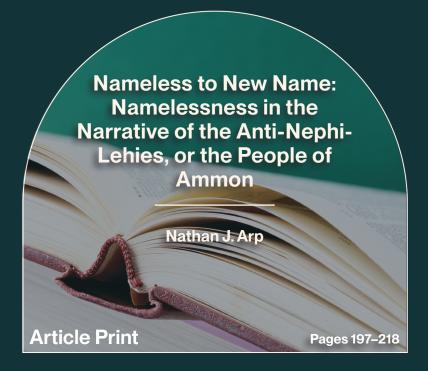


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Nameless to New Name: Namelessness in the Narrative of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, or the People of Ammon

Nathan J. Arp

Abstract: A narrator may choose to provide or withhold the name of a character for many reasons. This article hypothesizes that Mormon intentionally omitted the name of two key characters, a Lamanite king and queen. Both feature in his narration of the mission to the Lamanites and the miraculous conversion it inspires, as recounted in the book of Alma. While it is not possible to know exactly what information Mormon and other record keepers of the Book of Mormon had or preserved, it is at least plausible that Mormon might have intentionally omitted the name of these two Lamanites. Namelessness invites the reader to encounter and re-encounter the gospel in a story simultaneously historic and symbolic, at once particular and universal. The intentional absence of these names emphasizes, instead, the new name the converted Lamanites would take upon themselves and points the reader to the name of Jesus Christ.

It is, perhaps, an intuitive modern assumption that unnamed characters are less important, and yet, there are several memorable unnamed characters in the Book of Mormon. While it is possible that that their names were unavailable in an editor's records, there are significant literary reasons why an editor or author might intentionally withhold a character's name. This paper explores the possibility that the namelessness of a Lamanite king and the Lamanite queen depicted in Alma 19–24 contributes to the theological messages in those chapters. After a theoretical discussion on the use of namelessness in the Book of Mormon and a historical sketch of the likely names

of a brief succession of Lamanite kings, this paper will propose that Mormon may have left the high king over all the Lamanites unnamed to better create a symbolic model for readers to follow and provide an extra emphasis on the new name, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, that the people would take upon themselves. This name, I propose, ties these converts to the past colony of the people of Zeniff. The Lamanite converts chose a new name for their people and their king in response to experiencing Christ's atoning power. This paper similarly postulates that Mormon may have intentionally left King Lamoni's wife, the queen, nameless to model how we should respond with faith to experiences we do not understand and to emphasize the name of the Savior through her visionary experience. Both of these accounts powerfully testify of Christ's mercy and his power to save.¹

A Literary Reason: Structure and Significance

Although the first Lamanite king mentioned during the watershed Nephite mission to the Lamanites² is named early in the narrative, very few other Lamanites during this timeframe are mentioned by name. The missing names are curious in a text that highlights personal aspects of Lamanite culture and demonstrates the deep personal relationships between Mosiah's missionary sons and the Lamanite people. In fact, before the nameless king conceives of the new name Anti-Nephi-Lehi, there are only three named Lamanites in these accounts: King Lamoni, Abish a "Lamanitish woman" (Alma 19:16), and Antiomno (Alma 20:4). Of these, only Lamoni and Abish participate in the storyline.³

^{1.} In addition to the works cited specifically throughout this paper, this literary study on names and namelessness builds upon the works of Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon: Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957); Moshe Garsiel, Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns (Jerusalem, Israel: Bar-llan University, 1991); Meier Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 2011); and Grant Hardy, Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

^{2.} These events occurred in 90-77 BC, approximately, in Alma 21-27.

^{3.} Lamoni only mentions the name of Antiomno in a digressive remark. There may be a distinction of significance between the information Mormon provides the reader directly and what he conveys indirectly in a quotation from a character.

The lack of personal names in this part of Mormon's account does not, by itself, necessarily indicate authorial intention. Book of Mormon editors routinely do not provide names for all the characters they could have named. Neither does namelessness correspond to insignificance. Ancient authors sometimes pointedly seem to leave characters unnamed. Walker Wright has recently proposed that Moroni may have withheld the name of the brother of Jared in the book of Ether as a polemic against the civilization of Babel, who in contrast, sought a name.⁴

The New Testament, a work from a similar Jewish literary tradition to the Book of Mormon, exemplifies purposeful namelessness in its cast of key, but nevertheless still unnamed, characters. Strikingly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, one of the most important figures in the Bible, remains nameless throughout the Gospel According to John, as does John himself.⁵ The absence of Mary's name in the fourth gospel does not suggest that John or Jesus did not care for her or for women in general. The narratives in John demonstrate just the opposite. In fact, the important roles that women play in the New Testament testify that these records reliably convey history. Daniel C. Peterson has noted that the Bible's use of women as witnesses of Christ's resurrection, despite a legal culture that would have rejected their witnesses, rings with authenticity.⁶ Namelessness in female or male characters need not necessarily reveal an author's value judgment on those same characters. It might even allow deeper symbolic interpretations.

Indeed, R. Alan Culpepper observes that the general "paucity of description has not hindered, and indeed probably has stimulated, a variety of symbolic interpretations" for Mary.⁷ Culpepper further

^{4.} Walker Wright, "The Man with No Name: The Story of the Brother of Jared as an Anti-Babel Polemic," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 62 (2024): 319–33, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the -man-with-no-name-the-story-of-the-brother-of-jared-as-an-anti-babel -polemic. For another example of another possible withheld name in the Book of Mormon, consider Nathan J. Arp, "Nameless: Mormon's Dramatic Use of Omission in Helaman 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 62 (2024): 39–64, journal.interpreterfoundation.org /nameless-mormons-dramatic-use-of-omission-in-helaman-2.

^{5. &}quot;John never calls her Mary." Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 98.

Daniel C. Peterson, "Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 61 (2024): 45–56, journal.interpreter foundation.org/christ-is-risen-truly-he-is-risen/.

^{7.} R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design

points out that "John's . . . characters are individualized by their position in society and their interaction with Jesus. This means that they may easily become types." This is seen in the nameless disciple who the gospel of John refers to only by noting Jesus' affection towards him. In a work like the fourth gospel that defines its characters by their response or closeness to Jesus, a mere name may not be as powerful a descriptor as the character's actions or relationship to Christ. Of course unnamed key characters interact with Jesus throughout all the gospel accounts. Key characters, male and female, in the Hebrew Bible act namelessly as well. For example, Tracy Browning has noted the important role played by Naaman's nameless maid in 2 Kings 5.10 And from the other end of the social hierarchy, who can overlook the pivotal role of Pharoah's daughter who rescued and raised the baby Moses (Exodus 2)?

A similar approach to the nameless characters in the Book of Mormon may also lead to new insights into the characters' relationships to the narrative and, more importantly, to Christ. In general, character names in the Book of Mormon seem to follow or promote plot or ideological exigencies in the narratives where they appear. That is not to say that Book of Mormon editors necessarily make up names¹¹ to fit with plots, just that they seem to be judicious about providing names and intentional about when and with what frequency they name characters.¹² Matthew L. Bowen, specifically, has submitted a large and

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 133.

- 8. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 145.
- 9. Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 104.
- 10. Tracy Y. Browning, "Seeking Answers to Spiritual Questions," *Liahona*, November 2024, 80–83, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference /2024/10/42browning.
- 11. Brant Gardner has brought up the possibility that Mormon may, at times, invent names for characters to support his narratives' meanings. Brant A. Gardner, "Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture Chapters 4 and 5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 35 (2020): 95–98. journal.interpreterfoundation.org/labor-diligently-to-write-the-ancient-making-of-a-modern-scripture-2. Alternatively, it may be just as likely that Book of Mormon writers crafted plots and messages to resonate with the names featured in their stories.
- 12. I have attempted to show possible ways Mormon used names in his narrative in previous publications. For example, I proposed that Mormon deliberately delayed naming Nehor in Alma 1 and then used his name thematically throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon. Nathan J. Arp, "Mormon's Narrative Strategies to Provide Literary Justice for Gideon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 58 (2023): 167–222, journal.interpreter

still growing body of work on the narrative utility of Book of Mormon and Bible names.¹³ So there is good reason to suppose that Book of Mormon authors and editors use both names and namelessness rhetorically, to develop plots or underscore ideology.

A Limited Lamanite History from 200-77 BC

A brief look at Lamanite history of the period helps contextualize the nameless nature of the Lamanite king and queen this paper highlights. Various factors vex any sincere attempt at piecing together a Lamanite history from the Book of Mormon text. First, although Lamanites figure as primary characters in many of the Book of Mormon narratives, Nephite editors portray these characters primarily from Nephite perspectives. Secondly, the Book of Mormon focuses on theological narratives; therefore, the editors only scantily refer to subjects like politics, culture, art, linguistics, economics, ecology, etc. Finally, the Book of Mormon text suggests that the Nephites themselves may not have known or cared to know a lot about Lamanite culture or history. These three reasons, and likely many more, mean we cannot find in the Book of Mormon all the elements one would encounter in a comprehensive history.

Nevertheless, this paper will highlight two aspects of Lamanite culture that are discoverable in the Book of Mormon text from the time period relevant to this paper and that can inform the ideas presented. First, it is possible to piece together a partial list of Lamanite kings between 200–77 BC. Second, the Book of Mormon indicates there was an innovation in record keeping that the Lamanites instituted around the time they subjugated Alma's people (Mosiah 24:4, 6). This

foundation.org/mormons-narrative-strategies-to-provide-literary-justice -for-gideon. I also hypothesized a possible reason for Mormon repeating his own name in Alma 18. 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, journal .interpreterfoundation.org/count-your-many-mormons-mormons-personalized -and-personal-messages-in-mosiah-18-and-3-nephi-5.

- 13. A large collection of Dr. Bowen's work can be found at journal.interpreter foundation.org/author/matthewb/?journal.
- 14. As an example, Brant Gardner points out in his commentary of Alma 25:2–3 that "Mormon does not mention the Lamanites' political motivation because he never displays interest in Lamanite politics." Brant A. Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume Four, Alma (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 367.

seems to play a large role in the expansion of Lamanite power and will be discussed further below.

When Zeniff, in approximately 200 BC, led a group back into Nephite ancestral lands that had subsequently been inhabited by Lamanites. 15 he met a Lamanite king named Laman, (Mosiah 9:10). The narrative does not specify when the reign of king Laman, began, but he may have been in power when the Nephites, following Mosiah, fled the land of Nephi, around 220 BC. According to the chronology provided by Zeniff, King Laman, died sometime around 178 BC (Mosiah 10:6), whereupon his unnamed son became king. His son is likely the same Laman₃ mentioned later in Mosiah 24:3, as having been named after his father. The occurrence of two successive Lamanite kings with the name Laman may indicate a Lamanite practice of naming their kings Laman, a convention similar to the Nephite practice referenced by Jacob (see Jacob 1:9-11). Although possible, it seems more likely that Laman was the actual name these two specific Lamanite kings shared and it had become more than a reign name, if it had ever been a reign name to begin with.16

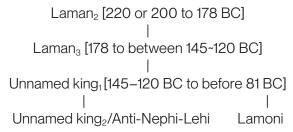
The reference to king Laman₃ occurs between 145 and 120 BC, a period of thirty-three to fifty-eight years from the approximate start to the reign of the son of Laman₂ (approximately 178 BC). Reigns lasting thirty-three to fifty-eight years match with known reign periods in

^{15.} Multiple scholars view Zeniff's departure as an act of disobedience, a willful rebellion against Mosiah, however, I hold that the text does not support their stance. Some of these works include Val Larsen, "Prophet or Loss: Mosiah₁/ Zeniff, Benjamin/Noah, Mosiah₂/Limhi and the Emergence of the Almas," Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 60 (2024): journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophet-or-loss-mosiah1-zeniff -benjamin-noah-mosiah2-limhi-and-the-emergence-of-the-almas; Shon D. Hopkin, ed., Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018); and Joseph M. Spencer, An Other Testament (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, BYU, 2016). My alternative perspective on Zeniff is included in Nathan J. Arp, "An Analysis of Mormon's Narrative Strategies Employed on the Zeniffite Narrative and Their Effect on Limhi," Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 59 (2023): 159–90, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-analysis-of-mormons -narrative-strategies-employed-on-the-zeniffite-narrative-and-their-effect -on-limhi.

^{16.} Brant Gardner has also noted this in Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Enos through Mosiah (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:406–7.

the Nephite monarchic system.¹⁷ Such long possible reign times may represent a multi-generational time of peace and prosperity for the Lamanites, the very scenario suggested by the text. Alternatively, there may be another king Laman between Laman₃ and Laman₂.

A conjectural king list might look something like this:



By the time the unnamed king transferred the kingdom to his nameless son, later named Anti-Nephi-Lehi, the Lamanites had grown powerful. The Book of Mormon authors also suggest that this line of Lamanite kings expanded the scope of their rule over surrounding lands and cultures. The narrator remarks that Laman₂ was king over "numerous people" (Mosiah 24:3) and had increased his landholding (Mosiah 24:1–2). And by the time of Lamoni's father, this king was "king over all the land" (Alma 20:8). So, over a period of fifty-five years (145–90 BC), this line of kings successfully expanded their kingdom such that it included a greater number of subjects and lands. Book of Mormon authors include information that may explain this success.

Beginning with the reign of Limhi, the people of Zeniff paid tribute to the Lamanites for about twenty-five years (145–120 BC). This tribute, no doubt a boon to Lamanite coffers, may have only been one of many tributes supporting the Lamanite king and enabling him to solidify his reign and increase the size of his kingdom. After the escape of the people of Zeniff, the Lamanites integrated the priests of Noah into their

^{17.} For example, Mosiah₂ reigned thirty-three years, which corresponded to his documented ages between thirty to sixty-three years (Mosiah 29:46). According to Grant Hardy's chronology, King Benjamin reigned for at least forty years. If Mosiah₁ reigned from 220 to 170 BC, then he would have ruled for fifty years. Fifty-eight years does not exceed the realm of possibility. But if our unnamed king began his reign in 120 BC and ruled until 81 BC, then he would have reigned for thirty-nine years. See Grant Hardy, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 846. It's hard to know when Mosiah₁ became king because in the book of Omni, Amaleki does not specify that Mosiah₁ was king in the land of Nephi but rather refers to him as one "who was made king over the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:12, 19). It's possible then that Mosiah did not become king until closer to 200 BC.

populace as teachers. The integration of these Nephites may have further empowered the kings. These priests taught the Lamanites the importance of records and taught them "the language of the Nephites" to keep their records and taught them how to write to one another (see Mosiah 24:4, 6). This new technology may have helped the Lamanites communicate more broadly and administer a larger territory. According to Mormon, this scribal technology allowed the Lamanites to "increase in riches" and "wax great" (Mosiah 24:7). The seemingly peaceful transition of power between four or more generations of Lamanite kings likely nourished the increased prosperity and power Mormon referenced.

The Unnamed Lamanite King (Alma 20, 22-24)

Our discussion of the namelessness of the powerful king over all the Lamanites focuses on Mormon's retelling of the mission of Ammon₂ and his companions. The namelessness of the great king in this story is all the more noteworthy because the story deliberately draws attention to names. This account has been studied for its likely onomastic word plays with names. Bowen has noted that Book of Mormon authors possibly drew a distinction between the Nephites and Lamanites with pejorative word plays on the name Laman and the Hebrew word for unbelief or unfaithfulness.

The phrase *lō'-'ēmun* (unvowelled *l' 'mn*) may have been the basis of, or catalyzed the formation of, a negative pun on the name "Laman" among the early Nephites. If so, this pun may have imbued the term "Lamanites" with the meaning of "unfaithful" or "unbelieving ones."²⁰

^{18.} It may have been efforts like this, teaching language and writing to American populations, that left Afro-Asiatic linguistic fossils in Uto-Aztecan languages as discovered by Brian D. Stubbs. See Brian D. Stubbs, *Changes in Language: from Nephi to Now*, 2nd ed. (Blanding, UT: Brian Darrel Stubbs, 2020).

^{19.} Alternatively, according to Brant Gardner, Mormon's comment about the benefit the Lamanites gained from Nephite recording keeping stemmed rather from a cultural bias and not from historical accuracy. Brant Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume Three, Enos through Mosiah (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 403–8.

^{20.} Matthew L. Bowen, "Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City:

Bowen has demonstrated the various ways Book of Mormon authors and editors perpetuated this possible play on the name of Laman/Lamanites with the Hebrew word for *unbelief* and *belief* throughout the Book of Mormon, and this account of Ammon₂ and his brothers' mission to the Lamanites seems to orbit around an interaction between belief and unbelief. For example, Bowen observed that "the verb believe occurs no less than thirteen times throughout Alma 18–19, together with other potentially related words faith (used at least four times) and true (used once)."²¹

This play on unbelief may extend to the name of Lamoni, himself a king and the son of the nameless king. According to the *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon*, "the Lehite personal name Lamoni may be related to the personal name Laman, but with the name modified by the 'Canaanite shift' plus the gentilic ending -i."²² If correct, Lamoni's name might have meant something like *Lamanite*, a name meant to tie Lamoni to his Lamanite heritage and further connect him to this onomastic background of unbelief. Mormon possibly plays on this meaning of Lamoni's name and this Lamanite heritage of unbelief when he describes Lamoni's sanctification process²³ in his visionary experience as "the dark veil of *unbelief* was being cast away from [Lamoni's] mind" (Alma 19:6).

The literary use of the name Ammon may stand in contrast to this pejorative literary meaning of the name Laman and Lamoni, regardless of the literal meaning these names conveyed. In the same way that Nephite authors may have linked the name Laman to the word unbelief, they may have also linked the name Ammon to the similar Hebrew word for faith, belief, and truth. Both literarily and linguistically, Ammon symbolizes the truth that will convert Lamanite unbelief into belief. Bowen has explained this possible linguistic association in the following manner:

Deseret Book, 2011), 242–43, rsc.byu.edu/things-which-my-father-saw/not-partaking-fruit-its-generational-consequences-its-remedy.

^{21.} Bowen, "Not Partaking of the Fruit," 248.

^{22.} Stephen D. Ricks et al., *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2022), 197.

^{23.} Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright refer to this same process as theosis or deification in "Theosis in the Book of Mormon: The Work and Glory of the Father, Mother and Son, and Holy Ghost," Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 56 (2023): 309–19, journal.interpreterfoundation.org /theosis-in-the-book-of-mormon-the-work-and-glory-of-the-father-mother-and-son-and-holy-ghost/.

In Hebrew, concepts of being "faithful," "believ[ing]," "stead-fastness," "faithfulness" (and "faith"), "trustworthiness," and "firmness" were expressed with lexical forms of the Hebrew verbal root 'mn (apparently cognate with Egyptian mn = "be firm, established, enduring"; "be fixed, stick fast..."; "remain"), which sounds like and may even be cognate with the name Ammon. Indeed, the onomastic connection between Ammon and forms of 'mn—aural or etymological—is evidenced by the profusion of 'mn-related terminology in the Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27).²⁴

A careful editor, like Mormon, may have used the names Lamoni and Ammon to dramatize the narrative tension between belief and disbelief. Furthermore, Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright have pointed out that Mormon may have played on the association of the name Ammon with the Egyptian god, Amun.²⁵ For example, after Ammon's miraculous defense of Lamoni's flocks, Lamoni identifies Ammon as the Great Spirit, the Lamanite equivalent of God, a possible aural play with the name Ammon and its association with the king of the Egyptian gods, Amun. In Lamoni's first direct speech in the narrative, he wonders whether Ammon is the Great Spirit (see Alma 18:2).

Up until this point in the narrative, Mormon has reported Lamoni's speech only indirectly. For example, when Lamoni first meets Ammon, Mormon states that "the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites." Mormon then reports Ammon's speech directly, prefaced by "and Ammon said. . ." (Alma 17:22–23). The Biblical scholar Robert Alter has pointed out that "the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory . . . in the exposition of character." So, according to Alter, Lamoni's first dialogue with actual speech may merit "special attention."

^{24.} Matthew L. Bowen, "'Behold, He Was a Man Like unto Ammon': Mormon's Use of *'mn*-related Terminology in Praise of Moroni in Alma 48," *Interpreter:* A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 58 (2023): 224, journal .interpreterfoundation.org/behold-he-was-a-man-like-unto-ammon-mormons-use-of-%ca%bemn-related-terminology-in-praise-of-moroni-in-alma-48/.

^{25.} Larsen and Wright, "Theosis in the Book of Mormon," 309. See also Val Larsen, "In His Footsteps: Ammon₁ and Ammon₂," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 99n17, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/in-his-footsteps-ammon-and-ammon/.

^{26.} 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

Lamoni's first direct words form a question regarding Ammon: "Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders?" We should not overlook King Lamoni's willingness to entertain the thought that he and his people had done something wrong. It was normal for powerful Lamanites to claim that "whatsoever they did was right" (Alma 18:5). In this moment, Mormon markedly destabilizes that view with a contrast between knowledge and astonishment. God, through his servant Ammon, repeatedly upends what the Lamanites think they know. In Book of Mormon language, Ammon continually astonishes them.²⁷ God's astonishing power leads Lamoni to question his traditions. He begins to wonder, contrary to his traditions, if he has done wrong (Alma 18:5).

The Lamanites' astonishment came by no accident. The small group of Nephite missionaries prayed for the upheaval of Lamanite beliefs, when they "prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them ... to bring ... the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct" (Alma 17:9). Despite his assertions that Lamoni "know[s]" and "surely know[s]" that Ammon is the Great Spirit or a god (Alma 18:4, 11). Lamoni learns that Ammon is just "a man" (Alma 18:17). Subsequently, Lamoni's continued astonishment with Ammon's acts and words prepares Lamoni to experience belief and faith. This same process of astonishment leading to belief and faith repeats with Lamoni's nameless father. Namelessness is a particularly powerful narrative device for emphasizing the complete astonishment and upending of tradition. The erasure of the high king's name strikes at the core of Lamanite identity, especially since the king bears the name of the people, and prepares the way for a new name, and a new identity.

When the nameless king over all the Lamanites first meets Ammon, he is already angered by Lamoni's absence at the king's feast. Seeing Lamoni with a Nephite further enrages him, and the nameless king

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.

^{27.} In Alma 17, for example, the Lamanite marauders think that they could easily defeat one man, but Mormon makes sure we know that "that they knew not that the Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of their hands" (Alma 17:35). Therefore, when Ammon begins to slay them, "they began to be astonished" (Alma 17:36).

affirms the Lamanites' false traditions, saying to Lamoni, "Thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property" (Alma 20:13). The king attacks his son, but just as Ammon astonished the herdsmen and King Lamoni, Ammon will now displace the traditions and beliefs of the nameless king in his defense of Lamoni. He renders the king unable to continue fighting and will uproot the king's certainty about the Lamanite traditions.

Although the king offers Ammon what he thinks a Nephite might want, his possessions and even up to "half his kingdom," this does not interest Ammon. Even more than his prowess, it is Ammon's demands to protect Lamoni that astonish the nameless king. Ammon does not desire Lamanite possessions, but "when [the nameless king] also saw the great love [Ammon] had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly" (Alma 20:13). Ammon's actions give the king pause and lead him to consider the words his son and the Nephite missionary speak. Astonishment, as it had with Lamoni, prepares the king for belief. This nameless king's ensuing conversion allows the rest of the Lamanite population the freedom to accept or reject the gospel of Christ. Regarding the king's conversion, literary scholar Marilyn Arnold has noted that "in one of the sweetest moments in all of scripture, this once proud and mighty king falls to his knees and offers a prayer, wrenched in tremulous words and from his humbled heart."28 Rather than defining the king with his name, Mormon may have chosen to honor and define this nameless king by his humble and zealous response to the message of salvation. The king's namelessness invites the reader to consider the universal and symbolic aspect of his story. This king demonstrates that we must all let go of our false traditions and surrender everything to Christ. Perhaps, ultimately, Mormon felt that keeping this king nameless could better emphasize his humility and self-sacrifice. Although nameless, this king is significant.

His importance in Lamanite society is unquestionable. His importance in the salvific narrative is also clear. The opposing possibility, that Mormon withheld the name of this king because the king was not important is implausible. This is apparent if we compare the unnamed

Marilyn Arnold, Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon— Its Narrative, Teachings, and People (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1996), 150.

king with his named son Lamoni. Alter has observed that "a general trait of biblical narrative" is "the primacy of dialogue." ²⁹ If we apply this insight to the Book of Mormon, we can assess the importance of the two kings by comparing the amount of dialogue Mormon reports for each man. Mormon reports for Lamoni's father and Lamoni similar amounts of dialogue; both father and son speak more than 500 words. Mormon also reports on the importance of both characters in the overall Lamanite conversion. It would be strange then to suggest that Mormon provided a name for Lamoni because he was more important to the narrative than his father was. And because of the importance of the Lamanite king in the overall mission of Mosiah's sons, Alma probably recorded his name. Although we cannot be sure what information made it to Mormon, it is probable that the king's namelessness is intentional and artful rather than accidental.

Along with its other symbolic meanings, Mormon's masking of this king's name highlighted the change this king would bring about for his people, a change marked by their own adoption of a new name. Casting aside unbelief, they mark themselves as good and faithful. Ironically, or maybe pointedly, it is the nameless king who sees the need for his people to have a new name.

And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished. And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites. (Alma 23:16–17)

According to the *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon*, the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi "may be based on Egyptian and Hebrew elements meaning 'he/adherent/partisan of Nephi and Lehi."³⁰ Bowen has explained this name in the following manner:

The name Anti-Nephi-Lehi at a minimum, like the city name Lehi-Nephi, appears to at once honor Lamanite

^{29.} Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 81-82.

^{30.} Ricks et al., Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words, 48.

ancestry from Lehi and the spiritual legacy of Nephi, whose visions and teachings they now embraced. In other words, Mormon's preservation and use of the names *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* and *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* constitutes a powerful statement that the Lamanites who converted to the "Nephite" religion had become every whit as "good" as the Nephites, their erstwhile enemies."³¹

In addition to the meanings proposed by Bowen, I propose that the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi may have designated that the king and his people belonged to the place "Nephi-Lehi." The Nephites originally occupied Nephi-Lehi before a group of them fled with Mosiah₁ and the Lamanites assimilated it. Approximately twenty years later, the Lamanites ostensibly returned this city and others to Zeniff and his party of returning Nephite colonists, with the intent to bring them into servitude. Ultimately, the Lamanites subjugated the people of Zeniff in Nephi-Lehi, exacted tribute for approximately twenty-five years, and killed many Nephites during their vain attempts to free themselves from bondage.

Renaming this people and their king with reference to this place name reimagines their Lamanite identity and kingdom as Nephite as direct heirs of Lehi and Nephi in a Nephite colony. It is, thus, no surprise that they became "industrious," that they "open a correspondence" with the Nephites, and that "the curse of God did no more follow them" (Alma 23:18). Having been converted and having tasted of redemption, they reject their false traditions and choose to identify themselves once again with God's chosen people. In essence, they take on the characteristics of stereotypical Nephites, as the narrators predominantly portray Nephites in the Book of Mormon. This name may also have served as a reminder of "the many murders which [they had] committed" (Alma 24:11), a reminder that they chose the wrong side when the people of Zeniff immigrated into Lamanite lands. The Lamanite kings should have aligned themselves with the Zeniffites when that group immigrated into Lamanite lands. Accordingly, one can imagine that for the Amulonites and Amalekites, the memory

^{31.} Matthew L. Bowen, "'Our Great God Has in Goodness Sent These': Notes on the Goodness of God, the Didactic Good of Nephi's Small Plates, and Anti-Nephi-Lehi's Renaming," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*61(2024):97–134,journal.interpreterfoundation.org/our-great-god-has-in-goodness-sent-these-notes-on-the-goodness-of-god-the-didactic-good-of-nephis-small-plates-and-anti-nephi-lehis-renaming/.

of this colony, retained through taking this name upon them, would have been especially galling. This particular naming situation allows Mormon to emphasize a complete reversal of identities where the Nephite and Zeniffite priests lose their inheritance and become the most implacable of Lamanites, but the Lamanites, previously enemies, take up the identity, mission, and blessings of the Nephites. The Lamanites are adopting a name that the Nephites had rejected. It is not surprising then that they who "had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (Alma 24:1) incited other Lamanites to anger against the new converts.

Not long after the people and their new king changed their names, the record itself changes yet again the way it refers to these people, calling them the people of Ammon, or Ammonites. This final change does not seem motived by the Anti-Nephi-Lehies themselves. It is a name the Nephites gave them (see Alma 27:26). Perhaps, this final name for this people reflected the fact that Ammon became "a high priest over [this] people" (Alma 30:20). Regardless, for the Lehites, names mattered. They mattered enough to fight over, and they mattered enough to change when the names no longer defined a people.

In the Book of Mosiah, Mormon details King Benjamin's sermon on kingship, which concludes by encouraging his people to take upon themselves the name of the true king, Jesus Christ. King Benjamin's memorable sermon and covenant are inextricably intertwined, historically, genetically, and thematically, with the stories of his grandsons' mission to the nameless Lamanite king. Underlying the entire Book of Mormon is the critical theme of individuals and peoples choosing to take on themselves the name of Jesus Christ. After all, it is his name that saves. Namelessness is a powerful tool for highlighting that necessity.

The Nameless Queen (Alma 19)

Lamoni's father is not the only nameless major character in this important Book of Mormon story. Mormon also leaves Lamoni's wife nameless. With so few women named in the Book of Mormon, we may regret her anonymity. As I will show, Mormon's choice here is neither by chance, nor a slight to her significance or to her gender. Mormon names the serving girl, Abish, but not the queen. And yet, the queen is clearly important. She saves Lamoni's life, directs her people, and serves in Mormon's narrative as an invitation for all to follow her example. It is through the queen's selective namelessness that Mormon's

rhetorical strategy may artfully reveal the name of Christ and his saving power.

After Lamoni falls into a death-like trance, his wife, the nameless gueen, manifests an uncommon faith during an interaction with Ammon, who seems, by virtue of his name, to represent faith itself. Ammon states that her husband is not dead and asks her, "believest thou this?" (Alma 19:9). Against all the evidence before her and the influence of everyone else in her life, she testifies that she believes. To which Ammon responds, "Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites" (Alma 19:10). This statement is powerful. It was Lamoni who said of Ammon, "Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them." (Alma 18:10). The astonishment of the Lamanite king before Ammon is remembered now in the astonishment of Ammon before the gueen. The praise of Ammon's faithfulness among the group of his servants is matched and raised by Ammon's praise for the faith of the gueen, above that of all the Nephites. Mormon proves the subtlety of his rhetorical skill here in this beautiful reversal. Indeed, he continues to weave this story into the larger narrative when he repeats this same praise of faithfulness, in speaking of the hero Captain Moroni₁ in Alma 48. Bowen has shown how Mormon's praise of Moroni hearkens back to Ammon,³² which connection, if intentional by Mormon, would further evince the esteem this nameless gueen enjoyed among the Nephite record keepers. Ammon's comment about the gueen could also potentially recall the Hebrew Bible's praise of Hezekiah and Josiah.³³ During his mortal ministry, Jesus also made a similar comment about a nameless centurion after his faithful request for Jesus to heal his servant.³⁴ These connections place her in an elite pantheon

^{32.} Bowen, "'Behold, He Was a Man Like unto Ammon," 223-42.

^{33. 2} Kings 18:5–6 (NIV) says the following about Hezekiah: "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses." 2 Kings 23:25 (NIV) describes Josiah in the following manner: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses."

^{34.} In response to the nameless centurion's faithful request, the writer of Luke narrates, "When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned

of believers. Her namelessness also links her to the many nameless characters in the New Testament and other scriptures as this queen symbolically represents how to faithfully respond to situations of which we do not have "a perfect knowledge" (Alma 32:21).

Given her station and narrative importance, his intimate interactions with her and her husband, and his obvious respect for her, Ammon clearly knew this faithful queen's name. Moreover, she probably remained a prominent follower of Christ among the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, known to Alma directly if not through the report of Ammon. Of course, it may have been Alma who decided not to include this queen's name in his record and thus her name may have never been available to Mormon. But if Alma and Mormon knew Abish, they likely knew the queen.

The rhetorical effectiveness of her namelessness argues strongly for the presumption of intentionality. Most importantly, namelessness could have included adding symbolic power to the queen's experience and placing greater emphasis on the name of Christ, whose name had been oddly absent in a narrative inextricably connected to him. This absence of Christ's name should also alert the reader to authorial intent in the use of namelessness. It is to this nameless queen that Mormon bestows the privilege of being the first to name Jesus in this narrative. Although her husband, Lamoni, encounters Christ first, it is she, not he, who first pronounces Christ's name.

After Lamoni witnesses God's miracles through the words and actions of Ammon, the Spirit envelopes Lamoni in an unconscious, visionary state. When he comes back from this visionary experience, he declares to his wife,

Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou. For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. (Alma 19:12–13)

Interestingly, Lamoni's focus rests not on Ammon or any of the servants in the room; he is speaking directly and likely only to his wife, the unnamed queen. He states that she is "blessed," he makes this oath with her life, "as sure as thou liveth," and declares that the Redeemer will "be born of a woman." Something happened in Lamoni's vision

that made him keenly aware of the importance of his wife. His words imply that he sees in her a kinship with the mother of God,³⁵ who would similarly be praised by an angel, "Blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28).

Additionally, when Lamoni says, "Blessed be the name of God," and states that the Redeemer "shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name," he twice alludes to God and the importance of his name but does not say God's name. If redemption rests on believing on Christ's name, why does Lamoni not say it? This seems like an intentional gap. In his vision, Lamoni saw that "[his] Redeemer" would be born of a woman." The story structurally replicates that fact. Christ's personal name, Jesus, is subsequently brought forth in the narrative by a woman. In response to Lamoni's words, the spirit also leads the queen into a similar unconscious vision. When she wakes, she praises the Lord by name:

- O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell!
- O blessed God, have mercy on this people! (Alma 19:29)

This is the first time Christ's personal name, Jesus, has been uttered in direct speech in the entire narrative of the Nephite mission to the Lamanites. The queen brings him forth in her plea. Previously, Mormon summarized in indirect speech the fact that Ammon taught Lamoni about "Christ" (see Alma 18:39). While pronouncing the name Jesus, the queen also fittingly puns on the etymology of the name Jesus in almost the exact way the gospel according to Matthew does: "thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The "name Jesus is a translated form of the Hebrew [Yehoshua], meaning 'Jehovah is salvation." The meaning of Jesus' name then is tied up with his mission to save. Here, whether she knows this etymology or not, the queen pronounces his name and his mission, as if she were the angel who first announced it.

Although the queen proclaims the name of Jesus, no one else ever speaks the name of Jesus or Christ during the Nephite mission to the Lamanites. In addition to Lamoni's comment about God's name in Alma 19:13, Aaron teaches the nameless king about Christ and the importance of his name, even telling the king to call upon his name in Alma 22:13 and 16, but neither Aaron nor the king say his name in the text. The king Anti-Nephi-Lehi references "the blood of the Son

^{35.} Larsen and Wright, "Theosis in the Book of Mormon," 309-19.

^{36.} Ricks et al., Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words, 171n23.

of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins" as he speaks to his people about their covenant to never shed blood in Alma 24. He does not mention the son of God by name, Jesus, or by the title of Christ. As Ammon glorifies God in Alma 26, he speaks repeatedly of "his name": "blessed be the name of our God," "let us give thanks to his holy name," "we will praise his name forever," and "he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name." In all this talk about God's name, Ammon does not actually say the name "Jesus Christ." The nameless queen's voice is the first, the last, and the only voice that actually speaks Jesus's name and then articulates its importance to salvation. This seems

John W. Welch has noted that the specific names for Christ that each individual chooses to use in the narrative also characterize that person.³⁷ For the nameless queen, her cry to Jesus manifests a personal and familiar relationship with him. Her intimate and desperate plea characterizes her as sincere, penitent, and humble. Alma will later teach his son that "none but the truly penitent are saved" (Alma 42:24). The queen's namelessness highlights her humility before the Lord and attests to her preparation to someday receive the salvation she so desperately pled for.

intentional.

The queen's words are also the final words spoken in direct discourse in this vignette in Alma 19. When Lamoni and Ammon regain consciousness, their words are summarized. They are not spoken in the text. These details matter. If we do not focus on what is left unsaid, we can miss one of the many rhetorical tools Book of Mormon narrators have used to reach us, their audience. Mormon's art of reticence, ³⁸ his emphasis through absence, cleverly captured in this narrative, points indirectly, but forcefully, to this queen's witness. Mormon reverences the faithful but nameless queen by allowing us to hear her intimate and personal cry, naming the author of salvation, "O blessed Jesus!" Our stories may be different than hers, but Mormon invites us to step into the opportunity provided by namelessness. Nameless, she stands in

^{37.} Scripture Central Staff, "Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob?," KnoWhy 36, 12 February 2024, scripturecentral.org/knowhy/why-does-an-angel-reveal-the-name-of-christ-to-jacob.

^{38.} For a better explanation of Mormon's art of reticence, please read Charles Swift, "When Less is More: The Reticent Narrator in the Story of Alma and Amulek," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 13, no. 1 (2012), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1524&context=re.

the place of every reader of the Book of Mormon who, likewise, must sincerely call upon the name of "blessed Jesus" to be saved.

Nothing in this text supports the theory that Mormon did not name this queen because he thought her unimportant. Instead, he used her namelessness to reverence her and reverence the Savior's sacred name by clearly connecting them. We can learn from this powerful queen how to take upon us the name of Christ so thoroughly that we lose our own names by declaring his. With the nameless queen's words being the final direct speech in this episode, with the nameless queen, stripped of her particularity, functioning as an individual but also as an archetype for all human beings, Mormon can appropriately summarize the import of this event as follows: "And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name" (Alma 19:36).

Conclusion

Namelessness in the Book of Mormon does not necessarily equate to insignificance. The stories of the king over all the Lamanites and the queen of the land of Ishmael, as narrated in Alma 17–24, demonstrate that their very namelessness added to their importance in the Book of Mormon narrative.

Mormon, whose message consistently returns to names and the importance of taking upon ourselves the name of Christ, may have withheld these specific names to help the reader see the queen and the king as exemplars and symbols for how we all should respond to the message of our Savior. The nameless king models how we should be willing to give up everything for Christ—all our sins, our false traditions, and our possessions. The nameless queen symbolizes the same repentance, but additionally teaches us how to respond with faith in the face of doubt. Together these characters point us to Christ, with the queen uniquely pronouncing the name Jesus, on which our salvation depends. Mormon's careful account ensured that this queen, and this queen only, would actually articulate the Savior's name.

Ultimately, this analysis of these characters highlights the Book of Mormon's narrative art, which points the reader to Christ in creative and compelling ways.



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Nathan J. Arp graduated from Brigham Young University with a BA in Chinese language and literature. As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Nathan has been enamored by the Church's scriptures for decades. He has been a longtime consumer of scholarly publications about the scriptures and is grateful for this opportunity to participate in the process of production. When not in an office cubicle, he can be found laughing with his wife, wrestling with their children, or playing with words.

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