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“Inspired by a Better Cause”: The Function of Alma 43:44–45 in Mormon’s Account of the Monarchic Wars against the Nephites

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: In Alma 43:44–45, as part of the narration of the war between Amalekite- (Amlicite-) and Zoramite-led Lamanites and the Nephites, Mormon juxtaposes the cause of the Amlicite/Amalekite-motivated “fighting for monarchy” with the Nephites’ “better cause” of fighting for wives, children, and religious freedom. In using this terminology, Mormon gives the conflict an onomastic framing: kingship or “monarchy” and Amlicites/Amalekites deriving from the Semitic root *mlk* versus Nephī/Nephites deriving from Egyptian *nfr*, “good,” “goodly,” etc. Mormon’s wordplay illuminates the shift from ethnically defined identity to identity based on our response to the invitation of the true King, Jesus Christ, to become his followers.

The themes of kingship and identity swirl turbulently through the books of Mosiah and Alma. Mormon weaves onomastic wordplay into Alma 43:44–45 to connect the earlier monarchic Amlicite/Amalekite wars with the later Nephite wars against Amalickiah and the king-men, while simultaneously offering a starkly contrasting vision of a priestly king in Alma 13 (including the use of wordplay on *mlk* there). Mormon’s wordplay additionally underlines the normative differences between Nephite and Lamanite groups who are becoming ever less ethnically defined. To this end, Mormon uses wordplay on *mlk* and on the traditional Nephite association with “good” from Egyptian *nfr* to broadly characterize the participants in these conflicts: on the one hand Amlici, Amalickiah, Amlicite/Amalekites (and Zoramites),

king-men, and the unconverted Lamanites led by these apostate individuals and groups, and on the other hand, the Nephites, especially the faithful, now joined with the converted Lamanites or the people of Ammon. Mormon introduces the designations, originally adopted by their enemies, of this latter group as “Christians” and their cause as “the cause of Christians.” The onomastic argument is that those who choose earthly monarchy and dominion, with all that Mosiah II taught it would entail (see Mosiah 29), stand against those who choose the “good” or “better cause” and whose cause Mormon ultimately aligns with those he designates as Christians, followers of the true King. Alma 43:45 stands out as another example of an ancient author using the rhetorical tools of wordplay and allusion to enhance and create meaning within an ancient text.

Demographics, Identities, and Characterizing Causes

The book of Alma presents the reader with a highly complicated demographic picture, and Mormon’s subtext, highlighted by onomastic wordplay, underlines questions of identity. Mormon’s abridged historical narrative covering this period acknowledges numerous migrations and shifting political and religious allegiances. The Amlicites/Amalekites attempt to reestablish Nephite-Mulekite (hereafter Mulochite)¹ kingship and subsequently ally themselves with the Lamanites. The people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi join the Nephites. The Zoramites likewise leave the Nephites to ally themselves with the Lamanites, and the Nephite “king-men” come out in support of the “Lamanite” monarchic aims spearheaded by Amalickiah and, later, his brother. Thus, when Mormon differentiates between Nephites and Lamanites and between Nephites and Amlicites/Amalekites along with the Zoramites, it is not clear that he is doing so based on the traditional ethnic categories presumed by the reader. Here, passages like Alma 43:45 have a potentially unique function that, if recognized, can be helpful for the modern reader: the Nephites, as a religious-political social affinity, become defined in terms of their “better cause” rather than any ethnicity, and the Lamanites, who are already categorized in terms of their “unbelief” in Nephite religious traditions, are further

1. The printer’s manuscript has the spelling Muloch in Mosiah 25:2. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 40* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Apologetic Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2006), 1464–70. The use of “Mulochite” here is intended to reflect that spelling.

defined by their pursuit of “monarchy” under Amalickiah and their Amlicite/Amalekite and Zoramite leadership.

Mormon’s abridged book of Alma is also a study in contrasts. In a deeper presentation of competing religious traditions, Mormon contrasts Melchizedek and priesthood leadership “after the order of [God’s] Son” with Nehor and religion after “the order of Nehor,”² Korihor, and “the iniquity after the manner of Korihor.”³ Similarly, Mormon contrasts the Christlike, self-abnegating political leadership of Alma and his sons, Ammon and the sons of Mosiah, Moroni, and even certain Lamanite kings, with the monarchic self-seeking of Amlici, Amalickiah, Ammoron the brother of Amalickiah, and the king-men. Mormon’s account of wars, troop movements, and military maneuvers also draws a contrast between the age-old issue of the right to rule—so central to Lamanite grievances⁴ against the Nephites and taken up as a cause in their own ways by Amlici, the Amlicites/Amalekites, Zerahemnah, Amalickiah, and Ammoron—and the Nephite desire to preserve family and religious freedom.

In Alma 43, Mormon directly contrasts the Zoramite- and Amlicite/Amalekite-motivated Lamanite cause with the Nephite cause, describing the latter as “a better cause”:

And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the **Amalekites**, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger. Nevertheless, **the Nephites** were inspired by a **better cause**, for they were not fighting for **monarchy** nor power but they were fighting for **their homes and their**

2. See, for example, Alma 24:29.

3. Alma 30:58. For an in-depth treatment of Nephite notions of kingship and priesthood as manifest in the book of Alma and elsewhere, see Avram R. Shannon, “After Whose Order? Kingship and Priesthood in the Book of After Whose Order? Kingship and Priesthood in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2021): 75–91, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol60/iss4/6/.

4. On the issue of the right to rule as an exploitable Lamanite grievance across time, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Political Dimension in Nephi’s Small Plates,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15–37, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol27/iss4/3/.

liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church. (Alma 43:44–45)

The Hebrew and Egyptian languages—the two Old World languages that must have had far-and-away the greatest influence on what became the Nephite language (see “A Note on Nephite Language,” below)—both lacked comparative adjectives⁵ in the way that we typically use them in English. Hebrew and Egyptian created a two-member comparative construction using a regular adjective with a preposition (*m-* or *min* in Hebrew, *r* in Egyptian).⁶ In other words, in expressing the idea of “better than” in Egyptian one would literally say “good to” (*nfr r*) or in Hebrew one would say “good from” (*ṭôb mi-*). As Gardiner’s definitive study notes, “The Egyptian adjective has no special forms to indicate the degrees of comparison. Comparison is effected by means of the preposition . . . *r*, which . . . signifies ‘more than,’ literally perhaps ‘relatively to.’”⁷ For example, the phrase *nfr r ht nbt* denoted “better than everything.”⁸ Janet Johnson notes that in Demotic, the stage of the Egyptian language that began during Lehi’s time, “the comparative form of the adjective was formed using the preposition *r*,”⁹ as in earlier stages of the language, citing the example *p3 ՚ r- i'r=k* (“the [man] greater than you”).¹⁰

Forms of biblical Hebrew *ṭôb mi-* show up in significant passages like 1 Samuel 15:18, which describes David as “better than” Saul [*haṭṭôb mimmekâ*, “better than thou”] and Proverbs 8:11, “wisdom is better than rubies [*ṭôbâ ḥokmâ mippêñîm*].” Some contexts demand that “good” (*ṭôb*) be understood as “better.” For example, the children of Israel complained to Moses, “Were it not **better** [*ṭôb*] for us to return into Egypt?” (Numbers 14:3). The people who supported David during

5. Comparative adjectives are adjectives that are used to make comparisons. For example, *better* and *worse* are comparative adjectives of quality. In English, comparative adjectives are typically, but not always, created by the addition of the *-er* suffix (e.g., *richer*, *poorer*). In English, superlative adjectives include words like *best* and *worst*. Superlative adjectives are typically formed by the addition of the *-est* suffix (e.g., *fastest*, *slowest*).
6. See Paul Joûon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 2:522–23; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 47 (§50).
7. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 47 (§50).
8. James B. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87.
9. Janet Johnson, *Thus Wrote ‘Onchsheshonqy: An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2000), 46n2 (§57).
10. Johnson, *Thus Wrote ‘Onchsheshonqy*, 46 (§57).

Absalom’s rebellion urged him not to go forth to battle: “Therefore now it is **better** [*tôb*] that thou succour us out of the city [or, send us help from the city]” (2 Samuel 18:3). Thus, there is a strong possibility that in describing the Nephites’ cause as “a better cause,” Mormon is using the expression “**good** cause” *understood* as a comparative. In any case, his description of the Nephite cause as “a **better** cause” alludes to the meaning of Nephi (as a form of Egyptian *nfr*,¹¹ denoting “good,” “goodly,” or “fair”)¹² in a way that updates for his readership the earlier ethnic associations of Nephites with “good” and “fair” to reflect more contemporary socio-political and religious realities. Mormon similarly updates the identifier “Nephites” in terms of “fair” in 3 Nephi 2:14–16 and 4 Nephi 1:10 (compare Mormon 6:17–19).

In this study, we will see that in Alma 43:44–45, while depicting Zerahemnah’s Zoramite- and Amlicite/Amalekite-led war, Mormon juxtaposes the two onomastic associations to create an effective narrative transition that epitomizes and contrasts the respective causes of the Zoramite- and Amlicite/Amalekite-led Lamanites—soon to be led by Amalickiah—and the Nephites. He does so in terms that graphically and aurally reflect the meaning of Nephi and the Semitic *mlk*-associations suggested by the names Amlici and Amalickiah as well as their gentilic derivatives: Nephites, Amlicites/Amalekites, and Amalickiahites (and also “king-men”).

Table 1. The *good* cause versus the *monarchic* cause.

lexical source	Egyptian <i>nfr</i> (<i>nfi</i>)	Semitic/Hebrew <i>mlk</i>
meaning	good, goodly, fair, fine	king, kingship (monarchy), to reign (as king)
name	Nephi	Melchizedek, Amlici, Amalickiah
gentilic association	Nephites	Amlicites/Amalekites, Amalickiahites, king-men

11. John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 189–91, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol1/iss1/12/; John Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009), 1–5, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book/pressing-forward-book-mormon-farms-updates-1990s.

12. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131–32. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 2:252–63.

This juxtaposition enhances Mormon's transition between the monarchic wars of the Amlicites/Amalekites in the first part of the book of Alma (Alma 2–28) and the monarchic wars instigated by Amalickiah, Ammoron, and the king-men in the latter part (Alma 46–62). Mormon associates the Amlicites/Amalekites with the pursuit of kingship or “fighting for monarchy.” The gentilic name Amlicites/Amalekites and terminology denoting “kingship” or “monarchy” both constitute likely derivations from the Semitic/Hebrew triliteral root *mlk* (hereafter \sqrt{mlk}) in Semitic languages. Mormon juxtaposes this monarchism against his association of the Nephites with the “good” or “better cause,” echoing the Egyptian meaning of the name Nephi (“good,” “goodly,” “fair,” “beautiful”). Mormon’s editorial work here is consistent both with his narratological association elsewhere of Amlici, Amalickiah, and the king-men with \sqrt{mlk} -associated terminology, and also with the etymological and popular association of Nephi and Nephites with “good” (“better”) or “fair” (i.e., *nfr*-terminology).

Mormon tells us that the Nephite cause is the *better* moral cause. So what practical, additional function does the wordplay serve? By linking this argument to “Nephites” as a gentilic name, Mormon underlines the extent to which *choosing* the *better* cause (a religious cause), rather than any other factor, is becoming the defining characteristic of Nephite identity. In doing so, Mormon’s account in the book of Alma is remarkably consistent with what Noel Reynolds identified as Nephi’s thesis statement for his small plates record: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).¹³ Thus, in this study we will also see in Alma 43:45 yet another example of how ancient authors used rhetorical tools such as wordplay and allusion to emphasize, enhance, and create meaning within ancient texts.

A Note on Nephite Language

As one born and raised in or near Jerusalem in the seventh century BCE, Nephi’s primary language was inevitably Hebrew. Nephi, however, asserts that he had also been “taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” including “the language of [his] father, which consist[ed] of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians”

13. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 20, no.2 (1980): 1–2, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol20/iss2/2/.

(1 Nephi 1:1–2). Nephi stated that he made a record in this “language” (1 Nephi 1:2). There is no current Latter-day Saint scholarly consensus on whether this refers to the (then) contemporary Egyptian language or to one of the various scripts (e.g., hieroglyphs, hieratic, carved hieratic, abnormal hieratic, or demotic)¹⁴ in which Egyptian was then being written and which were sometimes used to write other languages.

The best evidence suggests Lehi was a trained Manassite scribe and that he passed his training on to his son Nephi.¹⁵ Lehi and Nephi would certainly have been able to read Hebrew written in the contemporary paleo-Hebrew script (as distinct from the later and more familiar Aramean block script commonly used to write and copy Hebrew texts after the exile and up to the present day). If Lehi was indeed a scribe who could read and write Hebrew written in an Egyptian script, it is also probable that he would have known at least some of the Egyptian language itself.¹⁶ Ancient scribal activities frequently required the administrative use of multiple languages. Even a basic knowledge of Egyptian would explain Lehi giving Nephi an Egyptian name and Nephi’s knowledge of the meaning of his name (Egyptian *nfr*,¹⁷ one of the commonest Egyptian words of all of the stages of that language), not to mention the wordplay on this meaning that recurs throughout his record.¹⁸ In addition to the association of the derived gentilic term “Nephites” with being “good” or “fair,”¹⁹ it would also explain

14. See discussion in William Hamblin, “Reformed Egyptian,” *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 31–35, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1694&context=msr.

15. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–216, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes; See also Brant A. Gardner, “Nephi as Scribe,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 45–55, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1831&context=msr. Neal Rappleye, “Learning Nephi’s Language: Creating a Context for 1 Nephi 1:2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 151–59, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/learning-nephis-language-creating-a-context-for-1-nephi-12.

16. This is to say, Nephi probably knew more of the Egyptian language than just the sounds of the Egyptian letters and how to represent Hebrew in an Egyptian text.

17. Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” 189–91; Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” 1–5.

18. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181–95, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/nephis-good-inclusio.

19. Matthew L. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning

other Egyptianisms that occur in Nephi's small plates writing (e.g., the "rod" as "word" reflecting Egyptian *mdw* (later *md.t./mt.t.*)²⁰ and the "love of God" being "most desirable above all things," as playing on Egyptian *mr(i)* ("love, desire, wish") and echoing the name Miriam/Mary.²¹ Egyptian based wordplay in Nephi's small plates would be perfectly consistent with the influence of Egypt in Judah before and during Lehi's time. Even in the northern kingdom, from which Lehi's immediate forebearers were likely refugees, Egyptian influence would presumably go back to Joseph's own sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) speaking Egyptian from their birth. Indeed, Noel B. Reynolds avers that "Joseph's descendants were clearly accorded elite status and would have had access to advanced scribal education in Egypt."²² The Manassite scribal school to which Lehi and Nephi belonged, as proposed by Reynolds, would have furnished a very practical, if not perfect, vehicle for the perpetuation of the use of Egyptian language and script in the production of religious and non-religious documents in Israel and, later, in Judah. As a member of such a school, Nephi would thus be expected to have Egyptianisms in his writing.

In any case, the two languages (or writing systems) that Nephi's final successor Moroni said his people knew and used throughout the

of the Name Nephi," *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1308&context=insights; 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, Stanley A. Johnson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2011), 240–63, rsc.byu.edu/things-which-my-father-saw/not-partaking-fruit-its-generational-consequences-its-remedy. Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones'—Revisited," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–44, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/o-ye-fair-ones-revisited; 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" (FAIR Conference Presentation, Provo, UT, August 7–9, 2019), fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference_home/august-2019-old/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words.

20. Matthew L. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?" *Insights* 25, no. 2 (2005): 2–3, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol25/iss2/3/.

21. Matthew L. Bowen, "'Most Desirable Above All Things': Onomastic Play on Mary and Mormon in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 27–61, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/most-desirable-above-all-things-onomastic-play-on-mary-and-mormon-in-the-book-of-mormon.

22. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," 187.

duration of their roughly one-thousand-year history were Egyptian and Hebrew, though the use of these languages/scripts evolved overtime by Moroni’s own account. He writes, “And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:32–33). In this study, I will proceed on the assumption that the Nephites linguistic inventory remained heavily Hebrew and included some Egyptian, an assumption corroborated by the abundance of Hebrew and Egyptian names in the Nephite onomasticon and by the witness of Moroni, the last Nephite writer, who said they used both languages even during his own time.

Melchizedek and Melchizedek Priesthood: A Righteous Foil to the Monarchism of Amlici, the Amlicites/Amalekites, Amalickiah, and the King-men

One strong indication that the Nephite language remained essentially Hebrew during the time of Alma₂ is the wordplay on Melchizedek that Alma uses. His speech contrasts priesthood “after [God’s] holy order, which was after the order of his Son”²³ with the claims of the people of Ammonihah, many of whom were “after the faith and order of Nehor” or “of the profession of Nehor” (Alma 14:16, 18). Notably, Alma’s wordplay on Melchizedek and Salem does not involve the use of explanatory glossing (“being by interpretation,” “which is”). In contrast, the New Testament letter to the Hebrews’ explanation of Melchizedek and Salem does gloss these Semitic names for its Greek-speaking Jewish audience of Christians (Hebrews 7:2). Alma’s speech assumes his apparently Hebrew-speaking (or at least Hebrew-knowledgeable) audience will make the connections between the names and the relevant Semitic terminology from which those names are built. Although salient within the immediate context of the Ammonihah narrative and Alma₂’s goal of bringing the Nehorite apostates of Ammonihah to repentance, Alma’s wordplay on Melchizedek and Salem is even more significant in the broader context of the book of Alma, where monarchic assertion or reassertion is the dominant political issue.

23. Alma 13:1–2. See also Alma 13:6–11, 14, 16, 18.

Alma's Melchizedek wordplay begins in earnest with an emphasis on the *ṣedeq* or *ṣedāqâ*—the “righteousness”—practiced by those who “became high priests of God” after his “holy order.” Alma states, “Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their **righteousness** [*ṣedeq/ṣedāqâ*] before God, they choosing to repent and work **righteousness** [*ṣedeq/ṣedāqâ*] rather than to perish; therefore they were called after this holy order” (Alma 13:10–11). Alma frames the “repentance” and “righteousness” of the “many” who became “high priests” after the same “order” as Melchizedek as “choosing” to live the doctrine of Christ (“their exceeding faith and repentance”). This doctrine provides a consistently defining aspect of Nephite religion over the span of Nephite history²⁴ and could not be more opposite to the tenets of “the profession of Nehor,” whose adherents “did not believe in the repentance of their sins” (Alma 15:15). At this point it is worth considering whether the marriage of Nehorism and Amlicite (possibly Mulochite) monarchism included the religious concept that they were entitled to become “kings” (i.e., they were would-be priest-kings) or, more likely, that that they were kings by birth and had divine rights over priesthood, such as we see king Josiah and, later, king Noah specifically exercise.²⁵ Either way, they seemed to have assumed royal and priestly prerogatives absent the doctrinal principle of repentance, perhaps as a perversion of the Davidic enthronement liturgy of Psalm 110:4: “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Hence Alma's emphasis on repentance in his speech.) Mormon later says the following of the monarchist Nephite (probably Mulochite) “king-men”: “Now **those who were in favor of kings** [*mēlākîm*] **were those of**

24. See, e.g., Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol31/iss3/3/; Noel B. Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1492/; Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Mormon,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (2015): 218–34, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1479/.

25. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Putting Down the Priests: A Note on Royal Evaluations, (*wē*)*hišbit*, and Priestly Purges in 2 Kings 23:5 and Mosiah 11:5,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 105–14, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/putting-down-the-priests-a-note-on-royal-evaluations-wehisbit-and-priestly-purges-in-2-kings-235-and-mosiah-115.

high birth, and they sought to be kings [*mēlākîm*]; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people” (Alma 51:8).

Nehorite monarchists, especially those of Mulochite descent, likely believed that they were reviving and preserving a more ancient way of life. For them, Nephite kingship and Nephite religion (including the “good”²⁶ of Nephi’s doctrine of Christ) had evidently been a disappointment, and they regarded the dissolution of kingship in Zarahemla as altogether unacceptable. This would be particularly true if the king were the central religious authority in their religion as in monarchic Judah under the descendants of David (the Mulochites were descendants of David through Zedekiah).²⁷ Alma needed to call upon an even earlier royal religious authority—one preceding Zarahemla, Muloch, Zedekiah, Nephi, or even king David, one to whom even Abraham, the great patriarch of the covenant, was subordinate—in order to persuade the Nehorites of Ammonihah to repentance. That figure was Melchizedek.

For Alma, who, as chief judge, passed the death sentence on Nehor²⁸ and survived mortal combat with the Nehorite pretender to kingship, Amlici,²⁹ the issue remained extremely personal and pressing. Alma continues his discussion of Melchizedek priesthood with even more direct wordplay on Melchizedek and Salem:

Now this **Melchizedek** [*malkî-ṣedeq*, king-of-righteousness] was a king [*melek*] over the land of **Salem** [*šālēm*]; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of **wickedness** [*rā‘â*, or less commonly *rešâ*, the diametric antonyms of *ṣedeq* and *ṣedāqâ*, “righteousness”]. But **Melchizedek** [*malkî-ṣedeq*, king-of-righteousness] having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and **Melchizedek** [*malkî-ṣedeq*] did establish **peace** [*šālōm*] in the land in his days; therefore he was called **the prince of peace** [*íśar-šālōm*; cf. Isaiah 9:6], for he was **the**

26. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” 181–95.

27. See especially Omni 1:14–18; Mosiah 25:2; Helaman 8:21.

28. Alma 1:10–16.

29. Alma 2:29–31.

king of Salem [*melek šālēm*; cf. Genesis 14:18]; **and he did reign** [*wayyimlōk*] under his father [’ābiw]. (Alma 13:17–18)

Using a Hebrew/Semitic wordplay thoroughly perceptible to his audience, Alma highlights Melchizedek as the “king of righteousness,” “king of Salem,” and “prince of peace” who brings about the repentance of his people and establishes “righteousness”³⁰ and “peace” in “Salem,” the land of “peace” during his “reign.” Thus, using Melchizedek as a Christological type (compare Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6), Alma establishes the anteriority of Melchizedek’s priesthood and the type of kingship he personified vis-à-vis the violent monarchism of the Amlicites and violent priesthood of the Nehorite religion. His discussion also provides a narrative foil or contrast to the later violent monarchism of the Amlicite/Amalekite- and Zoramite-led Lamanites and the even later monarchic rule of Amalickiah and his brother Ammaron. Alma, hewing closely to Nephi’s presentation, establishes the validity of the doctrine of Christ broadly—and the doctrine of repentance in particular—over a religion that rejected Christ and the doctrine of repentance. Alma’s message to the Nehorites of Ammonihah was that by repenting and embracing the practice of working “righteousness” and priesthood “after the order of the Son of God” as typified by Melchizedek, they could avoid perishing and instead “enter into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 12:34–37; 13:6, 12–13, 16, 29, citing Psalm 95:7–11).

“That They Might Establish a Kingdom unto Themselves over the Land”: The Amlicites (Amalekites) and the Attempt to Reestablish Kingship

In Alma 43, Moroni repeatedly contrasts and highlights the differences in the respective motivations of the Nephites and the Zoramite- and Amalekite/Amlicite-led Lamanites. He begins by describing the family-centric “design” of Nephite self-defensive military measures: “And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty,

30. Alma’s wordplay in Alma 13:10–11, 17–18 on Melchizedek and Salem reflects the same ancient tradition also reflected in JST Genesis 14:36: “And this Melchizedek [*malkî-ṣedeq*], having thus established **righteousness** [*ṣedāqā*], was called **the king of heaven** [*melek šāmayim*] by his people, or, in other words, **the King of peace** [*melek šālōm* or *melek šālēm*].”

that they might worship God according to their desires” (Alma 43:9). The fourfold family-centric motivation of “lands,” “houses,” “wives,” and “children” is reinforced by the fourfold political and religious motivations of “rights,” “privileges,” “liberty” and “worship[ing] God according to their desires.”

Mormon then describes Lamanite motivations and intentions explicitly in terms of establishing a “Lamanite” monarchy (kingship) “over all the land” under the military leadership of their chief captain,³¹ Zerahemnah and his Amlicite/Amalekite and Zoramite leadership sub-strata: “And now, as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage **that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land**; and he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem” (Alma 43:29–30). The Hebrew term—and thus possibly the original Nephite term—for “kingdom” is *mamlākâ* (“dominion,” “kingdom,” “kingship,” “royal sovereignty”).³² This term signals a narrative return to issue of kingship raised by Amlici’s attempt to reestablish kingship among the Nephites in Alma 2: “Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish **Amlici to be a king** [*lēmelek*] over the people” (Alma 2:2).

I have previously argued that Mormon’s narrative engages in a thematic wordplay or paronomasia on the names Amlici and Amalickiah in the Book of Alma in terms of the Hebrew verb *mālak*³³ (“to be king,

31. Alma 43:4–6 strongly suggests that Zerahemnah was either an Amlicite/Amalekite or a Zoramite: “For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon. And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader. And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites” (Alma 43:4–6).

32. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 545. Hereafter cited as HALOT.

33. Matthew L. Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator* 15,

rule"; "install as someone as king,"³⁴ "be, or become king, or queen, reign"³⁵). More recently, Lyle H. Hamblin has argued that all *mlk*-adjacent names (including names like Amulek) should be viewed in terms of this Semitic root.³⁶

Amlici's attempt to reestablish the kingship ended by Mosiah₂, with himself as the renewed king in Zarahemla, was quickly recognized as a threat to religious freedom: "Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici" (Alma 2:3).

And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against **Amlici**, that **he was not made king** over the people. Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor. And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate **Amlici to be their king**. Now **when Amlici was made king** over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him. Now **the people of Amlici** were distinguished by the name of **Amlici**, being called **Amlicites**; and the remainder were called **Nephites, or the people of God**. (Alma 2:7–11)

Mormon's statement here defines "Nephites" not in ethnic terms, but in terms of religious and political opposition to Amlici and a return to monarchy. In making this contrast, Mormon is training us to recognize what he means by "the people of God" later on. Not only are they called by his name as his covenant people, but they oppose human monarchy. Mormon's use of the term "remainder" suggests that, although the opponents of Amlici's monarchism prevailed politically,

no. 2 (2014): 69.

34. HALOT, 590–91.

35. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 573–74.

36. Lyle H. Hamblin, "Proper Names and Political Claims: Semitic Echoes as Foundations for Claims to the Nephite Throne," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2024): 409–44, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/proper-names-and-political-claims-semitic-echoes-as-foundations-for-claims-to-the-nephite-throne.

religious Nephites themselves may have constituted a minority faction within their broader society and state.

Amlici’s and the Amlicites’ insurrection aimed at monarchic renewal is only the first in a series of such attempts to reimpose kingship in Zarahemla, as chronicled in Mormon’s abridged book of Alma. This part of Mormon’s narrative (Alma 43–44) also helps to frame this ongoing issue as a political and religious rather than an ethnic one, with the Nephites being defined as “the people of God” or “people of the Lord” vis-à-vis those seeking kingship. Mormon’s wordplay will continue to weave this theme of identity through the history of these struggles and ultimately offer an enriched and powerful definition of what it now means to be a Nephite.

“Behold, Are Not This People as Good as Thy People”? The Amlicites/Amalekites as Former Nephites

The best evidence, as Royal Skousen has shown, suggests that the Amlicites and the Amalekites Mormon describes are the same people(s),³⁷ having the same Mulechite origin and the same goal of monarchy. Mormon’s replete wordplay on Amlici/Amlicites/Amalekites, Amalickiah, and king-men in terms of \sqrt{mlk} monarchic terminology throughout the book of Alma recommends monarchic usurpation as a dominant concern of the entire book.³⁸ Apart from the events of Alma 2, their identity as apostate Nephites is further suggested in Alma 21:2–3: “Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem. Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations.” Mormon definitively confirms their identity as apostates in Alma 43:13: “The Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those

37. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1605–9. For a contrary view, see Benjamin McMurtry, “The Amlicites and Amalekites: Are They the Same People?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 269–81, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/the-amlicites-and-amalekites-are-they-the-same-people/.

38. See, e.g., Alma 46:4–5; 47:1–35; 49:10, 25; 51:5–21 (cf. 60:16–17); 52:3; 54:16; 55:5; 62:6–9.

who had dissented from the Nephites, **who were Amalekites** and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah.” This makes the identity of the Amalekites as Amlicites even more likely.

It is no small narrative detail that Aaron, Mosiah₂’s presumptive heir and heir to the Nephite throne, would be the one to go to the eponymous city of “Jerusalem” to attempt to evangelize Lamanites and Nephite dissenters who felt the most antagonistic toward the Nephites over the issue of kingship and the right to rule: “Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite [Amlicite] and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people **as good** as thy people?” (Alma 21:5). Another way of understanding the force of the Amalekite’s question within the Amlicite-Nephite cultural context is “Aren’t we as good as you?” or even “Aren’t we, like you, also Nephites?”³⁹

The Amalekite expects that the answer to the last question is “yes,” while the audience knows that the answer to this question, at least from a moral perspective, is “no.” However, the Amlicite/Amalekite’s expectation is based on the historical reality that his people had been Nephites and apparently still worshiped the same deity.⁴⁰ The contentious Amlicite/Amalekite’s challenge is best understood against the backdrop of Nephite self-perceptions. The name Nephi, as a derivation of Egyptian *nfr*, was understood to mean “good” or “fair.” The Gentilic derivative, Nephites, came to connote the “good” or “fair ones” amongst the Nephites themselves (see, e.g., 3 Nephi 9:2; 4 Nephi 1:10 and especially Mormon 6:17–19).⁴¹

Jacob’s Critique: Can the Nephites Claim the “Better Cause”?

Behind the Lamanites’ and Nephites’ respective motivations stood *motivators*. Behind the one, monarchy and the right to rule, behind the other, family, family preservation, and religious liberty—especially

39. I thank Rebecca Reynolds Lambert for this insightful and helpful suggestion on the framing of the Amalekite’s question. Rebecca Reynolds Lambert, personal communication to author, 19 November 2024.

40. See especially Alma 22:7.

41. Matthew L. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol23/iss6/2/; Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’—Revisited,” 315–45.

the right to practice traditional Israelite religion. The Nephite practice of Israelite religion was, of course, informed by a knowledge that Jehovah, the true “king of heaven” or “heavenly king,”⁴² would come among his people in mortality and atone for their sins and bring to pass the resurrection of the dead.

Love of family and family preservation had not always been the province of “Nephite” culture, however. Jacob, Nephi’s brother—still alive, writing, and functioning as a prophet-priest in the third generation of Nephite society—levied some pointed criticism against the growing Nephite belief that greed was good and perhaps an implicit corollary, that wealth made one more “Nephite.”⁴³ He declared, “And because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are **better** [literally, good] than they” (Jacob 2:13). Jacob recognized the potential problems of the Nephites thinking of and characterizing themselves in worldly terms of “good” or “fair” and thus uses the same wordplay, later applied so differently by Mormon, to puncture Nephite pride and question their goodness.

Jacob reserved even more pointed criticism for the Nephite men vis-à-vis the Lamanites, who demonstrated a higher cultural commitment to family love and integrity: “Behold, [the Lamanite] husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and **their unbelief** and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much **better** [literally, good] are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?” (Jacob 3:7). As with Alma 43:45, Jacob’s statement is best viewed against the backdrop of Nephite self-perceptions as the “good” or “fair ones” and their negative perceptions of the Lamanites as those who “dwindle in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:23–24; cf. *lō’-ēmun*, Deuteronomy 32:20).⁴⁴ The Lord, through Jacob, further

42. See, e.g., 2 Nephi 10:14; Mosiah 2:19; Alma 5:50.

43. In other words, this attitude perhaps represents an early Nephite version of the “prosperity gospel.”

44. 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* (40th Annual Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 242–45, rsc.byu.edu/things-which-my-father-saw/not-partaking-fruit-its-generational

alluded to this self-perception in condemning the immorality of the Nephite husbands: “And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of **the fair daughters** of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Jacob 2:32; compare Mosiah 19:13; 3 Nephi 8:5; Mormon 6:17–19). Indeed, the power of Jacob’s rhetorical point in Jacob 3:7—perhaps echoing the oracle in Jacob 2:32—is that Lamanite fidelity to their families potentially made them more “Nephite”—*better* or, literally, “good”—than the Nephites themselves.

Whether the Nephites’ “second king”⁴⁵ was Nephi’s immediate successor or his successor’s successor,⁴⁶ Jacob records that “the peo-

-consequences-its-remedy; see also 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,” (presentation, FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 2019), fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference_home/august-2019-old/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words.

45. This seems to be the gist of Jacob’s statement in Jacob 1:11: “Wherefore, the people were desirous to retain in remembrance his name. And whoso should reign in his stead were called by the people, second Nephi, third Nephi, and so forth, according to the reigns of the kings; and thus they were called by the people, let them be of whatever name they would.” Apparently, Jacob lived to see the Nephites’ third or fourth king.
46. Nephi, by his own account, was hesitant to call himself a king: “And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power” (2 Nephi 5:18). Some evidence points to Nephi being a king, on which see John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 328, 334–36. On the other hand, it is not clear that Nephi considered himself a king. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 151–89. Taylor Halverson has recently made the case that regarding his legacy, Nephi wanted to be seen more like Moses and less like King David. See Taylor Halverson, “Nephi Wanted to Be a Prophet Like Moses, Not a King Like David,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 281–92, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/nephi-wanted-to-be-a-prophet-like-moses-not-a-king-like-david. For his own part, Jacob seems to have had antimonarchic leanings or at least ambivalence: “And **this land shall be a land of liberty** unto the Gentiles, and **there shall be no kings upon the land**, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. And I will fortify this land against all other nations. And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish, saith God. For **he that raiseth up a king against me shall perish, for I, the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king**, and I will be a light unto them forever, that hear my words” (2 Nephi 10:11–14).

ple of Nephi, under the reign of the second king, began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son" (Jacob 1:15). Jacob explicitly says that the Nephite men had sought to justify their sexual immorality using the monarchic behavior of David and Solomon as detailed in scripture: "[They] seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son" (Jacob 2:23).

Deuteronomy 17:14–20 constitutes what is sometimes called the Deuteronomic Law of Kingship. Jacob's criticism of the Nephites pointedly refers to two key parts of this law that they have broken. First, this law specifically mandates that the king not "multiply wives": "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deuteronomy 17:17). This was not a law against polygamy per se, but against monarchic excess. The Deuteronomist writer(s) evaluated the kings of Israel and Judah in terms of their observance of the book of Deuteronomy, including the Law of Kingship.⁴⁷ The Deuteronomistic narrator of 2 Samuel 3 lists numerous sons born to David through six wives and recounts David seizing back his former wife Michal from her then-current husband Phaltiel (see 2 Samuel 3:15).⁴⁸ The same narrator later tells the story of David's indulgent "taking" of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah in order to cover up the resultant pregnancy and of David's subsequent marriage to Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12). This is followed by the mention of at least ten concubines, left behind to manage the palace when David flees, that David's son, Absalom, later takes and publicly rapes (2 Samuel 16:21–22; cf. 2 Samuel 15:16). The (likely) same Deuteronomistic writer later reports even grander promiscuity by Solomon, David's son and heir (by Bathsheba). The astounding numbers are almost certainly symbolic, emphasizing the totality of Solomon's apostasy:

But king Solomon loved many strange [foreign] women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of

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

48. 1 Samuel 25:44 records, "But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim." Phalti is a hypocoristic form of the name Phaltiel.

the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: **and his wives turned away his heart.** For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that **his wives turned away his heart after other gods:** and **his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God,** as was the heart of David his father. (1 Kings 11:1–4)

In the Deuteronomistic view, David and Solomon had both been guilty of multiplying wives, and David guilty of murder, but only in the case of Solomon did his wives “turn away his heart” from Jehovah as Deuteronomy 17:17 warned against. In other words, the Nephite men, in “indulging themselves” sexually in desire or deed with “many wives and concubines” were engaging in bad “monarchic” behavior and having *their* hearts turned away from the Lord.

In a second offense, the Nephite men also “began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride” (Jacob 1:18). In the same Deuteronomic statute that forbids the king from “multiply[ing] wives,” we read, “Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold” (Deuteronomy 17:17). It is worth noting here that when Amalickiah murdered the Lamanite king through subterfuge (Alma 47:20–31) and then married the widowed Lamanite queen, he was also engaging in the prototypical bad “monarchic” behavior.⁴⁹

Centuries after Jacob’s time, traditional hatred persisted between the Nephites and the Lamanites. By Moroni’s time the composition of these groups had been shuffled and reshuffled to the extent that the Nephites included many converted Lamanites—while the unconverted Lamanites, who had always included various numbers of Nephite apostates and dissenters,⁵⁰ now specifically included the

49. See, e.g., Alma 47:35: “And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.” The type of monarchic “cunning” represented by Amlici (Alma 2:1–2) and Amalickiah (Alma 46:10; 47:35; 51:27) met its match in the “stratagem[s]” of Moroni (see Alma 43:30; compare especially Alma 44:9).

50. See, e.g., Alma 47:35: “And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the

Amalekites, Zoramites, and Amulonites. In Alma 43, Mormon, as we have noted, details the respective motivations of the Lamanites and Nephites generally as opposing groups. He specifically notes that the Lamanites sought kingship—a kingdom—over all the peoples concerned, while the Nephites primarily sought protection of family and religious freedom.

The dominant Hebrew term for “kingship” and “kingdom” as a political institution was *mamlākâ* (“dominion, kingdom”; “kingship, royal sovereignty”),⁵¹ a derivation of Semitic *√mlk*. It takes little imagination to hear the aural similarity of *mamlākâ* to Amlicites/Amalekites, and as I will note later, to Amalickiah. Mormon is underlining these connections in ways we cannot miss. In the Hebrew and Egyptian languages there are few other words that sound remotely like these names. One exception is Hebrew *mal’āk* (“messenger,” “angel”), but this term is so similar in sound to *melek* (“king”), that the two were sometimes confused (e.g., 2 Samuel 11:1)⁵² or even made the object of wordplay (see, e.g., 2 Samuel 14:17; 19:27). From an aural perspective, the Biblical national name Amalek (*‘āmālēq*) and Amalekites (*ha‘āmālēqî*) might seem promising. However, all of the evidence of the Hebrew Bible suggests that ancient Israelites held these names and the people they designated in extreme contempt.⁵³ In other words, it is not likely that any Israelite (or Nephite) adopted the name of this longstanding national enemy as a personal name. The Semitic/Hebrew candidate as the origin of these names remains *√mlk*, and forcefully imposed kingship, wielded by literal king-men, highlights the moral nature of the Nephite alternative.

Behind the Lamanites’ and Nephites’ respective motivations stood inspiring *motivators*. According to Mormon, among the unconverted Lamanites’ motivators were charismatic Nephite apostates, Zoramites

favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.”

51. HALOT, 595.

52. The consonantal Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 11:1 has “kings” written *ml’kym* which makes it morphologically identical to “messengers” (*ml’kym*) as written in 2 Samuel 11:4. Many have argued that this is a deliberate wordplay.

53. See, for example, Paul Y. Hoskisson’s comments in *The Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Amalickiah,” onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=AMALICKIAH.

and Amlicites/Amalekites: “**They were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites**, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger” (Alma 43:44).

Mormon observes that among the Nephites’ motivators were also *people*. No one can deny the enduring charisma of Captain Moroni. More importantly, however, “**The Nephites** were inspired by **a better cause**, for they were not fighting for **monarchy** nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church” (Alma 43:45). What made the Lamanites arguably “better” than the Nephites during Jacob’s time, i.e., their loyalty to their wives and children despite their learned hatred for the Nephites (see again Jacob 3:7), is a commitment Mormon now identifies with the Nephites.

The Nephites’ motivators focused on everything that made for quality of life. Their aspiration was also emphatically religious: “And **they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God**; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies” (Alma 43:46). At the moment of greatest difficulty, Moroni wisely and strategically appealed to these motivations:

And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and **inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage**. And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and **they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage**. And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that self-same hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon. (Alma 43:48–50)

The Nephites’ “better cause” made it easier for Moroni to inspire his men. Because it was God’s cause, it allowed them to prevail over the unconverted Lamanites, despite their inferior numbers.

“The People of God” and “the Cause of Christians”

Some later narrative remarks help us to see how the Nephites’ “better cause” relates to their faith in Jesus Christ as Jehovah during the period described within the book of Alma. Over time, the gentilic term “Nephites” seems to have become a political and often a specifically religious designation. In Alma 2:11, Mormon glosses “Nephites” with a religious description: “Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God” (Alma 2:11). The Israelites used the designation “people of God” (*am ʾělōhîm* or *‘am hā’ělōhîm*) at least occasionally with reference to themselves (see 2 Samuel 14:13 and Judges 20:2).⁵⁴ They also self-referentially used the expression “people of the Lord” (i.e., people of Yahweh) with some frequency.⁵⁵ The Book of Mormon also attests the collocations “people of the Lord”⁵⁶ and “covenant people of the Lord.”⁵⁷

The expression “people of God” first occurs in the Book of Mormon when Mormon states that the church in Zarahemla led by Alma the Elder was called by this name: “And **they were called the people of God**. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land” (Mosiah 25:24). This seems to have been done in fulfillment of the baptismal covenant first administered at the waters of Mormon: “as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and **to be called his people**” (Mosiah 18:8). Just as significantly, it reiterated the effort that king Benjamin made in his sermon to unite the people of Nephi and the people of Muloch by “giv[ing] this people a name, that thereby they may be distinguished above all the people which the Lord God hath brought out of the land of Jerusalem . . . a name that never shall be blotted out, except it be through transgression” (Mosiah 1:11–12). King Benjamin, was a “just man”⁵⁸ who as

54. Cf. *laos tou theou* in Hebrews 4:9; 11:25; or *laos theou* in 1 Peter 2:10.

55. See, e.g., Numbers 16:41; Deuteronomy 27:9; Judge 5:11; 2 Samuel 1:12; 6:21; 2 Nephi 9:6; Ezekiel 36:20; and Zephaniah 2:10.

56. 1 Nephi 22:14; 2 Nephi 1:19; 6:13; Mosiah 1:13; 18:34; 19:1; 27:10; Alma 9:20; 24:29; 27:5, 14, 30; 54:8; Helaman 16:23; 3 Nephi 6:29.

57. 1 Nephi 14:14; 15:14; 2 Nephi 6:13; 30:2; Mormon 8:15, 21.

58. Omni 1:24; Mosiah 2:4.

king pointed his people to their “heavenly King.”⁵⁹ He asked them to take the name of that king and then put them formally under covenant to take Christ’s name upon them, and while using a clever wordplay on his own name (“son of the right hand”)⁶⁰ as typological of Christ:

And now, because of the covenant which **ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters** [Hebrew *bānâw ūběnôtâw*; compare Hebrew *bin/bēn*, “son”]; **for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you** [quoting Psalm 2:7]; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, **ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters** [*bānâw ūběnôtâw*; compare 2 Samuel 7:14]. And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. **There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.** And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be **found at the right hand** [*yāmîn*] of God, for **he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ.** And now it shall come to pass, that **whosoever shall not take upon him the name of Christ must be called by some other name; therefore, he findeth himself on the left hand of God.** And I would that ye should remember also, that this is the name that I said I should give unto you that never should be blotted out, except it be through transgression; therefore, take heed that ye do not transgress, that the name be not blotted out of your hearts. **I say unto you, I would that ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.** (Mosiah 5:7–12)

59. Mosiah 2:19.

60. See Matthew L. Bowen, “Becoming Sons and Daughters at God’s Right Hand: King Benjamin’s Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 2–13, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol21/iss2/2/.

The covenantal nature of the designation "people of God" and the close variant "people of the Lord" appears to ultimately hark back to King Benjamin's sermon and it remains consistent throughout the narratives of the books of Mosiah and Alma.

In Mosiah 26, Mormon uses the designation "people of God" to distinguish between faithful Nephites and those who embraced other religious ways: "And now in the reign of Mosiah they [the unbelievers] were not half so numerous as the people of God; but because of the dissensions among the brethren they became more numerous" (Mosiah 26:5). Just before the Amlici/Amlicite crisis, Mormon uses this phrase again to distinguish the faithful Nephites from other Nephites: "For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among **the people of God**. And also many withdrew themselves from among them" (Alma 1:24).

In Alma 19:14, Mormon again uses "people of God" as the equivalent of the term Nephites: "Now Ammon seeing the Spirit of the Lord poured out according to his prayers upon the Lamanites, his brethren, who had been the cause of so much mourning **among the Nephites, or among all the people of God** because of their iniquities and their traditions, he fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren." However, in this instance he does so just prior to what appears to be an expansive redefinition of this expression.

After the seismic numbers of conversions, Mormon extends his use of the expression "people of God" three times in a way that clearly includes the converted Lamanites. In the first instance he uses it to describe the converted Lamanites in contradistinction to the unconverted Lamanites, which retains its negative connotations: "And the king [Anti-Nephi-Lehi's and Lamoni's father] died in that selfsame year that the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against **the people of God**" (Alma 24:4). The second instance is similar. Here "the people of God" has clear reference to the converted Lamanites, also known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehis or the people of Ammon: "And it came to pass that **the people of God** were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved" (Alma 24:26). In the third instance, Mormon uses the term with reference to the converted Lamanites vis-à-vis both the unconverted Lamanites and Nephites: "And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that they could not overpower the Nephites they

returned again to their own land; and many of them came over to dwell in the land of Ishmael and the land of Nephi, and did join themselves to **the people of God**, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi" (Alma 25:13). The final instance of this term in the Book of Mormon seems to have little or no reference to the traditional designations like Nephites or Lamanites: "And it came to pass that two hundred and forty and four years had passed away, and thus were the affairs of the people. And the more wicked part of the people did wax strong, and became exceedingly more numerous than were the people of God" (4 Nephi 1:40). Mormon also uses the expression "people of Jesus" twice in 4 Nephi 1:34.

During the Lamanite conversion narratives, Mormon expands the concept of "people of the Lord" not only to include the Lamanite converts, but also to include the idea of divine approbation "highly favored" (compare Nephi's self-description in 1 Nephi 1:1). The ultimate result of this expansion is that the identifying characteristic of "Nephites" now clearly becomes their choice to enter into and remain in a covenant relationship with the Lord and live faithfully in that covenant, as well as the Lord's responsive approval and protection of his people. Alma refers to the Nephites as "such a highly favored people of the Lord" (Alma 9:20). In Alma 24:29, "the people of the Lord" are explicitly the converted Lamanites who are joined by additional converted Lamanites. Mormon records that Ammon described the converted Lamanites as "this people of the Lord" (Alma 27:5) and refers to them as "the people of the Lord" himself in Alma 27:14. Shortly afterward, in Alma 27:30, Mormon describes the converted Lamanites with the very words Alma used to describe the Nephites: "And thus they were a zealous and beloved people, **a highly favored people of the Lord.**" Later, Moroni, describes his own people, Nephites and converted Lamanites, as "the people of the Lord" in Alma 54:8.

Following his expansion of the concept of "the people of God" or "people of the Lord" earlier in the book of Alma, Mormon makes another significant terminological shift in his account of the Lamanite-Nephite wars later in the book. Mormon states that Moroni, the Nephite military general, "prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should **a band of Christians** remain to possess the land" (Alma 46:13). The term translated "Christians," used for the first time here, is unknown. The Nephite word for "Christ" is likely to have been Hebrew *māšîah* (Messiah, "anointed

one”) or some derivation of it.⁶¹ Perhaps “Christians” was something like **měšiḥim* (“Messiahites”), but this must remain conjectural.

Mormon subsequently links the following characterization of the “Christians” with “those who did belong to the church”: “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**. And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that **the cause of the Christians**, and the freedom of the land might be favored” (Alma 46:15–16). Mormon uses Hebraistic *√mn*-terminology—“faithful” (*ne’ěmānîm*), “true believers,” (**ma’āmînîm ne’ěmānîm*) “their belief” (*’ěmûnātām*, their faithfulness)—to describe the members of the Church. The church, by this time included many of the people of Ammon (former Lamanites). This statement recalls an earlier characterization of the people of Ammon by Mormon: “And they were called by the Nephites the people of **Ammon**; 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 in the faith of Christ**, even unto the end” (Alma 27:26–27; cf. Alma 23:6). Mormon will compare Moroni to Ammon using this *√mn*-terminology in Alma 48:7–18.⁶² Importantly, Mormon’s clarification here that the people of Ammon were among the Nephites “*and also*” numbered among those of Christ’s church, helps us to see that not all “Nephites” were Christians or “the people who of the church of God.” He had also earlier explained that the generation after King Benjamin’s sermon who did not “understand” the speech “did not believe in the traditions of their fathers” and thus “did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ” (Mosiah 26:1–2). Because of this “unbelief”—a

61. The term *Messiah* is used in 1 Nephi 1:19; 10:4–5, 7, 9–11, 14, 17; 12:18; 15:13; 2 Nephi 1:10; 2:6, 8; 2:26; 6:13–14; 2 Nephi 25:14, 16, 18–19; 26:3; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 13:33; Helaman 8:13. This term occurs by far the most frequently in the translation of Nephi’s writings.

62. 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): 223–42, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/behold-he-was-a-man-like-unto-ammon-mormons-use-of-mn-related-terminology-in-praise-of-moroni-in-alma-48.

term ordinarily and traditionally associated with the Lamanites—they became “a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after” (Mosiah 26:3–4).

Alma 46:16 is also the first time that Mormon uses the phrase “the cause of Christians.” Later, Mormon reveals that this expression not only describes the Nephites’ “better cause,” but that their kingship-seeking adversaries had coined this expression: “And thus he was **preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children**, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain **that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians**” (Alma 48:10).

The “support” of liberty, lands, wives, and children as “the cause of Christians” in Alma 48:18 is a refinement of the “better cause” and is further defined as “fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church” in Alma 43:45. Indeed, Mormon has transformed the definition of what it means to be a Nephite, and we can now align “the cause of Christians” with the Nephites’ “better cause.” Doing so brings Mormon’s allusive play on Nephi and Nephites into sharper focus:

- Nephites (+ converted Lamanites) ≈ people of God/people of the Lord
- “better cause” ≈ “cause of Christians”

Bridging to the Amalickiah-Ammonon-Kingmen Saga

In terms of its narrative function within his abridged book of Alma, Mormon’s description of the Nephites’ “better cause” vis-à-vis “fighting for monarchy” helps to succinctly bridge the earlier narratives in Alma that revolve around the issue of monarchy with the later narratives that revolve around the same issue. These earlier monarchy-centric narratives include Amlici’s and the Amlicites’ insurrection (Alma 2) and the Lamanite conversion narratives (Alma 17–27) that culminate in the conversion of the Lamanite king and his family and a massive conflict between them and the unconverted Lamanites, Amlicites/Amalickites, and Amulonites (Alma 24:1; 24:27–28; 27:2, 12; 28:1–3). The later monarchy-centric narratives include the Lamanite war spurred on by the Amalekite and Zoramite leaders under Zerahemnah (Alma 43–44),⁶³

63. See especially Alma 43:6: “And now, as the Amalekites [Skousen Amlicites] were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the

and the great Lamanite-Nephite war precipitated by Amalickiah (Alma 46–62) and the “king-men” crisis that transpired in its midst (Alma 51:2–21; 60–62). Mormon’s description of the king-men in Alma 51:8 is a fair summary of the motivations of Amalickiah, his brother Ammoron, and the king-men: “Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, **and they sought to be kings** [compare Hebrew *mělākīm*] and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people” (compare Alma 46:6: “And **Amalickiah** was desirous **to be a king** [compare Hebrew *melek*]”).

Thus, the statements that “the Nephites were inspired by a better cause” and that the Amlicite/Amalekite-led Lamanites were “fighting for monarchy” reinforce the values associated with the Nephite and the Amlicite gentilic designations respectively. The “good” (liberty, lands, wives, children) was better than kingship (power and control over people):

- Nephites + converted Lamanites ≈ people of God/people of the Lord
- “better cause” ≈ “cause of Christians”
- Amlicite/Amalekites, Zoramites + unconverted Lamanites ≈ Amalickiah, king-men
- “fighting for monarchy” = “they sought to be kings”

This narrative strategy also enables Mormon to more firmly link Amlici and the earlier monarchic aspirants, Amlicites/Amalekites, with later monarchists Amalickiah, Amalickiah’s brother Ammoron, and the traitorous “king-men.”

Conclusion

When Mormon states in Alma 43:45 that “the **Nephites** were inspired by a **better** cause” he is apparently playing on longstanding association with the name Nephi, and its gentilic derivative Nephites, with “good” and related concepts originating in the Egyptian lexeme *nfr* while simultaneously updating them for the contemporary socio-political and religious realities, which included interweaving migration

Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites [Amlicites] and Zoramites. Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs. For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.”

and assimilations (“dissensions”) from the Nephites to the Lamanites, and assimilations from the Lamanites to the Nephites through religious conversion. Many generations earlier, Nephi’s brother, Jacob, on errand from the Lord, who had heard “the cries of the fair daughters” (Jacob 2:32) of the Nephites, had leveled a strongly worded prophetic critique against the Nephite men that may have turned on the same linguistic association. Jacob averred and asked, “Behold, [the Lamanite] husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much **better** are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?” (Jacob 3:7). During Moroni’s time, the Nephites’ “better cause” included a much stronger “Nephite” commitment to their “wives and children” The “Nephites” of this time included many who were Lamanites by descent. This commitment “wives and children” was rooted in their covenant faithfulness to Jesus Christ. The Nephites’ “better cause,” now also adopted by converted Lamanites, became known, in Mormon’s narrative, as the “cause of Christians” (Alma 48:10).

In stating that the Nephites “were not fighting for **monarchy** nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church” (Alma 43:45), Mormon verbally recalls the inferior cause of Nephite apostates and monarchist dissenters like the Amlicites/Amalekites, Amalickiah, and the king-men—names that all revolve around Semitic *mlk*, to “reign as king.” He contrasts the cause of these unrighteous individuals and their adherents with the exemplary repentance and “work[ing] righteousness” of the people of Salem (“peace”) under the priest-king Melchizedek (“king of righteousness”) who was the Christ-typological “king of peace” or “prince of peace” (see Alma 13:10–19). Mormon underscores how Alma, Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah, Moroni, and some Lamanite kings (e.g., Lamoni, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and their father) followed the Melchizedek pattern of leadership.

The monarchists attempted to use Nephite dissidents and the unconverted Lamanites to achieve their unrighteous goals. In the process, they shed the blood of many Lamanites and Nephites, including many innocents. After powerful chapters detailing missionary work and dramatic conversion (Alma 17–27), Alma 43:45 provides a functional bridge between the bloody monarchic wars detailed in the

earlier chapters of Alma (e.g., Alma 2–28) and the protracted monarchic war chronicled in Alma 43–62. Mormon’s Lamanite conversion narratives of Alma 17–27 laid the groundwork for his refined definition of Nephites and showed that Lamanite kings and commoners who accept the message of Christ are his people. Thus, Alma 43:45 links not only the monarchic wars from both parts of Alma, but also the stories of those who choose Christ, the true king, with the stories of the Nephites, the “good” or “fair ones.”

We have seen in this study how, even in terms of the names of their respective peoples, the “good” or “better cause” befits the Nephites, whereas “fighting for monarchy” befits the Amlicites/Amalekites and the monarchic aspirants that followed their legacy, Amalickiah, Amalickiah’s brother Ammoron, and the “king-men.” Perhaps the bigger-picture story here is that the designations of “Nephites,” “Lamanites,” “Amlicites” (or “Amalekites”) are designations that contrast with each other in Mormon’s history, but ultimately prove more fragile than “Christians,” “people of God,” or “people of the Lord.” Mormon, writing in the fourth century CE, knew that Christ, the true king would come. The coming of Jesus Christ to the temple in Bountiful and the aftermath of his ministry there shows how fragile such gentilic designations *should* be. For almost two centuries, “there were no robbers, nor murderer, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17).

For Nephi and all his successors, including Mormon and Moroni, a person’s most important identifier would be to take upon oneself the name of Christ, and thus become “children of Christ” (see also Mosiah 5:7). We often speak of ways in which the Book of Mormon is oriented towards our time. Could anything be more relevant than questions of identity? Today, our prophets emphasize that the most important identifier we have remains “child of God” or “children of God” (cf. 4 Nephi 1:39). President Russell M. Nelson has recently taught, “If any label replaces your most important identifiers, the results can be spiritually suffocating.”⁶⁴ Mormon showed that this was demonstrably true during the monarchic wars recorded in the book of Alma. Mormon and Moroni both lived to see how tragically true this was for

64. See Mary Richards, “President Nelson Posts About Labels and True Identity,” *The Church News*, 21 July 2022, newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-posts-about-labels-and-true-identity.

the Lamanites and Nephites of their time. Can we expect it would be any different for us?



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