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# “BEHOLD, HE WAS A MAN LIKE UNTO AMMON”: MORMON’S USE OF ’MN-RELATED TERMINOLOGY IN PRAISE OF MORONI IN ALMA 48

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Matthew L. Bowen

**Abstract:** *This article examines Mormon’s comparison of Moroni, the Nephite military leader, to Ammon, the son of Mosiah, in Alma 48:18 and how Mormon’s use and repetition of ’mn-related terminology (“faithful,” “firm,” “faith,” “verily [surely]”) in Alma 48:7–17 lays a foundation for this comparison. Ammon’s name, phonologically and perhaps etymologically, suggests the meaning “faithful.” Mormon goes to extraordinary lengths in the Lamanite conversion narratives to show that Ammon is not only worthy of this name, but that his faithfulness is the catalyst for the transition of many Lamanites from unbelief to covenant faithfulness. Thus, in comparing Moroni directly to Ammon, Mormon makes a most emphatic statement regarding Moroni’s covenant faithfulness. Moreover, this comparison reveals his admiration for both men.*

At the conclusion of Mormon’s famed panegyric<sup>1</sup> for Moroni (Alma 48:7–18), the first person to whom Mormon favorably compares Moroni is Ammon, the son of Mosiah (see Alma 48:18). Although Mormon’s comparison also includes the other sons of Mosiah, of them he only mentions Ammon *by name*, suggesting that he is the main focus of the comparison. A close examination of Mormon’s language leading up to this comparison reveals the logic of and the rhetorical preparation for it.

Mormon’s earlier account of Ammon in the Lamanite conversion narratives had emphasized “the faithfulness of Ammon” (e.g.,

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1. Also called *laudatio*, “formal and ornate praise of a person or deed.” Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 106.

Alma 18:2, 10) as a major catalyst in the conversion of numerous Lamanites to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reversal of generations of unbelief to surpassing “faithfulness.”<sup>2</sup> In Hebrew, concepts of being “faithful,”<sup>3</sup> “believ[ing],”<sup>4</sup> “steadfastness,”<sup>5</sup> “faithfulness” (and “faith”), “trustworthiness,”<sup>6</sup> and “firmness” were expressed with lexical forms of the Hebrew verbal root *ʾmn*<sup>7</sup> (apparently cognate with Egyptian *mn* = “be firm, established, enduring”; “be fixed, stick fast ...”; “remain”)<sup>8</sup> which sound like and may even be cognate with the name Ammon. Indeed, the onomastic connection between Ammon and forms of *ʾmn* — aural or etymological — is evidenced by the profusion of *ʾmn*-related terminology in the Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27).<sup>9</sup>

In this study, I will endeavor to show how Mormon carefully lays the foundation for his comparison of Moroni with Ammon in Alma 48:18 through a concentrated use of *ʾmn*-related terms and concepts in the text preceding the comparison (Alma 48:7–17). The laying of this foundation begins with his contrast of Moroni with Amalickiah (Alma 48:7). He then builds on this foundation with successive descriptions of Moroni’s faith and faithfulness. By directly comparing Moroni with Ammon, whose very name aurally or etymologically suggests the meaning “faithful,” Mormon helps us see just how faithful both men were and how much he revered them.

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2. See Matthew L. Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 15, no. 2 (June 2014): 65–89.

3. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, ND: Brill, 2001), 1:63, hereafter cited as *HALOT*.

4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 53, hereafter cited as *BDB*; *HALOT*, 64.

5. *HALOT*, 62.

6. *Ibid.*, 62, 64; *BDB*, 53.

7. See *HALOT*, 62–65; 52–54.

8. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1999), 106.

9. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 240–63.

### Some Methodological Considerations

Many Latter-day Saints assume that the Book of Mormon name *Ammon* is simply the non-Israelite national name 'ammôn, abundantly attested in the Bible. However, there are good reasons not to default to this assumption. Firstly, Ammon ('ammôn) is a non-Hebrew, non-Israelite national name and is not, as far as I am aware, ever attested as an Israelite personal name in the biblical corpus, external inscriptions, or any other ancient sources. Secondly and perhaps relatedly, the national name "Ammon" is ascribed highly pejorative connotations by the etiological narrative of the national origins of Ammon and Moab in Genesis 19:30–38 (see especially v. 38). This is evident in the Hebraized ancestral name Ben-ammi, "son of my [near] kin," or much more pejoratively, "son of my grandfather"<sup>10</sup> (notably, the non-Hebrew, national Ammon is *not* the name of Lot's son, Ben-Ammi).

The Book of Mormon personal name *Ammon* may instead be a derivation from the Hebrew root \*'mn, perhaps a variation on "Amnon" ("faithful")<sup>11</sup> or "Amon" ("faithful"),<sup>12</sup> a Davidic king who reigned over the kingdom of Judah sometime around the time Lehi was born (see 2 Kings 21:19–26). Both of these 'mn-names, are attested as Davidic royal names in the Deuteronomistic History. Amnon is the firstborn son (see 1 Samuel 3:2) and heir of David, on whom David's promised "sure house" (*bayit ne'ēmān*; 1 Samuel 25:28; 2 Samuel 7:16; see also 1 Samuel 2:35; 1 Kings 11:38) might have been built, but who instead "takes" and rapes his half-sister Tamar (seemingly in imitation of his father's wanton "taking" of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah),<sup>13</sup> setting in motion a disastrous series of events that eventuates in Amnon's death and David's near loss of both his kingdom and his life (see 2 Samuel 13–19). The Deuteronomistic historian, who putatively compiled and edited the story from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings,<sup>14</sup> reports that David's descendant

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10. See, e.g., Elitzur Avraham Bar-Asher, "An Explanation of the Etymology of the Name Ammon in Genesis 19, Based on Evidence from Nabataean Aramaic and the Safaitic Arabian Dialect," *Zeitschrift für Althebräistik* 17–20 (2004–2007), 3–10.

11. Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 32, 228. See also HALOT, 62.

12. Noth, *Personennamen*, 228. HALOT, 62.

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

14. See Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1981).

Amon was anything but faithful to the Lord and his covenant as king of Judah (2 Kings 21:18–22) and was assassinated “in his own house” (21:23). While the doubling of the *m* in the Book of Mormon name Ammon might at first seem a barrier to considering it a form of Amon, it should be remembered that doubled consonants were unwritten and unmarked in ancient Hebrew manuscripts. The Book of Mormon text, in any case, is inconsistent in its use of doubled consonants in transliterated names.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Ammon as the attested personal name Amon (let alone from \*’*mn*) cannot be precluded or affirmed on that basis.

Alternatively, the Book of Mormon name Ammon could also be derived from or related to the Akkadian *ummānu* (“craftsman” or “expert”),<sup>16</sup> which comes into Hebrew as *’ammān* and *’amôn*.<sup>17</sup> The potential for word association with Hebrew \*’*mn* (“faithful,” “sure”) on the basis of sound similarity (homophony) is clear. Without more information than we now have (e.g., access to the plates of Mormon), the question of the precise etymology of the Book of Mormon personal name Ammon will remain pending. Thus, the etymologies mentioned above all remain possibilities. On that acknowledgement, I proceed, further noting that for ancient writers and audiences, the sounds latent in names were often more important than real (or scientific) etymology.

Whatever its precise etymology, the homophony between the name Ammon and the root \*’*mn* (“faith,” “loyalty,” and “faithfulness”) appears to have been the basis for a wordplay throughout the Lamanite conversion narratives of Alma 17–27. Even if the initial consonant in the Book of Mormon name Ammon is the Hebrew pharyngeal fricative ayin (‘) — far from a certainty — we find onomastic wordplay involving the name Jacob (*ya’āqōb*) a name derived from the *ayin*-initial root \*’*qb*, in terms of the aleph-initial root \*’*bq*, “wrestle” (“And Jacob [*ya’āqōb*] was left alone; and there wrestled [*wayyē’ābēq*] a man with him”; “and the hollow of Jacob’s [*ya’āqōb*] thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled [*bēhē’ābēqō*]<sup>18</sup> with him,” Genesis 32:24–25) and the *het*-initial root \*’*hbq*, “embrace” (“And Esau ran to meet [Jacob], and embraced him [*wayhabbēqēhū*],”

15. For example, the *’amm-* names in which we expect a doubled radical, Aminadi (Alma 10:2–3) and Aminadab (Helaman 5:39, 41), lack such in their Book of Mormon renderings. Cf. Amminadab in the KJV in Exodus 6:23; Numbers 1:7; 2:3; 7:12, 17; 10:14; Ruth 4:19–20; 1 Chronicles 2:10, 6:22, 15:10–11. In the KJV New Testament is Matthew 1:4 and Luke 3:33 following the Greek rendering.

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

17. See HALOT, 64.

18. Or *bēhē’obqō*.

Genesis 33:4). Thus, *ʿm ʾmwn* ("people of Ammon"), a phrase repeated throughout the Book of Mormon (eighteen times in the Book of Alma and once in Helaman), works alliteratively as a wordplay, especially upon the shared *m* and the *n*, whether the initial consonant is the pharyngeal *ayin* (ʿ) or the glottal stop *aleph* (ʾ). The same is true of the name Ammon and the *ʾmn*-related terminology in Alma 17–27 (and later in chapter 48) with which it is frequently juxtaposed (at least in twenty instances in Alma 17–18 alone).<sup>19</sup>

Hebrew onomastic puns, like many wordplays and puns today, often involved roots etymologically unrelated to the name and with greater or lesser degrees of homophony, as illustrated by the foregoing example and many others that could be furnished. It should be further noted that I assume here, for purposes of my thesis, that such wordplays would have been detectable and meaningful in the "reformed Egyptian" script ("characters") Mormon used to record the Nephite language, which remained Hebrew to a greater or lesser degree throughout its history (see Mormon 9:32–33). Given the fact that we do not have the plates of Mormon available to us to definitively affirm or disavow the findings presented here, they must remain tentative.

Nevertheless, the internal evidence of the Book of Mormon text itself suggests that a replete thematic wordplay on *ʾmn*-related terminology in Alma 17–27 reinforced the idea that Ammon's name befitted his character — faithful, loyal, steadfast — a name he proved entirely in the performance of his mission among the Lamanites and the fruit his faithfulness bore in their lives. In terms of earlier Nephite figures, Ammon furnished the ideal model of faithfulness with whom Mormon could compare Moroni.

### **"Moroni ... Had Been Preparing the Minds of the People to Be Faithful": Moroni as a Teacher of Covenant Faithfulness**

A significant feature of Mormon's narrative in the book of Alma is a thematic paronomasia involving the names of two monarchic aspirants, Amlici and Amalickiah,<sup>20</sup> in terms of the Hebrew words *mālak* ("be the king,"<sup>21</sup> "become king, or queen, reign"<sup>22</sup>) and *melek* ("king").<sup>23</sup> Flushed with the success of his usurpation of the Lamanite

19. See Bowen, "Not Partaking," 249.

20. Bowen, "Faithfulness of Ammon," 69.

21. *HALOT*, 590–91.

22. *BDB*, 573–74.

23. *HALOT*, 591–92; *BDB*, 572–73.

kingship, Amalickiah's initial monarchic ambitions ("And **Amalickiah** was desirous to be a **king** [cf. Hebrew *melek*]," Alma 46:4) had achieved success to the point that he "sought also **to reign** [cf. Hebrew *limlök*] over all the land" (Alma 48:2). Mormon draws an ever-starker contrast between Amalickiah and his egocentric monarchism and Moroni's selfless, faithful leadership: "Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people **to be faithful** unto the Lord their God" (Alma 48:7). In ancient Hebrew, "to be faithful" would be expressed with a passive construction (participial or verbal) involving a form of *'mn* (cf., e.g., the Niphal plural participle *ne'ëmānîm*).<sup>24</sup> The Abrahamic covenant significance of this verbal root emerges in Genesis 15:6, where the narrator records Abraham's response to the Lord's promise of seed as numerous as the stars of heaven using a third-person masculine hiphil perfect of *'mn*: "And **he believed** [*wëhe'ëmin*] in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Abraham's "believing" or "having faith" in the Lord constituted a key aspect of his covenant relationship with him, as "unshaken faith in him" is for all who enter into the Abrahamic covenant and walk the covenant path anciently and now (see 2 Nephi 31:19).

In terms of a relationship with Yahweh rooted in the Abrahamic covenant, ancient Israel's "faith" in Yahweh begins with the Exodus event: "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and **believed** [*wayya'ämînu*] the Lord, and his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:30–31). Just as the Lord's faithful acts toward Abraham, beginning with "redeem[ing]" him (Isaiah 29:22) off of the altar in Ur of the Chaldees (Abraham 1:15–20),<sup>25</sup> became the basis for his own faith

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24. For other examples of the masculine plural Niphal participle *ne'ëmānîm*, see, e.g., Deuteronomy 28:59; Isaiah 8:2, 33:16, 55:3; Psalms 111:7; Proverbs 26:7; Job 12:20; Nehemiah 13:13. The construct form *ne'ëmnê* occurs in Psalms 101:6. The masculine singular form *ne'ëmān* occurs in such passages as Numbers 7:12; Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Samuel 2:35; 22:14; 25:28; 1 Kings 11:38; Isaiah 22:23, 25; 49:7; Jeremiah 42:5; Hosea 12:1; Proverbs 11:13; 25:13; Nehemiah 9:8. The feminine form *ne'ëmānâ* occurs in Isaiah 1:21, 26; Hosea 5:9; Psalms 19:7 [MT 8]. Another singular feminine form *ne'ëmenet* occurs in Psalms 89:28 [MT 29]. The feminine form *ne'ëmānôt*. This list is not comprehensive or exhaustive.

25. See Jennifer Lane, "The Redemption of Abraham," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant: Proceedings of the 1999 Book of Abraham Conference*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 167–74.



and faithfulness in Yahweh, the Lord’s acts that culminated in “saving” Israel became the basis for their covenant faithfulness. Brent Schmidt writes, “The covenant relationship is central to understanding the *’āman* lexeme of Hebrew faithfulness. The covenant of the patriarchs and the exodus generation was completed in Leviticus 26 by the commandments revealed at Sinai, accompanied by the conditional promise attached to them. [...] However, if Israel breaks the covenant, God will avenge the quarrel of the covenant. But mutual obligation also characterizes the covenant.”<sup>26</sup> These aspects of the covenant and the requirements of covenant faithfulness can clearly be seen in the covenant that Moroni concludes with the Nephites in Alma 44:11–23<sup>27</sup> and the behavior that characterizes his faithfulness throughout his life.

### “He Was a Man Who Was Firm in the Faith of Christ”: Moroni the Covenant Keeper

As Israelites steeped in the ancient Israelite covenant tradition, the Nephites’ concept of “faithfulness” and how it relates to the Abrahamic covenant directly derives from that tradition.<sup>28</sup> When Mormon essays to describe Moroni’s faithfulness, he is describing him as faithful to the divine covenant:

And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery; yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people. Yea, and he was **a man who was firm** [cf. Hebrew *ne’ēmān* or *yē’āmēn*] **in the faith**

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26. Brent J. Schmidt, *Relational Faith: The Transformation and Restoration of Pistis as Knowledge, Trust, Confidence, and Covenantal Faithfulness* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2022), 39.

27. See Matthew L. Bowen, “We Are a Remnant of the Seed of Joseph’: Moroni’s Interpretive Use of Joseph’s Coat and the Martial *nēs*-Imagery of Isaiah 11:11–12,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 169–92, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/we-are-a-remnant-of-the-seed-of-joseph-moronis-interpretive-use-of-josephs-coat-and-the-martial-nes-imagery-of-isaiah-1111-12/>.

28. See especially Noel B. Reynolds, “The Nephite Prophets’ Understanding of Faith and Faithfulness,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 21, no. 2 (2020): 73–97.

[cf. *be'ēmûnat*] of **Christ**, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. (Alma 48:11–13)

In Classical Hebrew, “faith” and “faithfulness” as a noun is expressed with the term *’ēmûnâ* or *’ēmûnat*. One of the ways in which the idea of being “firm” could be expressed in Classical Hebrew was through passive (Niphal) forms of the verb *’mn*: *ne’ēmān* or *yē’āmēn*, “to prove to be firm, reliable, faithful” (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Mormon’s description of Moroni as “a man firm in the faith of Christ” recalls three earlier uses of this phrase. Firstly, Mormon recalls his own description of the “people of Ammon” as the people of faithfulness:

[A]nd they were called by the Nephites the people of **Ammon** [or, people of faithfulness]; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after. And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. 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** [*\*wēne’ēmānû* or *\*wayyē’āmēnû*] **in the faith** [Hebrew *be’ēmûnat*] of **Christ**, even unto the end. (Alma 27:26–27)

In recalling this description and the scenes that led up to it, Mormon associates Moroni’s being “firm in the faith of Christ” with the people of Ammon being “firm in the faith of Christ.” The wordplay — a paronomasia on similar sounds or possibly involving the “repetition of words from the same root”<sup>30</sup> — in Alma 48:11–13 recalls the wordplay on Ammon as an onomastic symbol of the Lamanite converts’ “firmness” and “faithfulness.”

An additional detail confirms Mormon’s narratological strategy. Mormon’s characterization of Moroni as “a man that did not delight in bloodshed” finds a precedent in the very same text that describes the faithfulness of Ammon’s Lamanite converts: “And they did look upon

29. HALOT, 63. In the clause “who was firm,” masculine singular perfect or imperfect forms would be likely in Hebrew.

30. Lanham, *Rhetorical Terms*, 117. Lanham defines polyptoton as “Repetition of words from the same root but with different endings.” The example from Winston Churchill he cites (“So they go on in a strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute ... [etc.]”) suggests that polyptoton more precisely involves the repetition of variations of words from the same root.

shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence" (Alma 27:28). Mormon reiterates this point regarding Moroni in Alma 55:18–19.<sup>31</sup>

What's more, Mormon's description of Moroni as "a man who was firm in the faith of Christ" recalls his earlier statement regarding the "faithful ... who were true believers in Christ" in Alma 46:15: "And those who did belong to the church **were faithful**; yea, all those who **were true believers** in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their **belief** in Christ who should come." Mormon detailed how, for Moroni, Nephite covenant faithfulness was deeply rooted in their identity as a "remnant of the seed of Joseph": "And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not **stand fast in the faith** of Christ" (Alma 46:27). "Standing fast" in the covenant as the 'mn-derived concept of Yahweh's covenant "standing fast" is attested in Psalm 89:28: "My mercy [*ḥasdî*] will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall **stand fast** [*ne'ēmenet*] with him" (Psalm 89:28). Isaiah had direct reference to this in Isaiah 7, with its infamous polyptotonic pun on 'mn: "if ye will not believe [*'im lō' ta'āmînû*], surely ye shall not be established [*kî lō' tē'āmēnû*]" (Isaiah 7:9, KJV) ... "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (Isaiah 7:9, NRSV Updated Edition).

For Mormon and his predecessors, to have "died in the faith of Christ" was to have endured to the end: "But there were many who died with old age; and those who died **in the faith** of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose" (Alma 46:4). King Benjamin had similarly taught, "And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they **hold out faithful** to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things **are true**; for the Lord God hath spoken it" (Mosiah 2:41).

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31. In Alma 55:18–19, Mormon records the following regarding Moroni and his forces: "But had they awakened the Lamanites, behold they were drunken and the Nephites could have slain them. But behold, this was not the desire of Moroni; he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people from destruction; and for this cause he might not bring upon him injustice, he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness."

## “And This Was Their Faith”: Moroni, the Nephites, and the Lehitic Covenant

Following a vision of divine judgment, the prophet Habakkuk testified that “the just shall live by his faith [*be`ēmûnâtô*]” (Habakkuk 2:4, KJV) or “the righteous live by their faithfulness” (Habakkuk 2:4, NRSV Updated Edition). Psalm 31, one of “the hymns of the [Jerusalem] temple,”<sup>32</sup> declares that “the Lord preserveth [*nôšēr*] the faithful [*’ēmûnîm*]” Psalm 31:23 [MT 24]. John Goldingay notes that *’ēmûnîm* “is a rare form of a common root to refer to people who steadfastly keep their commitments.”<sup>33</sup> In this case, it refers to a covenant people who keep covenant commitments, namely divine commandments. Note the specific promised blessing associated with being *’ēmûnîm* in Psalm 21:23 is the protection and preservation of life.

Schmidt has recently noted that *’mn*-terms “expressed concepts of truth, confidence, relationships, and covenants.”<sup>34</sup> It is “faith [that] expresses itself in terms of behaviour, rather than systematic theology.”<sup>35</sup> The connection between *’mn*-terms like *’ēmûnâ* and *’ēmûnîm* to divine covenant and covenant-guided behavior, including trust in and reliance on God, is key to understanding Mormon’s explanation of Nephite faithfulness and how Moroni’s leadership fits into that framework:

Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives. **And this was their faith**, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, **if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land**; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; and also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, **the Lord would deliver them**. (Alma 48:14–16)

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32. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 45.

33. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 197.

34. Schmidt, *Relational Faith*, 38.

35. *Ibid.*, 37.

Mormon's explication of Nephtite "faith" and "faithfulness" in terms of "defend[ing]" and "preserv[ing]" life specifically recalls Ammon's martial expertise and the "faithfulness" ascribed to him in Alma 18. Lamoni's servants marveled at "the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his [Lamoni's] flocks" (Alma 18:2). Lamoni averred to his servants his belief<sup>36</sup> that Ammon had "come down at this time to preserve [their] lives" (Alma 18:4–5). Ammon asked Lamoni regarding his astonishment at this "faithfulness": "Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?" (Alma 18:16).

The clauses "God would prosper them in the land" and "that he would prosper them in the land" have reference to what Joseph Spencer and Kimberly Matheson have called the "Lehite covenant"<sup>37</sup> — i.e., the initial covenant made to Lehi and Nephi that finds repeated expression throughout the Book of Mormon: "Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 50:20; see also 1 Nephi 2:20; 2 Nephi 1:20).

The covenant nature of "faith" and "faithfulness" as articulated by Mormon here in Alma 48:14–16 directly recalls Moroni's speech to Zerahemnah as recorded in Alma 44:3–4: "But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and **our faith** in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this **our faith**. Now ye see that this is **the true faith** of God; yea, ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as **we are faithful** unto him, and unto **our faith**, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny **our faith**." In other words, God's "faithfulness" to the covenant — "the true faith of God" — would

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36. Cf. Alma 18:5.

37. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2016), 84, 88–90; Kimberly Matheson, "Retain All Their Oaths': Lehite Covenant and Secret Combinations in Alma 37," in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 411–32.

be manifest in his support, protection, and preservation of Nephite lives and the Nephite nation to the degree that they were “faithful” (*ne’ēmānū*) unto God and to their own “faith” (*’ēmūnā*).

Mormon’s correlation of covenant “faith” and “faithfulness” with the divine preservation of life in Alma 44:3–4 and 48:14–16 also looks forward to his inclusion of Helaman’s account of the sons of the people of Ammon, where Helaman makes this same correlation:

And now, their [i.e., the Ammonite sons] preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their **exceeding faith** in that which they had been taught to **believe** — that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that **they should be preserved by his marvelous power**. Now this was **the faith** of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are **firm**, and **they do put their trust in God** continually. (Alma 57:26–27)

Covenant faithfulness in “the sons of the Ammonites” (Alma 57:6) and in their parents, particularly their mothers who had taught them covenant faithfulness (Alma 56:47–48; 57:21), resulted in the divine preservation of every one of these sons in battle. Helaman’s repetition of *’mn*-related terminology (“exceeding faith,” “believe,” “the faith,” “firm”) here serves to reinforce the connection between Helaman’s “stripling Ammonites” (Alma 56:57) and Ammon himself, especially in the face of the traditional Nephite association of Lamanites with “unbelief” (cf. *lō’ ’ēmūn* [Deuteronomy 32:20], see Alma 56:2–3 in the context of 1 Nephi 12:22–23; Mosiah 1:5–6; Mormon 5:15, etc.).<sup>38</sup> This repetition of *’mn*-terms also helps Mormon’s readers see that the faith of these Ammonite warriors was the match of Moroni, the general’s surpassing faith.

### **“And This Was the Faith of Moroni”: Moroni as Covenant Keeper**

What Mormon describes as the Nephites’ *’ēmūnā* (“faith”) was also Moroni’s *’ēmūnā*: “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” (Alma 48:16). Again, the preservation of life and keeping the

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38. See Bowen, “Not Partaking,” 242–43.

commandments of God are cited as two major elements of “faith.” Moroni embodied both. Moroni’s “doing good” also embodied what it meant — or most often what it should have meant — to be Nephite.<sup>39</sup>

This “faith” was far more than an abstract belief or set of beliefs or even intellectual acceptance of certain ideas, it was the consistent, reliable, durative performance of covenant obligations that formed the basis for a relationship of trust. It is Yahweh’s constancy in the performance of covenant promises in the past that formed the basis for Mormon’s point. His point is not simply that Moroni believed “God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them.” His point is also that in the constancy of “doing good,” “preserving his people,” “keeping the commandments of God,” and “resisting iniquity,” Moroni qualified to receive covenant promises and blessings of divine warning and protection.

Earlier in Nephite history, Omni records that he had actively fought to preserve the lives of his people but had not maintained covenant faithfulness: “Wherefore, in my days, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, the Nephites, from falling into the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites. But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done” (Omni 1:2). Although Omni’s self-confession may be somewhat self-deprecative,<sup>40</sup> Omni’s son Amaron was well aware of the devastating consequences that covenant unfaithfulness had incurred on his people during his father’s and his own lifetimes. Amaron describes these consequences as the realization of divine judgments directly attached to the Lehitic covenant:

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39. See Bowen, “Not Partaking,” 245–48, 255–56; Matthew L. Bowen, “Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors” (PowerPoint presentation, 2019 FAIRMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 7–9, 2019), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2019/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words>. See further Matthew L. Bowen, “For Their Good Have I Written Them: The Onomastic Allusivity and Literary Function of 2 Nephi 25:8,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 77–90, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/for-their-good-have-i-written-them-the-onomastic-allusivity-and-literary-function-of-2-nephi-258/>.

40. John S. Tanner, “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights That You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 57–58.

Behold, it came to pass that three hundred and twenty years had passed away, and the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed. For the Lord would not suffer, after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from falling into the hands of their enemies, yea, he would not suffer that the words should not **be verified** [*\*lō' yē'āmēnū*],<sup>41</sup> which he spake unto our fathers, saying that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land. (Omni 1:5–6)

The Lord's words are faithful,<sup>42</sup> even if his people are not. Mormon, perhaps to a greater degree than all previous Nephite writers, knew personally and deeply the blessings of covenant faithfulness and the consequences of covenant infidelity.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, he prized the legacy of Moroni as a military leader of the Nephite people because he was, above all, a covenant keeper and “faithful” — *ne'ēmān* — to the covenant. Moroni was as effective at instilling faith and faithfulness in the Nephites in his station, as Ammon was in his station among the Lamanites.

### “Yea, Verily, Verily I Say unto You...”: The Dauntless Faithfulness of Moroni

At the highpoint of his praise of Moroni's faithfulness, Mormon continues to use *'mn*-related terminology: “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 power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). Although some might see it as a mean or mundane detail, Mormon's use of the idiom “verily, verily, I say unto you” is significant. The Synoptic Gospels ubiquitously attest Jesus's use of the expression,

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41. Cf. Genesis 42:20: “But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified [*wēyē'āmēnū dibrēkem*]”; 1 Kings 8:26: “And now, O God of Israel, let thy word [Qere: *dēbārēkā*; Ketiv: *dbryk*], I pray thee, be verified [*yē'āmēn*], which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father.”

42. See especially 2 Nephi 31:15; Revelation 21:5; D&C 1:37, 66:11, 68:34, 71:11. Cf. Jeremiah 42:5.

43. Mormon as a youth had “tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus” (Mormon 1:15), and yet, as he records, “a continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient to behold the ways of man” (Mormon 2:18). Mormon, faithful to the end, witnessed the final annihilation of his own people before being hunted and slaughtered by his enemies, as recorded by his son Moroni (see Mormon 8:2–3).



“verily, I say unto you” (Greek, *amēn legō humin*)<sup>44</sup> and the Gospel of John attests the doubly affirmative “verily, verily, I say unto you” (*amēn amēn legō humin*)<sup>45</sup> as a standard feature of Jesus’s vernacular. The Greek texts preserve the adverbial use of the Hebrew term *ʾāmēn* — “truly, verily”<sup>46</sup>; “surely”<sup>47</sup> used in both spoken Hebrew and Aramaic as a lucid example of Semitic interference. Mormon’s account of Jesus’s post-resurrection theophanies at the temple in Bountiful (and subsequent events pertaining thereto) records Jesus using both.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Mormon’s use of the idiom “verily, verily, I say unto you” in Alma 48:17 almost certainly derives from Jesus’s replete use of it, as preserved in the records he abridged to create what now constitutes 3 Nephi 11–27. The fact that Mormon only uses this idiom once — the only occurrence of this idiom within the Book of Mormon outside 3 Nephi 11–27 — strongly recommends that Mormon intended to make one of his most emphatic points using an idiom that Jesus himself used. To wit, he commends the dauntless faithfulness of Moroni (“the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever”; “the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men”) to his readers as if Jesus were making the point himself.

The repetition of *ʾāmēn* in averring truth or surety had a venerable history within the ancient Israelite tradition. In some contexts, the use of this word amounted to a “solemn formula” whereby “the hearer accepts ... the validity of a curse,”<sup>49</sup> or accepts “an acceptable order ... or announcement.”<sup>50</sup> In others, it “belong[ed] to doxology.”<sup>51</sup> Jesus’s and Mormon’s use of *ʾāmēn* echoes other solemn asseverations in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in the trial-by-ordeal Sotah ritual, a woman suspected of adultery was required to affirm the curses upon her with a double *ʾāmēn*: “And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy

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44. See Matthew 5:18; 6:2, 5, 16; 8:10; 10:15, 23; 11:11; 13:17; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34; Mark 3:28; 6:11; 8:12; 9:1, 41; 10:15, 29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9, 18, 25, 30; Luke 4:24; 11:51; 12:37; 13:35; 18:17, 29; 21:32; 23:43.

45. John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24–25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20–21, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18.

46. *BDB*, 53.

47. *HALOT*, 65.

48. The idiom “verily, I say unto you” occurs in 3 Nephi 11:23, 27; 12:18, 20; 13:2, 5, 16; 15:6, 20–21; 19:36; 20:24; 21:1–2, 26; 23:9; 27:9, 11, 27–28. The idiom “verily, verily, I say unto you” occurs in 3 Nephi 11:29, 31, 35, 39; 12:13–14, 26, 32, 34; 13:1; 14:1; 16:1, 9, 16; 18:15, 18, 27; 20:39, 46; 21:3; 27:4, 21.

49. *HALOT*, 64.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen [*ʾāmēn ʾāmēn*]” (Numbers 5:22). At Ezra’s reading of the Law during the Feast of the Tabernacles, as recorded in Nehemiah, the people asseverate Ezra’s blessing of the Lord: “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen [*ʾāmēn ʾāmēn*], with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:6). The similar colocation, *ʾāmēn wəʾāmēn* (“amen and amen”) occurs in several Psalms as temple hymns: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen [*ʾāmēn wəʾāmēn*]” (Psalm 41:13); “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen [*ʾāmēn wəʾāmēn*]” (Psalm 72:19); “Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen [*ʾāmēn wəʾāmēn*]” (Psalm 89:52).

### “A Man Like unto Ammon”:

#### The Logic of Mormon’s Comparison of Moroni to Ammon

It has been widely observed that Mormon’s admiration for Moroni is amply evident in the fact that he named a son after him.<sup>52</sup> Mormon’s similar admiration for Ammon, the son of Mosiah, is demonstrated in his comparison of Moroni to him.

In Alma 48:18, Mormon’s use of *ʾmn*-related terminology culminates in his comparison of Moroni and Ammon. A comparison of the *ʾmn*-related language used to emphasize the appropriateness of Ammon’s name in Mormon’s narration of the Lamanite conversion narratives — as in Alma 18:2, 10 — helps us to see Mormon’s rhetorical and narratological strategy in Alma 48:

Alma 18:2, 10	Alma 48:7; 13–18
<p>And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of <b>the faithfulness</b> [<i>ʾēmūnat</i>] of <b>Ammon</b> in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: <b>Surely</b>, 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? (Alma 18:2)</p>	<p>Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people <b>to be faithful</b> unto the Lord their God. (Alma 48:7)</p>

52. See Words of Mormon 1:1; Mormon 6:6, 11–12; Moroni 8:1.

Alma 18:2, 10	Alma 48:7; 13–18
<p>Now when king Lamoni heard that <b>Ammon</b> was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of <b>the faithfulness</b> [cf. <i>’ēmūnat</i>] of <b>Ammon</b>, saying: Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been <b>so faithful</b> [cf. <i>ne’ēmān</i>] as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them. (Alma 18:10)</p>	<p>Yea, and he [Moroni] was a man who <b>was firm in the faith</b> of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives. And this was <b>their faith</b>, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if <b>they were faithful</b> in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was <b>the faith</b> 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, <b>verily, verily</b> 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 power over the hearts of the children of men. Behold, he was a man like unto <b>Ammon</b>, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God. (Alma 48:13–18)</p>

Lamoni’s statement in Alma 18:10 (“Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful”), as presented by Mormon, is intended to echo a scene in the Saul-David cycle in which Ahimelech, chief of the priests of Nob acclaimed David’s faithfulness to Saul who was seeking David’s life: “Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who **is so faithful** [*ne’ēmān*] among all thy servants as David, which is the king’s son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is

honourable in thine house?” (1 Samuel 22:14). Using the \*’*mn* concept, the Lamanite conversion narratives favorably compare and contrast Ammon with David, and Lamoni with Saul and Jonathan (Lamoni’s father is also compared and contrasted to Saul).<sup>53</sup> Lamoni perceived in Ammon what Saul was loath to acknowledge in David. Ammon was reliable and loyal to Lamoni as David was to Saul. Both were, at one point, completely loyal to the Lord. After David becomes king, his faithfulness to his covenant obligations fails in 2 Samuel 11–12 in the matter of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, while the faithfulness of Ammon, who circumspectly eschews any appearance of monarchic ambition (see, e.g., Alma 17:24–25; 20:16–27), never does fail.

In affirming the faithfulness of Ammon, Mormon reports Lamoni twice using an adverbial term rendered “surely” in translation. In Hebrew, this concept could be expressed with the adverb *’āmēn* (as noted above) or with the similarly *’mn*-derived adverbs *’omnâ* (“verily, truly, indeed”; “in truth, indeed”),<sup>54</sup> *’umnām* (“verily, truly, indeed,”<sup>55</sup> “really?”<sup>56</sup>), and *’omnām* (“surely . . . , indeed, truly”<sup>57</sup> “verily, truly”).<sup>58</sup> Since *’umnām* is used in interrogative sentences, it is likely not the term Mormon uses here. Nevertheless, *’omnām*, *’omnâ*, and *’āmēn* all fit the context of Mormon’s presentation of Lamoni’s speech. The main point is that the repetition of an *’mn*-derived adverb in Alma 18:2, 10 along with additional *’mn*-related terminology not only emphasizes the connection Ammon with “faithfulness,” but helps us see the nature of the emphasis Mormon attempted to give Moroni’s “faithfulness” by his painstaking association of him with Ammon and the people of Ammon.

The association of Ammon with *’ēmûnâ* that helped transform the Lamanites’ unbelief to supreme faith and faithfulness was remembered until the final days of the Nephites: “Behold, it was the **faith** [cf. *’ēmûnat*] of **Ammon** and his brethren which wrought so great a miracle among the Lamanites” (Ether 12:15). It was Mormon’s son, Moroni — named for the one Mormon compares to Ammon — who made this paronomastic statement.

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53. Bowen, “Faithfulness of Ammon,” 71–73.

54. *HALOT*, 65, *BDB*, 53

55. *BDB*, 53.

56. *HALOT*, 65.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *BDB*, 53–54.

## Conclusion

Apart from Jesus Christ himself, the man whom Mormon most admired was Moroni, the famed Nephite military leader. The first person to whom Mormon directly compares Moroni was Ammon, the son of Mosiah. Mormon’s use and repetition of *’mn*-related terminology (“faithful,” “firm,” “faith,” and “verily [surely]”) — terminology he emphatically used to characterize Ammon and the people converted through Ammon’s faith and faithfulness — prepares the reader to appreciate this comparison.

Ammon, whose name, life, and mission Mormon repeatedly associates with “faith” and “faithfulness” — his own and that of his converts — forever changed Lamanite and Nephite history (see Ether 12:15), thus becomes the highwater mark of Nephite faithfulness that Moroni manages to match. The Moroni-Ammon comparison, with its preparatory *’mn* rhetoric, helps us more fully appreciate just how much Mormon loved and lionized both men.

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