struggles before returning to battles, which included the Amalekites and Amulonites. These numerous battles may have greatly afflicted these populations.

Mormon includes both the Amalekites and the Amulonites as key participants in a battle fought between the Lamanites led by Zerahemnah and the Nephites captained by Moroni<sub>1</sub> (Alma 43:13). The Amalekites are specifically chosen as chief captains in Zerahemnah's army, along with another group of dissenters (Zoramites), because of their wickedness and murderous disposition (Alma 43:6). Mormon emphasizes the role of this murderous disposition showing how it inspired the Lamanites to fight with unheard of ferocity (Alma 43:43–44). As the bloody battle comes to its end, there are multiple times where Moroni<sub>1</sub> offers the enemy an opportunity to leave under covenant never to fight the Nephites again. Because of the ferocity and murderous disposition emphasized in the actions of the Amalekites, it is probable that none or few of their numbers belonged to the "many" who opted for peace when it was offered (Alma 44:15) and left the battle. This battle may have been the ending of the Amalekites, because they are never mentioned again.

When a future Lamanite army is mustered to go to battle, Mormon ensures that the reader knows that the Lamanite population includes

“all the dissenters of the Nephites” (Alma 47:35). The new despot, Amalickiah, again appoints Nephite dissenters as chief captains; however, the Amalekites and Amulonites are not mentioned. It appears that the battle with Moroni<sub>1</sub> in the 18th year of the reign of the Judges might have been their last. Like the previous Nehor population, the Amlicites, the slain Amalekites certainly factored into the total number of the dead who were cast into the waters of Sidon and buried in the depths of the sea (Alma 44:21–22). This nearly identical end shared by the Amlicites and the Amalekites is likely the subtle reminder of the “Nehor” tie between these two peoples.

With the death of the final Nehors, the Amulonites and Amalekites, Gideon’s murder has now found its final justice by proxy. It is curious that Mormon chose not to more heavily mark this ending as an ending of all the Nehors, or he may have realized that the influence of the Nehors lived on among dissenters, king-men, and power seekers in secret combinations, so they were not ever fully exterminated. He could have chosen to add a decisive comment. It seems that he elected silence as his voice of final justice against the Nehors.<sup>46</sup> The Nehors fade away in much the same way that Nehor entered the Book of Mormon, i.e., without a name. Of course, the lack of a final declaration of victory over the Nehors may be missing because it would not be accurate, in spite of the destruction that came to several specific groups. Mormon surely realized that the influence of the Nehors still lived on and that Nehor-like groups persisted, in spite of the justice that is demonstrated in the book of Alma as edited by Mormon.

In the end, Nehor’s story really is not just about Nehor, but his life and death seem to point the reader continually to Gideon and through Gideon to others. This is the magic of Mormon’s possible personal message here.<sup>47</sup> Mormon could be pointing the reader to the existence of final justice by proxy, through literary strategies. His message resonates to all people suffering under injustice; he is telling us there will be an accounting for all who have been wronged. God will make it right.

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46. Perhaps Mormon also chose to end this way to show that there are always new “Nehors” to fight by showing subtly how the Zoramites took the place of the Amalekites.

47. For more on Mormon’s personal messaging practices, see Nathan J. Arp, “Count Your Many Mormons: Mormon’s Personalized and Personal Messages in Mosiah 18 and 3 Nephi 5,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-Day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 75–86, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/count-your-many-mormons-mormons-personalized-and-personal-messages-in-mosiah-18-and-3-nephi-5/>.

### **Geographic Reiteration of Gideon: Gideon's Path to the Prince of Peace**

After presenting evidence for the existence of a sub-narrative connected by repeated references to Nehor, we now investigate the possibility of another related sub-narrative plot line built around repeated references to geographic locations named after Gideon. After Gideon's death, the majority of references to the name Gideon are references to locations named after the martyred hero. In fact, the narrative seems to suggest that naming a valley and a city after Gideon was wholly caused by an event, the event of Gideon's murder. Mormon seems to use this event to apply meaning to these Gideon-locations and focus the reader on other events framed by Gideon-related geography. Mormon's repetition of Gideon, as place names, belongs to a strategy known in biblical scholarship as geographical reiteration.<sup>48</sup> A geographical reiteration lens will be applied to the repetition of Gideon-locales in support of a theory that Mormon employs the related geography as a way to endow its namesake, the person Gideon, with literary salvation. As a place name, Gideon frames some key events in the tortuous unwinding of the Book of Mormon's patchwork of narratives. Gideon as a place and its people seem to symbolize the defense of the faith and freedom from oppression — two things Gideon himself represented by his death. These repeated references also form a possible textual path to Christ for the Gideonites and for Gideon, via proxy.

The most significant aspect of the valley and city of Gideon is the event from which its name is derived. When Mormon introduces the valley of Gideon during the conflicts with Amlici in the fifth year of the reign of the judges (about 87 BC), he specifically associates the valley's name with the event of Gideon's murder: "the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword" (Alma 2:20). Similarly, the introduction of the city of Gideon occurring in Alma<sub>2</sub>'s visit to the people of Gideon sometime in the ninth year of the reign of the judges (about 83 BC) is also connected to the event of Gideon's martyrdom. From an aesthetic perspective, Mormon artfully situates the city textually between two references to the valleys, as if suggesting that it was a city nestled in between two mountain ranges.

[Alma] went over upon the east of the river of Sidon into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built which was

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48. Victor H. Matthews, "Back to Bethel: Geographical Reiteration in Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no.1 (2009): 149–65.

called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword. (Alma 6:7)

From this introduction to the municipality of Gideon, we learn that this city did not exist before Gideon (it was built in honor of him) and perhaps didn't exist prior to his martyrdom. Unlike the lands from the Bible, where place names were often changed over the course of history to mark significant events, the city of Gideon seems to have been newly built as a testimony to Gideon's martyrdom. Thus, according to the narrative, the city may have been built specifically with Gideon's murder in mind.<sup>49</sup> Whether or not this was actually the case,<sup>50</sup> what matters for this study is the intent of the narrative. What is Mormon trying to communicate to the reader? Mormon's emphatic commentary and repetitive reminders of Gideon's murder in these locations help ensure that the reader notices this solemn association and thereby imbues all the repeated references to Gideon-locations in the Book of Mormon with deeper meaning. Accordingly, a new city named for Gideon and recalling his murder may figuratively bring new life to the person Gideon. In other words, Mormon's geographical reiteration of Gideon allows the reader to see Gideon in geography as proxy for the martyred hero.

Anselm C. Hagedorn observed in his study of Deuteronomy 12 that the landscape is much more than background and therefore it is to be expected "that the description of the sacred landscape in Deuteronomy allows us to interpret the values of the writer(s) of the text."<sup>51</sup> Similarly, these Gideon-related sites and their association with Gideon's martyrdom suggests that Mormon does not want the reader to forget about Gideon's death. This event mattered to Mormon. Through his intentional associations between event and setting in Alma 2 and 6, Mormon endows the people of Gideon and Gideon-related geography

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49. After the Zeniffites, recently delivered from bondage by Gideon, return to Zarahemla around 120–121 BC they do not then migrate to a city named Gideon or build a city named Gideon then. When Gideon confronts Nehor and is murdered for it around 91 BC, there is no stated setting for this event; in other words, this event does not seem to occur in the land, valley, or city of Gideon. In the conflicts with Amlici about 87 BC, only a valley of Gideon is mentioned.

50. It is evident from Alma's remarks to the Gideonites (see Alma 7: 1–2) that the name Gideon referred to a people and place from as early as Alma's appointment as chief judge in 91 BC, if not earlier. It is quite possible that the city was erected soon after the Zeniffites migrated to Zarahemla, which would have made sense. This is not Mormon's focus though.

51. Matthews, "Back to Bethel," 151n8

with the character and roles of a person, fraught with psychological baggage and momentum. Mark Allan Powell has remarked that “some settings ... become so clearly entrenched in the mind of the reader that they, like memorable characters, take on a life of their own.”<sup>52</sup> I don't know if Mormon achieved this goal with modern readers of the Book of Mormon, but I argue he intended to do this with his treatment of Gideon's death and his subsequent use of geographical reiteration. Evidence for this claim will be noted through analysis of Gideon-locations in the order defined in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Gideon's Path to the Prince of Peace.

Topical Context	References to Gideon	References to Zarahemla
Gideon dies by the hand of Nehor in an unnamed setting; Nehor is brought before Alma in an unnamed setting; Nehor is executed on the hill Manti (around 91–88 BC).	A possible implied setting in the land of Gideon, where Nehor encountered and contended with Gideon (the only location named in this narrative is the site where Nehor is executed, the hill Manti).	An implied setting in Zarahemla, where Nehor is brought before Alma <sub>2</sub> (the only location named in this narrative is the site where Nehor is executed, the hill Manti).
Alma <sub>2</sub> 's forces leave the valley of Gideon in an effort to repulse Amlici's forces before they reach the city of Zarahemla (about 87 BC).	Alma 2:1, 20, 26, Mormon mentions Gideon 4 times. Gideon as a location is exclusively, “the valley of Gideon,” the setting where Alma <sub>2</sub> 's forces rest from fighting Amlici's. Mormon sends spies, who discover that Amlici joined Lamanite forces and was en route to Zarahemla.	Alma 2:15, the battle with Amlici begins at the hill of Amnihu near Zarahemla. Alma 2:26, Alma <sub>2</sub> 's forces go to Zarahemla to defend the city from an Amlicite and Lamanite combined force.
Alma <sub>2</sub> leaves Zarahemla to preach to the people of Gideon (about 83 BC).	Alma 6:7–8, Mormon mentions Gideon a total of 4 times. See Alma <sub>2</sub> 's sermon to Gideon in Alma 7. Alma <sub>2</sub> also announces the impending birth of the Savior. The people of Gideon are preparing for the coming of Christ.	Alma <sub>2</sub> leaves Zarahemla to go to Gideon (Alma 6:7). Zarahemla was in an “awful dilemma” and Alma <sub>2</sub> “wad[ed] through much affliction and sorrow” for them (Alma 7:3–5). The people in Gideon, in contrast, were “in the paths of righteousness” (Alma 7:18–19). Alma <sub>2</sub> leaves Gideon to return to Zarahemla (Alma 8:1).

52. Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 70.

Topical Context	References to Gideon	References to Zarahemla
Unplanned meeting between Alma <sub>2</sub> , coming from Gideon and the sons of Mosiah headed towards Zarahemla (about 77 BC).	Alma <sub>2</sub> is heading from Gideon (Alma 17:1) after a message about Christ's coming to the Nephites circulates among the people (see Alma 16:20).	The sons of Mosiah are headed to Zarahemla to plead for safe passage for the Ammonites, who are being persecuted by the Amalekites for their beliefs (Alma 26:1–16).
Korihor (about 76–74 BC)	Korihor, the anti-Christ attempts to preach in Gideon, but the people of Gideon tie him up and escort him to Alma <sub>2</sub> (see Alma 30:21–30).	The people of Gideon bring an apprehended Korihor to Zarahemla for a showdown with Alma <sub>2</sub> (see Alma 30:30–60).
The king-men take over Zarahemla and the Freeman stage a revolution form Gideon. (About 62–57 BC).	Gideon serves as a refuge for the escaped Chief Judge Parhoron <sub>1</sub> (Alma 61:1–5). It is also the staging ground for Moroni <sub>1</sub> 's retaking of the capital Zarahemla (see Alma 62:3–6)	The King-men take over Zarahemla forcing the chief judge to flee. They establish a king and conspire with the Lamanites (see Alma 61:8).
Samuel, the people of Zarahemla and Gideon need to repent (about 6 BC).	Samuel pronounces a woe upon the inhabitants of Gideon for its abominations (Helaman 13:15). Gideon, which has served as a home to the righteous but has succumbed to wickedness.	Samuel warns Zarahemla to repent or it will be destroyed (Helaman 13:12).
List of cities destroyed before Christ's coming (about AD 34).	Gideon is not mentioned as being destroyed (3 Nephi 9: 2–12). It is implied that Gideon survived the destruction and its inhabitants were there to greet the risen Savior at Bountiful.	Zarahemla is destroyed (3 Nephi 9:3).

Additionally, an analysis of the Book of Mormon's Gideon-related passages shows a curious preference for citing Gideon place names in tandem with the city of Zarahemla. These tandem references seem intended to invite a comparison between the lands of Zarahemla and Gideon. Following the noticeable interactions between these two places, chronologically from Gideon's death to the coming of Christ, the reader moves through multiple and notable events before Zarahemla's destruction. Ultimately, through the omission of Gideon in the list of places destroyed before Christ's coming, it is possible that the Gideonites, and through proxy Gideon himself, survive the destructions to see the Savior when he visits the Nephites.

The references to Gideon, presented in Table 3 are not as conspicuously placed as the Nehor references outlined previously, so

their identification as markers of authorial intent is not as strong. Even so, given the connection between Nehor and Gideon emphasized by Mormon through repetition, it is reasonable to suggest that Mormon may have also intended the reader to connect references to Gideon-related geography thematically, with a theme of ultimate salvation for those suffering mortal injustices. This hypothesis regarding Mormon's use of geographical reiteration is also consistent with the Book of Mormon's central theme to lead people to Christ; therefore, although speculative, it is not a counter-reading of the Book of Mormon to suggest the following sub-narrative may have been intended by Mormon.

### **The Omitted Setting to Gideon's Death**

When Mormon introduced Nehor and reintroduced Gideon in Alma 1, as discussed above, Mormon seems to mark his authorial intent by an almost uncomfortable delay in naming these two characters. In terms of the setting, he affects the text in an equally telling way. Mormon omits naming specific locations until the execution of Nehor, the exact moment when he also names Nehor (Alma 1:15). To demonstrate how conspicuous this omission is, we can compare the geographic specificity between the Nehor and Korihor narratives, which Mormon seems to intentionally present as parallel accounts. Joseph Spencer has presented evidence suggesting that “the whole book of Alma is meant to be read as two large parallel halves” and finds that there is an “obvious parallel between the stories of Nehor and Korihor,” where “clear features of the text set the two stories in parallel.”<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to the Nehor narrative, Mormon contextualizes Korihor's actions with named settings in Alma 30. Korihor came into the land of Zarahemla to preach against the church. He was successful in his preaching until he decided to preach in the land of Jershon and the land of Gideon. He is expelled from Jershon and Gideon, bound and brought to Zarahemla to talk with Alma<sub>2</sub>, and finally killed by the Zoramites. If these two accounts conform to intentional parallel structures, then a comparison like this may be intended as well. Therefore, readers of these accounts aware of their parallel association might more easily notice an intentionality and significance behind the Nehor account's lack of specificity of setting and Mormon's delay in naming the characters.

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53. Joseph M. Spencer, “The Structure of the Book of Alma,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 281, 273, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1609&context=jbms>.



Because of the possible parallel nature of these two accounts, we can hypothesize a different Nehor account. We can imagine that Nehor likely started teaching with some success in Zarahemla, then he went to the land of Gideon where he killed Gideon, was brought to Zarahemla for trial, and executed on the hill Manti. Such a sequence of events makes sense, so why did Mormon not supply this information? These omissions leave gaps that invite the reader to look elsewhere to fill. A viable place is the hypothesized location for Gideon's confrontation with Nehor and subsequent murder, the geography named after Gideon. As if in answer to our query, Mormon overtly reiterates Gideon's death twice when he introduces the valley of Gideon in Alma 2 and the valley and city of Gideon in Alma 6.

### **Pitching Tents in the Valley of Gideon**

The account of Amlici is the very next focused narrative after the account of Nehor, the intervening verses are limited to summaries of events and narrative commentary (Alma 1:16–33). Even though Gideon's death was basically the last thing that happened for the reader, Mormon immediately reminds the reader of Gideon's death in his introduction of Amlici, "he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword" (Alma 2:1). And if that wasn't emphasis enough, he reminds the reader again when he uses Gideon as a setting for the first time. Alma<sub>2</sub>'s army pitches "their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword" (Alma 2:20). It is here that I argue Mormon is preparing the reader to see Gideon in geography as proxy for the person Gideon, who was killed by Nehor.

It is also significant that Alma and his forces depart in haste from Gideon to save Zarahemla, something that will be reiterated in later events. Here in its first iteration, Gideon the setting is already taking on a reputation, much like its namesake, as a defender of freedom. Mormon may be teaching us to read Gideon-related geography as a symbol of something greater than an actual place and likely teaching the reader to see the reputation Gideon-locations held for the Nephites. We might apply Matthews's insights from the Bible to our study of the Book of Mormon:

When the biblical writers mention a specific geographic site or feature, they are often describing a place that they and their audience are intimately familiar with ... and it has become a part of their collective memory of this space. Because of



their shared emic frame of reference as geographic ‘insiders,’ they do not have to go into great detail to conjure up a picture in the minds of their listeners. But these omissions mean that modern readers can often get lost .... This means that close attention to geographic information is necessary in order to catch these nuances and to draw fuller meaning from a story.<sup>54</sup>

### **Alma<sub>2</sub> Preaches Christ in Gideon**

In this narrative segment, once again Mormon reminds the reader about Gideon, something that should strike the reader as a likely marker for authorial intent. When Alma<sub>2</sub> travels to Gideon, Mormon reintroduces the valley of Gideon and then introduces the city of Gideon with the repeated association with the event of Gideon’s murder, “being called after the man which was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword” (Alma 6:7). This and the last episode are the only two places where the “valley of Gideon” is mentioned. The conspicuous nature of the single geographic reference to the hill of Manti in Alma 1 and these repetitions of the valley of Gideon suggest a possible geographic relationship. Perhaps, Nehor was executed “upon the top of the hill Manti” because it overlooked the valley of Gideon and therefore was also viewable by the people of Gideon living in the valley (Alma 1:15).

Grant Hardy also noted the importance of this location, “the key connection made by Mormon between Alma<sub>2</sub>’s sermon and the grim wartime scenes of four years earlier is the phrase ‘the valley of Gideon,’ an expression that Alma<sub>2</sub> himself never uses.”<sup>55</sup> For Hardy this connection was intended to “remind alert readers what was at stake in this delicate visit, fraught with political meaning, to a people still in need of spiritual assurance and healing.”<sup>56</sup> In Alma<sub>2</sub>’s words of comfort to this people, you can almost hear Isaiah’s words that “every valley shall be exalted” (Isaiah 40:3). The importance of the word “valley” may not have been lost on Mormon or Alma<sub>2</sub>. As Alma<sub>2</sub> prepares the Gideonites for Christ’s coming, he invokes related words from Isaiah.

Alma<sub>2</sub> heads to Gideon after some hard-line preaching in Zarahemla, where he “wad[ed] through much affliction and sorrow” before he could experience “joy” (Alma 7:5) with the people there. In conspicuous contrast, the people of Gideon readily receive Alma<sub>2</sub>’s preaching, because

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54. Matthews, “Back to Bethel,” 152–53.

55. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 151.

56. *Ibid.*

they were in a higher state of spirituality. These comparisons will mark these two populations throughout their existence, where Gideon is known for its consistent righteousness and Zarahemla will be known for its pendulum-like swings between righteousness and unbelief. There are elements within Alma<sub>2</sub>'s sermon that suggest that Gideon is not only righteous, but has a connection with Christ's coming.

Pivotal to Mormon's sub-narrative about Gideon is the coming of Christ as a mortal. Alma<sub>2</sub> announces to the Gideonites that "there be many things to come. And behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all: for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people" (Alma 7:7). As he teaches about Christ's coming, Alma<sub>2</sub> populates his sermon with references to Isaiah 40: 3–4:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.

Alma<sub>2</sub> alludes to Isaiah in the following verses:

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. (Alma 7:9)

For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness. I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God. Yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight. I perceive that it has been made known unto you by the testimony of his word that he cannot walk in crooked paths, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong. Therefore his course is one eternal round. (Alma 7:19–20)

Alan Goff points out that Alma<sub>2</sub>'s allusions to Isaiah 40 in his sermon to the Gideonites suggests that "these Nephites in Gideon must be those preparing the way for the coming of that redeemer."<sup>57</sup> Additionally for the Gideonites, Goff notes that "not only are they preparing the way but

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57. Alan Goff, "Repetition and Shadows," 296.

are themselves traveling the path.”<sup>58</sup> Through the repetition of Gideon-place names throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon, we can see the Gideonites walking this path to Christ and it is the conclusion of this analysis that they make it to Jesus, and by proxy Gideon does too.

It is noteworthy to point out that this sermon from Alma<sub>2</sub> and the upcoming sermon from Samuel are the only two places in the Book of Mormon where the “city of Gideon” is mentioned. Both of the sermons, Alma<sub>2</sub>'s and Samuel's, similarly focus on the coming of the Christ and are meant to prepare the people for Christ's coming. Contrastingly, while Alma<sub>2</sub> praises the people in the city of Gideon, Samuel calls on them to repent. Even so, Alma<sub>2</sub>'s characterization of the people of Gideon establishes the importance of Gideon-related geography for the reader.

### **Missionary Reunion between Gideon and Zarahemla**

As Alma<sub>2</sub> was journeying from Gideon some years after his preaching there in Alma 7, he came in contact with the sons of Mosiah who were journeying to Zarahemla (Alma 17:1). It is telling that this meeting between Alma<sub>2</sub> and his dearest friends happens in an unnamed place. The namelessness of this nexus point emphasizes the importance of the other two named places and leads the reader to wonder about the intent behind the travels of the two groups.

Mormon reveals the reason why the sons of Mosiah are heading to Zarahemla by following this meeting with a chronological flashback to the sons of Mosiah's fourteen-year-long mission to the Lamanites. After narrating the surprising success of these Nephite missionaries among their kindred enemies, violent persecution from Nehor-like populations against the unarmed Lamanite converts drives the missionary brothers to Zarahemla to plead for protection. A series of battles ensues between the Lamanites and the Nephites in connection with the Nephites' merciful determination to harbor these Lamanite converts.

Alma<sub>2</sub>'s journey from Gideon is likely part of the transmission of the specific message that Christ would be coming to the Nephites after his resurrection. On his first visit to Gideon, Alma<sub>2</sub> publicly confessed that he did not know if Jesus would come to the Nephites during his experience in a “mortal tabernacle” (Alma 7:8), but he knew that Christ would come to earth. In the three years after the destruction of the Nehors in Ammonihah (discussed earlier), a message emerges about the coming of the Son of God that “he would appear unto them after his resurrection”

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58. Ibid.

(Alma 16:20). This may seem like some discontinuity between Alma<sub>2</sub>'s time and prophecy's regarding Christ coming to the Nephites, either a new idea or a rediscovery of something revealed to Nephi<sub>1</sub> hundreds of years earlier (see 2 Nephi 26:9); however, Scott Stenson has persuasively demonstrated that Alma<sub>2</sub> and later Nephite prophets were aware of the teachings and prophecies on the Small Plates regarding the coming of Christ to the Nephites.<sup>59</sup>

Regardless, Alma<sub>2</sub>, Amulek, and many others were going about establishing the church "throughout all the land" (Alma 8:4–5) preaching that Christ would come to them. Alma<sub>2</sub>'s implied visit to Gideon in Alma 17 is likely part of this movement to spread the revelation that Christ would not only "[live] and [come] among his people" (Alma 7:7), he would come to the Nephites specifically; a message that the Gideonites no doubt received with joy. And as previously established by Alma<sub>2</sub>'s praise for Gideon, we might assume that there were Gideonites taking part in establishing the church as well.

### **Korihor: Defense of the Faith**

Korihor successfully preaches his dissenting doctrines to the Nephites, until he preaches in Jershon, the city given to the Ammonites for an inheritance, and in the land of Gideon. Both the Ammonites and the Gideonites adamantly resist Korihor. Godfrey Ellis notes the parallel structure linking these two communities in their resistance.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, the people of Gideon bind Korihor and take him to Zarahemla where Alma<sub>2</sub> resides. The land of Gideon, as proxy for the person Gideon, resists Korihor, who Mormon likely equates with Nehor through the probable parallel textual structures identified by Joseph Spencer, discussed above. The land of Gideon shows its reputation as a defender of the faith and, specifically in this instance, as a defender of Christ.

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59. Matthew Scott Stenson, "According to the Spirit of Revelation and Prophecy: Alma<sub>2</sub>'s Prophetic Warning of Christ's Coming to the Lehites (and Others)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 55 (2023): 107–68, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/according-to-the-spirit-of-revelation-and-prophecy-Alma2s-prophetic-warning-of-christs-coming-to-the-lehites-and-others/>.

60. Godfrey J. Ellis, "The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite: A New Look at the Failed Mission of an Agent of Zoram," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 48 (2021): 58–59, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-korihor-a-zoramite-a-new-look-at-the-failed-mission-of-an-agent-of-zoram/>.

Like Gideon, who withstood the teachings of Nehor, Alma<sub>2</sub> withstands Korihor's teachings with the word of God. God reveals Korihor to be a pawn in Satan's campaign against Christ and silences him. There is a possible contrastive connection between Mormon's prolific use of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s voice to preach the gospel and the absence of Gideon's voice as a "teacher" in Alma 1:7, when he combats Nehor with the word. When Mormon re-introduces Gideon, he does so through the use of a brief inclusio placing Gideon in the middle of the word of God, presented below in a small chiasmus:

A ... but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.

B Now the name of the man was Gideon,

C and it was him that was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.

B' Now, because Gideon

A' withstood him with the words of God ... (Alma 1:7-9)

Mormon may be using parallelism to associate Gideon with the words of God. We can imagine that Gideon, like Alma<sub>2</sub>'s later Christ-centered sermon to the people of Gideon, spoke of Christ to withstand Nehor's doctrine that sought to render a redeemer unnecessary for humans (see Alma 1:2-6). Additionally, the title of "an instrument in the hands of God" given to Gideon connects him to some of the most powerful missionaries in the Book of Mormon. For example, Mormon labels the sons of Mosiah and Alma<sub>2</sub> with the same title.<sup>61</sup> And just prior to this verbal bout with Korihor, Alma prayed to "be an instrument in the hands of God" (Alma 29:9). This chiasmus and a specific title involving Gideon in Alma 1 guides the reader to this connection, linking Gideon with the missionary work going on in and around the city and land named after him.

Mormon judiciously chooses whose voice enters his record, so an awareness of the voices Mormon repeatedly employed or voices he omits can further illuminate authorial intent. In a similar way to how Mormon judiciously limited the name of Nehor in Alma 1, limiting Gideon's voice against the dissident Nehor creates a gap. A gap that the reader can fill

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61. Mormon labels the sons of Mosiah as instruments in the hand of God in Mosiah 27:36, Alma 17:9, but allows the dialogue to label them in Alma 26:3. Alma<sub>2</sub> pleads to be an instrument in God's hand in Alma 2:30 and Alma 29:9 and Mormon describes Alma<sub>2</sub>'s group of missionaries as these instruments in Alma 35:14.

with Alma<sub>2</sub>'s voice. Alma is the convincing voice that Mormon uses to express God's word against the dissidents.<sup>62</sup> Alma's words against Korihor might help the reader imagine what might have been said when Gideon "withstood [Nehor] with the words of God" (Alma 1:9), a dialog that, if it was recorded, was not repeated by Mormon in his abridgment. However, the parallel structure links the two accounts and may help fill in a gap in the earlier account. This is especially relevant considering the parallel nature of these two accounts (Nehor's and Korihor's).

### **Pachus and Freeman: Freedom from Oppression**

The Nephite civilization almost breaks apart from the pressure from without (the Lamanite wars) and the destabilization from within (the temporary overthrow of the Nephite government by dissidents). Pachus's party, inspired by the king-men movement in Alma 51, take over Zarahemla. The chief judge Parhoron<sub>1</sub><sup>63</sup> flees to Gideon where a Nephite army rallies to make the restoration of the rightful government possible. From the perspective of geographical reiteration, it is meaningful that Parhoron<sub>1</sub> went to Gideon. In addition to the land of Gideon being close to Zarahemla, Parhoron<sub>1</sub> must have known that Gideon would be anti-monarchic as well as righteous. A possible memory of king Noah's tyrannical evil, something the people's namesake fought against personally, may have ensured this political position.

During Parhoron<sub>1</sub>'s refuge in Gideon, he and Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> have a dialogue through an exchange of letters that recalls the dialogue between King Limhi and Captain Gideon (compare Alma 61:10–12 and Mosiah 20:22). Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> assumes incorrectly that Parhoron<sub>1</sub> is at fault for the lack of support to the war front. In Parhoron<sub>1</sub>'s response

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62. John W. Welch has described Alma 36 as "a masterpiece of composition, as good as any other use of chiasmus in world literature, and it deserves wide recognition and appreciation." John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 116. In response to criticism leveled against the existence of a chiasmus in Alma 36, Noel B. Reynolds not only defended its existence using Hebrew rhetorical principles, but also concluded that the "powerful conjunction of rhetorical form, personal transformation, and doctrinal teaching establishes Alma 36 as one of the greatest literary gems of the Book of Mormon." Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 309, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/rethinking-alma-36/>.

63. Spelling of *Parhoron* instead of *Pahoran* follows Royal Skousen's recommended emendation in Skousen, *Earliest Text*.

to Moroni<sub>1</sub> to explain the problem, he mentions a willingness to accept bondage if that was what the Lord wanted and an extreme reluctance to shed the blood of his own people, the King-men, who had taken over Zarahemla. However, Parhoron<sub>1</sub>'s hesitancy to counter the King-men's assault on the capital led to greater problems. Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s divine direction to use force against Pachus's dissidents allayed Parhoron<sub>1</sub>'s concerns (see Alma 61:19–20) and they ultimately joined forces to reclaim the capital, narrated in both Alma 51 and Alma 62.

Parhoron<sub>1</sub>'s inability to see the dissenters as an enemy is strikingly similar to Limhi's inability to see the Lamanite king as an enemy. In both cases, the ruler required their respective captains to aid their decision-making with stirring criticism. Fortunately, both Limhi and Parhoron<sub>1</sub> obeyed their captains' directions and their people were saved. Gideon becomes the staging ground for mustering the scattered Freemen and rocketing the resistance's successful siege of Zarahemla (Alma 61:5–7, 62:6–7). Gideon, therefore, makes it possible to save Zarahemla and the Nephite system of judges. This political system was cherished by Nephite leaders, not just because it gave people power to elect their representatives, but specifically it protected their freedom of religion. For example, the freemen wished to “maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government” (Alma 51:6). Additionally, it is hinted at in the records that these would-be-kings wished to take away this religion (see Alma 2:4 and 46:10 as two examples). Therefore, we can also see the role of Gideon-related geography as part of Gideon's path to Christ.

### **Zarahemla and Gideon Called to Repentance in Preparation for Christ's Coming**

Around 6 BC, about 50 years after the events narrated in Alma 62, Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, calls upon the Nephites to repent in preparation for the coming of the Savior after his birth, death, and resurrection. Samuel provides the people particular prophecies with signs to announce these events (Helaman 13–15). Imbedded within his announcements is a specific call of repentance to the inhabitants of the cities of Zarahemla and Gideon (Helaman 13:12 and 15, respectively). These are the only two cities Samuel names.

Although Samuel calls the people of Gideon to repentance, there is implied evidence that the people of Gideon repent and finish their travel on the path to Christ, as suggested earlier. Alma<sub>2</sub> saw the Gideonites as those who were both preparing the way for and walking on the path to



Christ. Yet somehow around fifty years after the land of Gideon's last appearance in Alma 62, they lose their way on this path. According to Samuel, it appears that the children and grandchildren of the Gideonites who were present when freemen forces gathered around the land of Gideon under Captain Moroni<sup>1</sup>, to take back Zarahemla from the kingmen (see Alma 62), "[did] not remember the Lord [their] God in the things with which he hath blessed [them]" (Helaman 13:22). These same descendants of the Gideonites, who expelled Korihor from their land (see Alma 30:6–29), sixty years later Samuel is condemning for harboring and supporting the same type of false preachers (see Helaman 13:27–28).

After more than thirty years, as Samuel's prophecies begin to be fulfilled in preparation for Christ's coming, the text presents multiple lists of city names that were destroyed because of wickedness. The reader, prepared by Samuel's previous call to repentance, may search through these lists of named cities for the only two cities Samuel named, Gideon and Zarahemla, to find that only Zarahemla is named. In fact, Mormon first narrates the burning of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 8:8), then he quotes a multitude who mourn the burning of the people in the city of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 8:24), and finally Christ's own voice relates, "that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof" (3 Nephi 9:3). The destruction of Moroni and Moronihah likewise are referenced repeatedly.<sup>64</sup> Gideon, although a possible casualty included in the phrasing "and many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and their abominations" (3 Nephi 9:12), is more likely one of the spared cities. The conspicuous absence of the city of Gideon in these lists suggests that the people of Gideon likely repented within the intervening thirty years. Mormon explains that "it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved" (3 Nephi 10:12), and by omitting any account of the city of Gideon's destruction, the righteousness and salvation of some of the Gideonites is implied.

In a creative stroke of narrative poetics, Mormon ends his series of references to Gideon-related geography, in the same way he started them, by subtly referring to Gideon with an expected, but actual absence of a reference to Gideon. It is into this negative space that Mormon possibly intended for the reader to place the person Gideon. If this hypothesis is true, then all the references to Gideon and Nehor point to this moment. This is the centerpiece of the Book of Mormon and may be the happy

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64. For the destruction of the city of Moroni, see 3 Nephi 8:9, 9:4; For Moronihah's destruction, reference 3 Nephi 8:10, 8:25, and 9:5.



ending Mormon has carefully led the reader to imagine for Gideon. We can imagine Gideon, like the other spared Nephites, witnessing the risen Savior's visit to the Americas; seeing with his eyes and feeling with his hands the prints of the nails and the wound in his side (3 Nephi 11:14–15). Through subtle means, Mormon can imply that both the people of Gideon who repented, and symbolically Gideon himself, survive to see the risen Lord and were saved, or at least “we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved” (Alma 24:26).

### **Part 3: Gideon as a Peacemaker**

This section is an attempt to answer the question, why? Why would Mormon go through such effort to organize a sub-narrative of post-mortal, literary justice and salvation for a minor character, like Gideon? In order to best answer this question, we will closely review the life of Gideon and especially note the way Mormon handled presenting Gideon's life. It is through focusing our attention on Mormon's methods that we might discover Mormon's authorial intent behind his editorial decisions. Through an analysis focusing on Mormon, with the intent to discover how Mormon viewed Gideon and how he intended for the reader to also view him, I propose that Mormon viewed Gideon as a peacemaker and also hoped that the reader would see Gideon this way.

Unlike the Bible, whose narrators are mostly anonymous, the Book of Mormon's narrators are known. Mormon himself, the main abridger, is also a character in the Book of Mormon. The reader's indirect access to Mormon's mind through his decisions to include or omit various elements in his carefully crafted narrative allows us to theorize reasons why he used certain narrative strategies. My approach is based on the premise that Mormon's life of war caused him to value not only valor and courage, but peace and peacemakers. Mormon saw in Gideon, a tragedy; a valiant, courageous peacemaker who died a violently unfair death. Through subtle literary means, Mormon may have rewritten the ending to more fully vindicate Gideon.

Mormon's subtle handling of Gideon's narrative is a tribute to his literary and literal ancestors who wrote the Hebrew Bible. Mormon's masterful manicuring of Gideon's narrated life seems intended to impress upon the reader specific aspects of Gideon's character, one of which is his determination to save lives. In texts that are so terse, like the Bible and the Book of Mormon, minute choices to exclude, include, or offset material may reveal further insights packed into the text. Scrutinizing the story of Gideon offers a backstage pass to Mormon as he subtly

employs gaps, chronological displacements, structures of repetition, and specific wording that often seems calculated to dramatize Gideon's role as a peacemaker. Mormon's illustration of Gideon as a peacemaker connects Gideon to Captain Moroni, the Ammonites, and Christ.

Mormon's primary messages in the Book of Mormon are overt and punctuated by conspicuous commentary to focus the reader on Christ and his gospel. This article has attempted to highlight Mormon's more subtle narrative tradecraft, which is easily overlooked by his more obvious ideological commentary. In this vein, Turley aptly remarked about Mormon's craft:

Mormon appears not as a moralistic editor of unsophisticated stories and "and thus we see" didactic conclusions, but as a skillful author and editor who can portray himself as inexperienced while simultaneously weaving depth and nuance into his stories, rounding out flat characters, and creating silences that speak louder than words.<sup>65</sup>

Accordingly, in the overall narrative of the Book of Mormon, Gideon does not play a large role. In contrast, Mormon's more conspicuous treatment of Gideon's post-mortem literary life seems insistent on making Gideon much more than a minor character whose major moments are merely limited to the following five brief episodes:

1. Gideon's attempt on Noah's life (Mosiah 19:1–9);
2. Noah's death is reported to Gideon (Mosiah 19:15–25);
3. Gideon redirects Limhi to save the people (Mosiah 20:12–26);
4. Gideon presents a plan to save the people (Mosiah 22:1–9);  
and
5. Gideon is killed (Alma 1:1–15).

Why would Mormon amplify Gideon's story beyond his life? We cannot know for sure. Mormon may have been personally touched by the tragic ending of Gideon. In response, he may have found a way to provide an alternate literary ending for Gideon through sub-narratives expressed through repetitions of the names of Gideon and Nehor. Further, Mormon may have presented Gideon's life in a way that emphasizes his role as a peacemaker while highlighting the injustice of Gideon's death, thereby affecting the reader's experience with the text.

Mormon's ingenuity with Gideon's story can be seen through the title he gives Gideon in episode 3, where he is described as a captain. Unlike

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65. Turley, "Alma's Hell," 40.

the 37 other times the role of captain is cited in the Book of Mormon,<sup>66</sup> this reference in episode 3 is the only one that does not appear to be part of a military event, mentioned to explain someone's participation in a war. Instead, the placement of this title appears to define a relationship between Captain Gideon and King Limhi and to explain Gideon's rough tone in his first dialogue with Limhi. He is not named as the captain of the army or the guard, but "the king's captain" (Mosiah 20:17); it is that relationship that matters here. Specifically, this relationship matters because it changes. Gideon's direct, cutting, and near-peer tone in his first dialogue becomes a pleading and subservient one in his second dialogue with Limhi in episode 4. This change suggests that Gideon is no longer the captain by this 4th episode in his life. In this way, Mormon provides evidence in this account to suggest that Gideon stepped down as the captain, perhaps because he did not support the people's desire to attack the Lamanites in order to free themselves. This may be a technique Mormon employs to reveal Gideon, the peacemaker, but arguably is part of a larger strategy.

Mormon's placement of Gideon's title as captain is pivotal to unraveling Mormon's approach to Gideon's portraiture as a peacemaker. Mormon's specific placement of this title both creates gaps and fills others, and seems to suggest an overall strategy to distance Gideon from bloodshed. Mormon's placement of Gideon's title in episode 3 is a delayed placement, which makes and fills a gap in episode 2. Gideon's sudden and inexplicable command authority over men in episode 2, where he sends out men to look for King Noah is a gap (Mosiah 19:18–24). It does not make sense, until Mormon provides Gideon's title as the captain in episode 3 (i.e., these men are referred to as "the men of Gideon"). This chronologically displaced title occurs right after a victorious battle, in which captain Gideon conspicuously plays no role.

As the king's captain, Gideon likely participated in this battle; however, his participation appears to be omitted. Withholding Gideon's participation in this battle and delaying his title as the captain may emphasize a key gap, Mormon may be purposefully distancing captain Gideon from bloodshed. Mormon's possible downplaying or obscuring of Gideon's military activities incidentally causes his title to take on an

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66. The title *captain* actually appears 39 times, but I have discounted the reference in 2 Nephi 13:3, because it does not refer to a Nephite captain. I have also discounted the *captain* reference in 3 Nephi chapter 3, because this reference appears in a chapter heading that was added later and was not part of the original Book of Mormon.

ironic feel. Gideon who is a captain that is never specifically said to be a participant in a single battle and instead encourages non-violence to solve conflicts. (Of course, we have seen him angry enough at King Noah to threaten his life with his sword, so he is not a gentle pacifist, but he still spares Noah's life.) The apparent incongruence between title and action also allows Mormon to redefine what a military captain can or even should be. Meir Sternberg suggests a similar redefining in the epithets used for Job, which allowed the Biblical narrator to not only "modify our view of a certain righteous man but to redefine the concept of righteousness itself."<sup>67</sup>

Mormon's intent to distance Gideon from bloodshed may even extend to the reporting of King Noah's death to Gideon in episode 2. In this episode, Mormon avails himself of repetitive structures to lessen Gideon's direct connection to the brutality of King Noah's murder, but still connect him to the justice required by the Lamanite King. First, Mormon details how Noah's own men turn on him and destroy him by fire, then the reduced version "that they had slain the king" is reported to the men Gideon sent, and finally the report is generalized into "they told Gideon what they had done to the king" (Mosiah 19:23–24). It is also possible that Mormon additionally softened the report of Noah's execution by mingling these repeated reports with a cross-report on the safety of the families of Noah's men and their joyful reaction to this news. By the time Gideon receives the account of Noah's betrayal and murder, the reader may see it as a mercy done to the people. Gideon escapes direct association with bloodshed, but simultaneously is the vehicle for ensuring that Noah's death happens.

The possible softening of this report is not for Gideon, per se. Mormon is not suggesting that the men held back any of the details from Gideon, like the Bible's account of Jezebel's softened report to Ahab regarding Naboth's death. In the case of Ahab, Meir Sternberg suggests that his sterilized report reveals a weakness in him, as seen through Jezebel.<sup>68</sup> Instead of making a direct comment about Gideon, Mormon may have manicured the repetitive structure of Gideon's report to influence the drama of the reading. In other words, Mormon may have wanted the reader to separate Gideon from the bloodshed so we can see Gideon as a different kind of hero. It is only after the report of Noah's execution reaches Gideon that Mormon reveals that the Lamanite King makes an oath not to slay the Zeniffites. Delivering Noah up to the Lamanites was

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67. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 346.

68. *Ibid.*, 408–409.

one of the original conditions the king required. Apparently, Noah's death satisfied this requirement and Gideon is the apparently bloodless deliverer.

On the occasion of Gideon's soft rebuke to Limhi in episode 3, Gideon is once again portrayed as a bloodless liberator; except this time Mormon uses Gideon's own words. Up to this episode in Gideon's life, Mormon has only allowed Gideon acts of speech, where Mormon states that Gideon has said something, but has not quoted his actual words. For example, in episode 1, when Mormon writes that Gideon "swore in his wrath," he does not quote the actual oath Gideon swore. As Robert Alter points out, "the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory ... in the exposition of character"<sup>69</sup> and thus worthy of special attention. This is true of Gideon's first dialogue, as well. Even more powerfully than the narrative strategies Mormon used in episode 2, Gideon's own words reveal how serious he was about preserving life.

Gideon's first dialogue comes at the climax of an intense narrative sequence in Mosiah 20. The wicked priests of King Noah, who were in hiding, abduct some Lamanite women. The Lamanites assume it is Limhi's people who took their daughters and prepared for war. Limhi sees their preparation and readies his people to counter them. Limhi successfully and surprisingly repels the Lamanites and questions their king, who is found among the fallen on the battlefield. After Limhi finds out that the Lamanites suspected Limhi's people of taking Lamanite daughters, he naively believes his enemy and begins a search among his people to find the culprit or culprits. Mormon privileges the reader with a separate account of the abduction, so that when Gideon boldly objects to Limhi's response, we already know that Gideon is right to name the priests of Noah as the real culprits.<sup>70</sup> Even if the priests were not the

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69. According to Alter, "In any given narrative event, and especially at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character." Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 93–94.

70. Sternberg calls this the "reader-elevating" position and comments, "Within the reader-elevating configuration, the discrepancies in awareness are so manipulated in our favor, at the expense of the characters, that we observe them and their doings from a vantage point practically omniscient. The narrator's disclosures put us in a position to fathom their secret thoughts and designs, to trace or even foreknowledge their acts, to jeer or grieve at their misguided attempts at concealment, plotting, interpretation." Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 164.

actual guilty party, the Zeniffites did not have time for an intrusive investigation into the masses because the Lamanites were already preparing for a second battle.

Faced with such an intense situation, Gideon dispenses with a preamble. He does not address the king with honorifics. He just begins his reprimand with a call for a full stop to Limhi's activities through a triple-combination of negatives: "I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge" (Mosiah 20:17). Gideon instructs Limhi in what he should have thought in the first place through three rhetorical questions whose criticisms crescendo:

For do ye not remember the priests of thy father,  
which this people sought to destroy?  
And are they not in the wilderness?  
And is it not they which have stolen the daughters of the  
Lamanites? (Mosiah 20:18)

Gideon also moves away from telling Limhi what he should have thought to what he now needs to do with the phrase "and now behold" (Mosiah 20:19). According to Gideon, Limhi needs to convince the Lamanite king that the wicked priests are to blame and the Lamanite king needs to pacify his people before they descend upon the Zeniffites with their innumerable horde and wipe them out.

There is no time for Limhi's plan for an investigation, trial, and execution. The force of Gideon's reprimand leaves no room for Limhi to respond; he only acts in obedience to persuade the Lamanite king to pacify his people. Gideon's rebuke, although cutting, was measured; he did not threaten King Limhi and he did not directly tell him he was wrong, but Limhi got the message anyway. This dialogue shares similarities with a dialogue between the later army captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> and his ruler Parhoron<sub>1</sub> that Mormon appears to connect with Gideon through the insertion of his name as a setting to Parhoron<sub>1</sub> and Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s later dialogue.<sup>71</sup>

Gideon's speech to Limhi moves beyond the pressing needs of the moment, when Gideon appeals to prophecy to suggest that the Zeniffite's bondage was divinely appointed. In an ironic twist, Captain Gideon suggests that "it is better that [they] should be in bondage than that [they] should lose [their] lives" (Mosiah 20:22). Gideon's plea, "let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood" swells with emotional weight,

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71. Parhoron and Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s dialogue occurs through an exchange of heated letters in Alma chapters 60–61.

as we consider the scope behind Gideon's concern (Mosiah 20:22). Gideon does not restrict his concern to his own people by qualifying his statement with whose blood he wishes to spare; rather it seems that Gideon, in the spirit of Zeniff,<sup>72</sup> also cares for the lives of his enemies, the Lamanites. This universal love not only marks Gideon as an odd military captain but marks him as an anticipatory type that the reader will recognize in other peacemakers like Parhoron<sub>1</sub>, Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub>, the Ammonites, and Christ.

Gideon's dialogue with King Limhi seems prophetic itself, because as soon as the immediate crisis, which Gideon's words were meant to address, is averted, Lamanite persecution builds, and the people petition the king to go to war. Gideon's position of accepting bondage as a remedy to stop bloodshed is not maintained as the people take matters into their own hands in a series of costly campaigns to liberate themselves but without success. The only consolation for the terrible toll of unnecessary lives lost in battle is the turning of the people's hearts to God. The Zeniffite's repentant hearts prepare the people for deliverance. These battles are the axis point around which Gideon's two dialogues pivot. Gideon's first dialogue (Mosiah 20:17–22) anticipates these battles (Mosiah 21:7–12) and his second dialogue readdresses them in hindsight (Mosiah 22:3–8).

Gideon's second and last dialogue emerges from a narrative backdrop bristling with anticipation. After the harrowing repeated losses on the battlefield bring the people in humility to finally accept their bondage, the people regain hope through the unexpected arrival of a group of men from the main body of the Nephites. These men, led by another Ammon, Ammon<sub>1</sub>, also bring a gospel message by which Limhi and "many of his people" are converted (Mosiah 21:32–33). Gideon is not named specifically in this group as Limhi is, but his participation is assumed. Limhi sees the arrival of Ammon<sub>1</sub> and his men as a sign that deliverance is nigh at hand; however, Limhi mistakenly believes that this deliverance will come through the sword.<sup>73</sup> As the people realize that liberation through the force of arms is impossible, Gideon steps into the discussion with an awkward preamble that epitomizes a complete reverse in tone

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72. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 123–32.

73. In Mosiah 7:18 Limhi shares his belief that "an effectual struggle" still awaited the people. The fact that this was a euphemism for war is borne out by his referencing the failed battles as "strugglings" in the same verse. By Mosiah 22:2 Limhi's people were still "thinking to deliver themselves out of bondage by the sword."



from his previous dialogue with King Limhi. Instead of speaking with the authoritative voice of Captain Gideon, Gideon pleads three times to be heard. Gideon's tone is plaintive but calculated. His repetitive pleas are strategically structured as a reminder to the king and the people.

Now it came to pass that Gideon went forth and stood before the king and said unto him: Now, O king, thou hast hitherto hearkened unto my words many times when we have been contending with our brethren the Lamanites. And now, O king, if thou hast not found me to be an unprofitable servant, or if thou hast hitherto listened to my words in any degree and they have been of service to thee, even so I desire that thou wouldst listen to my words at this time; and I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage. And the king granted unto him that he might speak . . . . (Mosiah 22:3–5)

What has changed? Why is Gideon pleading to be heard, when previously he just spoke? Why is he using the rare reverential “O king,”<sup>74</sup> noticeably absent in his first dialogue with Limhi? A quick comparison of the two dialogues show that the motivations are the same; Gideon wants to correct a less-effective and violent approach for delivering the people by suggesting an alternate approach that does not require the shedding of blood. However, the audience has changed: the first dialogue seems to be a more intimate setting versus the gathering of “all the people” (Mosiah 22:1) in this second dialogue. Would this press Gideon to such desperate-sounding measures? Perhaps, but more convincing is the possibility that Gideon's position has changed, and he is no longer the captain. In similar fashion to how Mormon informed the reader of Gideon's position as captain to explain Gideon's tone and relationship with Limhi in his first dialogue, Gideon's tonal change in his second dialogue may signal the reader to a change in Gideon's relationship with Limhi.

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74. The reverential term “O king” is only used 12 times in the Book of Mormon; 7 of those times occur in the Zeniffite narrative: Ammon<sub>2</sub> uses it twice to address Limhi, Gideon uses it twice to address Limhi, and King Noah's people use it three times to address him. In the book of Alma, Aaron uses this reverential title to address the Lamanite king three times and the Lamanite king Lamoni is addressed by his people as “O king” and by Ammon<sub>3</sub> once, respectively. Most of these occurrences (7) are people from a different kingdom addressing a foreign king; only in the cases of Gideon and King Noah's people are a people addressing their own king as “O king.”



A change in Gideon's position more fully explains his change of voice; he is no longer a near-peer to the king, so he petitions an audience and he employs honorifics. If this change in status is truly behind the dramatic change in tone, why is he no longer captain? The intervening bloodshed of the three failed campaigns, where Gideon was conspicuously absent provide the start of a workable hypothesis. It is also apparent from Gideon's tone that he is speaking to the king as someone to whom the people have not listened recently. We better understand to what incident or incidents Gideon may be referencing as we count the number of times he pleads with King Limhi to hearken or listen — three times.

Gideon is completely absent in the preemptive dialogues prior to the three failed campaigns. Mormon paints in the passage of time as the people, in response to affliction, "began to be desirous to go against [the Lamanites] to battle" and then "afflict the king sorely with their complaints" (Mosiah 21:6). This was a sustained and intensifying pressure, under which King Limhi ultimately buckles, "grant[ing] unto them that they should do according to their desires" (Mosiah 21:6). The people acted with tacit approval seen in the phrasing "they gathered themselves together," which suggests that King Limhi did not march out with them as he had previously (Mosiah 21:7). The next two failed attempts do not even mention Limhi; it is as if the people are just taking war into their own hands. Gideon is reminding the people in attendance to listen to him now, because the people likely did not listen to him on the three failed battles; these were conflicts that shed so much unnecessary Zeniffite blood. Gideon's repetition has the feel of a subtle, "I told you so." Three times.

The distinct possibility that Gideon stepped down from military service<sup>75</sup> rather than be a part of the battles he likely opposed finds further support in the details of his plan of liberation, which did not require a single casualty in order to be successful. This possible move to give up military control out of principle certainly would have garnered the attention of a young Captain Mormon, who also stepped down from leading his people because of their wickedness.<sup>76</sup> Like the Zeniffites,

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75. It is also possible that he was fired by Limhi.

76. See Mormon 3:11; Mormon's people started not only wanting to defend themselves or reclaim lands, but began wanting to attack the Lamanites. Reading Gideon's account could have been very validating for Mormon. It is also interesting to note that in Mormon's context, the number three was also significant. In his own words, "thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins" (Mormon 3:13).

Mormon's people moved beyond a desire to merely defend themselves or reclaim lands to a desire to attack the Lamanites. Reading Gideon's account may have validated Mormon's divine injunction to step down as the captain of the army in his day. It is also interesting to note that in Mormon's context, the number three was also significant. In his own words, "thrice have I delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and they have repented not of their sins" (Mormon 3:13).

Gideon's peaceful plan successfully delivers the people out of Lamanite bondage and Ammon,<sup>2</sup> and his men lead the Zeniffites to the main body of the Nephites in Zarahemla. This plan earns Gideon the later descriptor from Mormon, "and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage" (Alma 1:9). A city and a valley are also named after Gideon; an honor that likely came as a product of this victory of the people. It may be that the inhabitants of this new city included the Zeniffites he had rescued. Within his own people, Gideon takes on a new and more fitting role as a teacher,<sup>77</sup> when misfortune meets him in the form of an antagonist. Gideon's reaction to this antagonist further crystallizes his character as a peacemaker. It connects him to the Ammonites and Christ.

Like Sternberg's assessment of Biblical characterizations, there is a distance between Gideon's first appearance and his last.<sup>78</sup> Gideon initiates the narrative sequence in which he first appears (episode 1) by drawing a sword and swearing in his wrath to kill the king. At first glance, this seems like the ominous foreshadowing of someone who is going to meet a violent death; however, after Gideon spares Noah's life and spends the rest of his narrated actions saving people, it is the last thing we expect. The wrathful and militant man the reader first meets contrasts sharply with the peaceful, beloved hero turned religious teacher in his last episode, and a degree of irony may be involved.

Despite Gideon's peacemaking, he does meet a violent end, but not before Mormon's artful sculpting makes the injustice of Gideon's ending. Portraying Gideon as a peacemaker seems to be another part of Mormon's calculus to outrage the reader at Gideon's undeserved end. If this truly was Mormon's intent, then this outrage may have been part

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77. From a personal perspective Gideon is likely one of the teachers mentioned in Mosiah 25:19–24, who were set apart by Alma<sup>1</sup>. If this were true, this would make Gideon the only one of these teachers named in the Book of Mormon.

78. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 326. Sternberg comments that "there is a distance—and often a clash—between the impression produced on his first appearance and the one left after his last."

of Mormon's strategy to lead the reader to Mormon's literary ending for Gideon, as described above.

To better demonstrate Mormon's narrative art and intent, we will now review Gideon's murder again, specifically emphasizing Mormon's techniques and illustrate how these techniques might reveal his intent. My goals here are to show Mormon's sensitivities, his personal sympathy for Gideon, and his apparent effort to connect Gideon to the reader.

Mormon's strategies to characterize Gideon as a peacemaker climax in the representation of his tragic death, which Mormon dramatizes by contrasting the imbalances between the two sides in the conflict. Whereas, Nehor, upon meeting Gideon, immediately "began to contend with him sharply" (Alma 1:7), Gideon answers with a kindness; he admonishes Nehor. The verb admonish is noteworthy because of its specific and uncommon usage in the Book of Mormon.<sup>79</sup> In the five times that it is used, the verb admonish always denotes a call to repentance; it is not contentious, but corrective, so that the object can come back to God. John Welch suggests that Gideon's admonishment "may have served a legal function," an official warning, like one described in 2 Chronicles 19:5,10, that if left unheeded could have legal repercussions.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, as Nehor attacks Gideon with words, Gideon is not trying to argue back per se, but trying to save Nehor by warning him about the path he was on. Gideon's caring approach may have surprised Nehor enough to allow him an advantage to withstand Nehor verbally (the verb "to withstand" is used twice). Unfortunately, Gideon's verbal victory does not turn Nehor to repentance but to violence.

Here, Turley's analysis of Alma<sub>2</sub> in Alma 1–29 may explain the imbalance between Gideon's verbal approach and Nehor's violent response, a response not completely explained by the text itself. Turley emphasizes Alma<sub>2</sub>'s wicked past when he led the concerning unbeliever movement described in Mosiah 26 and 27. Turley explains that "the backdrop of Alma's past clarifies episodes during his reign as chief judge" like the perplexing episode with Nehor's rash murder of Gideon and subsequent pleas with "much boldness" to Alma<sub>2</sub>.<sup>81</sup> Turley points out:

When Nehor "stood before Alma and [plead] for himself with much boldness," he seems reckless about his very life (Alma 1:11). However, that same attitude may be credulity if Nehor

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79. "Admonish" appears in Jacob 2:9; Omni 1:13; Mosiah 26:6, 39; and Alma 1:7.

80. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 221.

81. Turley, *Alma 1–29*, 37.

is a preacher of unbeliever-based doctrine and finds himself being judged by a former unbeliever. Nehor's boldness may be the brash assumption that Alma has not really changed or that a changed Alma can be bullied and humiliated by the reminder of his past.<sup>82</sup>

In the same way that Nehor's boldness before Alma<sub>2</sub> may be explained by Nehor's connection to Alma<sub>2</sub>'s wicked past, Nehor's decision to murder Gideon may also be explained by this connection or even an unexplained history with Gideon. Nehor may have sought Gideon out purposefully knowing that success in the renowned faithful population of Gideon would win him even more popularity.

Although Mormon demonstrates Gideon's advantages in rhetoric and on moral grounds, he also displays Gideon's disadvantages in a physical struggle. These disadvantages included advanced age (Gideon was "stricken with many years" per Alma 1:9) and the possible absence of a weapon,<sup>83</sup> though the text seems to indicate that it was his age rather than the lack of a weapon that impaired his ability to resist the blows of Nehor's sword. In any case, Mormon presents the fight as unfair, for Gideon was old and Nehor was large and strong (Alma 1:2).

This account is calculated to arrest the reader, to fill us with outrage, while possibly foreshadowing the innocent slaughter of the Ammonites and reminding us of the righteous martyr, Abinadi. Gideon's unjust murder has a similar feel to the outrage created in and the motivations behind the unjust killing of the thousand Ammonites slain while on their knees in prayer and the prophet Abinadi, who willingly gave his life to relay the Lord's message. The murders of Gideon, the Ammonites, and Abinadi and their concern for their attackers also prefigures Christ. This connection to Christ is the capstone to Mormon's rhetorical attack on Nehor. Mormon may mean to stir the reader. After Gideon dies, Mormon may have wanted the outraged reader to question, "Can this really be it?" so Mormon can tell us, "It isn't." Mormon's literary act of redemption and justice for Gideon and others in the Book of Mormon

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82. Ibid., 38.

83. Alternatively, Welch points out the possibility that Gideon may have been able to withstand multiple blows because he wore armor. Welch, *Legal Cases*, 224n18. Morgan Deane also agrees with this reasoning in Deane, "Experiencing Battle in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 246n33, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/experiencing-battle-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

is a notice to us all that God will prevail. There is such a thing as divine justice and redemption for all.

#### **Part 4: Mormon's Preference for Peacekeepers**

According to the analysis presented above, Mormon organized the account of Gideon's life and death to accentuate Gideon's struggles to refrain from shedding blood. Gideon appears to be a peacemaker partly because Mormon emphasized this aspect to Gideon's life. This section presents evidence demonstrating that Mormon had a marked preference for peacemakers generally and suggests that this preference may have prompted him to create the sub-narratives of justice and salvation for Gideon outlined in this article. Mormon's emphasis in creating happy-endings for peacemakers like Moroni<sub>1</sub> and the Ammonites is suggestive of this very reasoning that he might have wanted to make a literary happy-ending for Gideon, one for which Gideon and others did not experience in mortality. Knowing more about the person Mormon can help us know more about his messaging methods and better interpret his messages.

An impactful aspect to the Book of Mormon is the ready access the reader has to the narrator. This personal connection made possible between reader and the narrators in the Book of Mormon enables the reader to wring out more meaning from the text and allows an aspiring follower of Christ to gain a sense of belonging with the narrators, who devotedly followed Christ. One motivation for Mormon to write in a sub-narrative plot for Gideon and bring post-mortem justice and salvation to him via proxy is Mormon's preference for peacemakers.

Mormon's life of war likely caused him to value peace and peacemakers. I propose that Mormon saw in Gideon a heart-rending tragedy; a peacemaker who died a violently unfair death. Mormon had the means to rewrite his ending, so he did in a literary sense. In contrast to his overt messages, Mormon may have preferred to provide more personal messages in a subtle way, as I have previously proposed.<sup>84</sup>

The Nephites chose Mormon to lead the Nephite armies at the age of 15. He spent the majority of his life warring. He witnessed an unceasing spectacle of atrocities. The sorts of horrors Mormon hints at in the record of his own life and what Moroni<sub>2</sub> reveals from Mormon's life are traumatic to read, they must have been psychologically crippling to have

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84. Arp, "Many Mormons."

lived through.<sup>85</sup> Much of what we read in Mormon's abridgment of the Nephite's history will unavoidably be colored by Mormon's experiences leading an army, who should have been, and were at one point, "the good guys" against their kindred, but mortal enemies.

In Mormon's time, the Nephites had not only rebelled against God, but glutted themselves on the blood shed from their brethren. There was no moral high ground for the Nephites any longer and Mormon knew his people's unceasing wickedness would lead to their ultimate demise. He could not leave them, because he still loved them; and therefore, was trapped in the same vortex pulling all of them down to annihilation together. Isolated in a despairing desert of spirit, Mormon seems to have found relief by turning to a record with stories that must have seemed like fairy tales to a man full of such sorrows and grief.<sup>86</sup> His sacred records allowed him to see a different world and to create a different world as he edited this record.

Though he lived in a time of massive war and violence, he rejoiced in the righteousness of great heroes on Nephite history such as Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub>, who, though a great warrior, did not delight in bloodshed but sought creative ways to avoid it when possible. Consider Mormon's praise of Moroni<sub>1</sub>:

And this was the faith of Moroni. And his heart did glory in it— not in the shedding of blood, but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity. Yea, verily verily I say unto you: If all men had been and were and ever would be like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever. Yea, the devil would never have no power over the hearts of the children of men. (Alma 48:16–17)

Mormon's decision to slow down the narrative to deliver praise of this magnitude should alert the reader to the narrator's presence.

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85. Morgan Deane also assumes the presence of "long-term physical and psychological scars" on the survivors from the Book of Mormon of Mormon warfare. Deane, "Experiencing Battle," 250.

86. The cathartic power of the war-ridden Book of Mormon narrative for those who are seeking refuge from war can be seen through the experience of Hugh Nibley as he found a companion in the Book of Mormon during the horrors of World War II. Boyd Jay Petersen presents Nibley's use of the Book of Mormon during his landing on Utah Beach in *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 194. Nibley's subsequent emphasis on peacemaking due to his exposure to war may also be telling as it relates to Mormon; *ibid.*, 208–21.

Mormon introduces his praise for Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> with some of the most elevated language possible for him; he uses the phrase “verily, verily I say unto you,” which outside of this reference only occurs in the Book of Mormon as spoken by the resurrected Savior.<sup>87</sup> Mormon intends for us to focus on Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s character, not just for Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s sake alone, but also so that he can lead the reader to see this character in others (see Alma 48:18–19). These comparisons between Moroni<sub>1</sub>, the sons of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, Alma<sub>2</sub>, Alma<sub>2</sub>'s sons, and Helaman<sub>1</sub> also invite the reader to see these same character traits in other Book of Mormon characters as well.

Mormon concludes the life of Moroni<sub>1</sub> with this summation: “he retired to his own house, that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace” (Alma 62:43). I imagine that this brought Mormon a sense of satisfaction to pen this happy ending for an obvious hero of his. Similar in quality to Mormon's respect for Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub>, it is also obvious that Mormon revered the Ammonites. Consider this striking strain of praise for the Ammonites and again note the meaningful role of shedding blood:

And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God and also towards men, for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things. And they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end. And they did look upon shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence. And they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren. And they never did look upon death with any degree of terror for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection. Therefore, death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it. (Alma 27:27–28)

At one point in the narrative, the Ammonite's resolve to refrain from shedding blood is challenged. The Lamanites come down upon them to destroy them, but instead of lifting up weapons to defend themselves, they “prostrated themselves” upon the earth in prayer only to be cut down by the sword (Alma 24:21). Mormon assures the reader that these 1,005 individuals, slain by the sword, were “blessed, for they [had] gone to dwell with their God.” (Alma 24:22). One can only imagine Mormon's response to reading these stories about the Ammonites, who had previously been wicked but underwent a thorough change because of the word of God.

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87. The connection of this phrase with the Savior has been noted by others, including Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 110, 298n24.



His love for this people, who were once Lamanites, also produced this strong oath, “yeah, 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’s use of the strong oath, “as the Lord liveth” to convey the faithfulness of the Ammonites is emphatic; Mormon employs it twice in Alma 23:6 in reference to the Ammonites. The only other occasions when Mormon employs this oath in doublet is in 3 Nephi 5:24–26, where he promises the restoration of the house of Jacob (Israel).<sup>88</sup> As with Moroni<sub>1</sub>, Mormon is employing the strongest language possible to him in order to arrest the reader’s journey through the text. These are indications of authorial intent. This is not only meant to teach us about the type of character we should develop, but these interruptions of the narrative are points of intersection between the reader and Mormon. We learn about him by learning about what was important to him too.

Mormon likely manifested a clear preference for peacemakers because he knew such little peace in his life. Although a commitment to avoid taking lives was not the only criteria Mormon used to qualify someone for a happy ending in his work, it is the most relevant to Gideon. Gideon also sought to save lives by not taking them. His story has much in common with those of Moroni<sub>1</sub> and the Ammonites. As shown above, Gideon’s post-mortem story connects to both of them. Mormon shows how Gideon sought to save lives, like Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub>, and sacrificed his own, like the Ammonites.

Like the Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> he praised, Mormon did not delight in shedding blood, but sought for peace, even while being dragged into an apocalyptic war he could not win. Tragically Mormon did not live to see the Book of Mormon finished nor did he spend the rest of days in peace, but died in the last Nephite battle living just long enough to mourn his people’s annihilation (see Mormon 6). For Mormon’s tragic passing, we could extend the same eulogizing statement Mormon employed for the Ammonites to Mormon himself, that “we have no reason to doubt but what [he was] saved” (see Alma 24:26). Mormon’s narration is a prophetic call echoed by modern-day prophets that “true disciples of Jesus Christ

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88. Even without doubling, the use of the oath is rare by Mormon. Moroni<sub>2</sub> includes a letter from his father in Mormon 8:23, in which Mormon uses this oath. Helaman 15:17 could be an additional instance; however, it is not conclusive, because the speaker could be the Lord himself, instead of Mormon.



are peacemakers” and “as we follow the Prince of Peace, we will become His peacemakers.”<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to highlight Mormon's more subtle narrative tradecraft, which is easily overlooked by his more obvious ideological commentary. Mormon's gift for layered story-telling turned towards the minor character Gideon is a reminder of the worth of individuals to God. Even after his death, the name Gideon is used repeatedly to convey messages about justice and the salvation that Christ offers. We find Nehor and those who followed his wicked order being repeatedly contrasted with Gideon and what he stood for.

Mormon's message of hope and preference for peace is especially poignant given that he emphasizes these points specifically through a narrative teeming with tragedy and doom. Interestingly, this contrast draws out the importance of a Christ even more. Ultimately, it is Christ who is the end-all, be-all of Mormon's message. It is through Christ, the Prince of Peace, that all wrongs will be made right. He is the one through whom we attain salvation. This was true of Gideon and it is true for us. Mormon's most important personalized message about Gideon's narratives, both the main narrative and the sub-narrative proposed in this article, is that tragedy and death are not the end, and do not prevent us from reaching our final destination, to be “clasped in the arms of Jesus” (Mormon 5:11).

*[Author's Note: I am grateful to my mother, who bought me my first piece of Hugh Nibley scholarship in the early nineties. I am grateful to my friend Katherine and my brother David for their efforts over the course of years in wordsmithing my first drafts and my rewrites. Similarly, thank you to Jeff Lindsay and the Interpreter's peer reviewers for their sage suggestions that guided this paper to publication. Additionally, I express a heartfelt thank you to Leslie Reynolds, whose constant encouragement brought this paper to life.]*

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89. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona: Pointing Us All to Jesus Christ* (May 2023), 99, 101, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2023/05/47nelson>.

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