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Competing Bloodlines and
Political Legitimacy in the
Book of Mormon**

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Dynastic Dynamics: Competing Bloodlines and Political Legitimacy in the Book of Mormon

Noel Hudson

Abstract: *This study reinterprets the political and military upheavals of the book of Alma through the lens of dynastic competition among Nephite, Mulekite, and Jaredite lineages. It builds on the work of Hugh Nibley, John Sorenson, Noel Reynolds, and more recently, Val Larsen and Lyle Hamblin, among others. Their research suggests that hereditary legitimacy and rival bloodlines shaped later Nephite history as deeply as did religious conviction or moral struggle. The merger of the Nephite and Mulekite peoples appears to have produced a fragile political order that fractured when traditional royal authority was replaced by the reign of judges. Alma₂'s abdication, the apparent weakness of Nephiah and Pahoran as executives, and the appointment of Captain Moroni are examined as deliberate efforts to stabilize a government suffering from dynastic instability. Tracing the intersection of lineage, legitimacy, and divine favor illuminates how the Book of Mormon frames its wars not merely as moral conflicts but as struggles to preserve righteous authority amid inherited divisions.*

In every age, the stability of a people depends on the perceived legitimacy of its leaders. As Noel Reynolds observes, societies require stories that validate the authority of their leaders and laws.¹ Political legitimacy—the moral right to rule—is often grounded in tradition

1. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1987): 15, byustudies.byu.edu/article/the-political-dimension-in-nephis-small-plates.

and dynastic continuity.² Across the ancient world, from Egypt to China, long-standing royal lineages symbolized divine sanction³ and stability.⁴ In some cases the lineage was and continues to be of such supreme importance that individual identity is of much lesser cultural significance than the bloodline to which the individual belongs.⁵

Legitimacy and Dynastic Context in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon appears to also emphasize the importance of bloodlines. As John Sorenson notes, this scripture is “a partial record of events, emphasizing what happened to one group of people, put in their own ethnocentric terms.”⁶ Its narratives are shaped by the rival memories of distinct lineages. Although the text never states this directly, evidence from naming patterns, political crises, and social dissensions suggest that Nephite history was marked by competing dynastic claims.⁷

This paper presents evidence for the hypothesis that much of the wars and political unrest recorded in the book of Alma reflect the interplay of Nephite and Mulekite bloodlines vying for legitimacy. Viewing the record through this lens provides a possible explanation for the abdication of Alma, the perceived weakness of Nephiah and

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2. Emily Lange da Silva, “Ideological Transitions: A Theory Based on Martin Wight’s Three Doctrinal Conflagrations,” *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* (2023): 166–67, run.unl.pt/bitstream/10362/161130/1/20231015_TeseDout_Ideological%20Transitions_v.corrigida_e.lange.pdf.pdf.
 3. John van Seters, “Sacral and Not-so-Sacral Kingship in the Ancient Near East,” in *Kingship In Asia and Early America: 30. International Congress of Human Sciences In Asia and North Africa*, ed. A. L. Basham (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1981), 13–14, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvcwp01n.6.
 4. Andrej Kokkonen and Anders Sundell, “Delivering Stability—Primogeniture and Autocratic Survival in European Monarchies 1000–1800,” *The American Political Science Review* 108, no. 2 (2014): 438–53, [jstor.org/stable/43654382](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43654382).
 5. Meyer Fortes, “The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups,” *American Anthropologist* 55, no. 1 (1953): 26, [jstor.org/stable/664462](https://www.jstor.org/stable/664462).
 6. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 55, archive.org/details/ancientamericans0000sore/.
 7. Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” *Faculty Publications* (1997): 151–89, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1488. See also 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/.

Pahoran, and the rise of captain Moroni as both a military and political figure.

The Nephite–Mulekite merger and its consequences

Dynastic conflict has historically been among the most violent forms of political rivalry. Kokkonen and Sundell note that “violence is the ultimate arbiter of political conflicts in autocracies,” a principle evident throughout history whenever rival royal lines met.⁸ Marriage between dynasties was often the only means of avoiding or ending bloodshed, as in the British War of the Roses that was concluded through the unification of the Houses of Lancaster and York in the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York.⁹ Val Larsen proposes a similar event in Nephite history: the merger of Mosiah₁’s Nephites with the people of Zarahemla through a dynastic marriage linking Nephite and Mulekite elites. Larsen states:

As part of the merger of the two peoples, Mosiah₁ would likely have arranged a marriage between one or more of his children and those of Zarahemla. If Benjamin, his heir, was thus married (a reasonable hypothesis), then Mosiah₂ would be half Mulekite.¹⁰

The use of marriage to diffuse political tensions and allow for the merging of two separate peoples is a time-honored strategy that makes sense in this situation. John Sorensen notes that Ammon₁ in the book of Mosiah, is likely the product of early intermarriage between Nephites and Mulekites. He suggests that is why Ammon is described as a descendant of Zarahemla and yet also calls the people of Zeniff his “brethren” (Mosiah 7:13). Sorensen says that this dual claim “seems to imply some sort of descent for Ammon from both Nephite and Zarahemla ancestors.”¹¹

If the leading families of both the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla mixed in this fashion, then Mosiah₂ would have been of mixed descent, and his kingship would have embodied both royal

8. Andrej Kokkonen and Anders Sundell, “The King is Dead: Political Succession and War in Europe, 1000–1799,” *University of Gothenburg* (2017): 2, academia.edu/80453561.

9. R. A. Griffiths, “Henry Tudor: The Training of a King,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1986): 205. doi.org/10.2307/3817121.

10. Val Larsen, “In His Footsteps: Ammon₁ and Ammon₂,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 90–93, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/journal/in-his-footsteps-ammon-and-ammon/.

11. John L. Sorensen, “The ‘Mulekites,’” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 22n23. scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol30/iss3/8.

lines. This intermarriage would have created a dynasty that was supported by both Nephites and Mulekites, and indeed, the record notes that Mosiah₂ was an extremely popular king: “And they did wax strong in love towards Mosiah; yea, they did esteem him more than any other man” (Mosiah 29:40).

Jaredite influences and the persistence of rival traditions

John Sorenson and Hugh Nibley have both demonstrated that the people of Zarahemla were a composite group, combining descendants of Mulek with remnants of the Jaredite civilization.

Sorenson observes that such syncretism would have transmitted Jaredite cultural elements into the new society.¹² The primary evidence for the cultural continuity of the Jaredites, beyond the collapse of their civilization, is the onomastic influence clearly present among the Mulekites and Nephites.

Nibley explains that a striking number of Jaredite names reappear among the Nephites, especially among dissenters. The name *Coriantumr* refers to both a Jaredite king and a Nephite dissenter who led a Lamanite army. Similarly, the name *Corihor* was likely related to the better-known *Korihor*. These are just two of many examples that illustrate how this older tradition may have survived through the Mulekite line. Nibley observes that many Nephites bearing Jaredite names belonged to a faction opposed to Nephite orthodoxy, a pattern that underscores interactions between royal and religious legitimacy.¹³ Naming traditions do not necessarily indicate genetic heritage, of course. However, the relationship between onomastics and ethnic identity has such great explanatory power¹⁴ that it has even been used to reconstruct poorly attested languages.¹⁵ Because of its explanatory power, this speculative approach will be frequently employed throughout this paper.

The notion that Jaredite bloodlines survived and mixed with

12. Sorenson, “The ‘Mulekites,’” 17.

13. Hugh W. Nibley, “The World of the Jaredites, Part IX,” *Improvement Era*, May 1952, 317–18, scripturecentral.org/archive/periodicals/magazine-article/world-jaredites-part-ix.

14. M. Depauw and W. Clarysse, “How Christian Was Fourth Century Egypt? Onomastic Perspectives on Conversion,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 67, no. 4 (2013): 407–35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42003515>.

15. I. J. Gelb, “Ethnic reconstruction and onomastic evidence,” *Names* 10 (1962): 45–52, [researchgate.net/publication/275494396_Ethnic_Reconstruction_and_Onomastic_Evidence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275494396_Ethnic_Reconstruction_and_Onomastic_Evidence).

the later inhabitants is an idea that dates back nearly a century in Mormon scholarly publications. J. M. Sjodahl proposed the idea in the *Improvement Era* in 1927 based on the reasoning that the destruction of a civilization does not mean that every last member of that people is annihilated.¹⁶ The appearance of Jaredite names among the Nephites only after they had fused with the Mulekites is an indication that the Mulekites likely mixed with the remnants of Jaredite peoples in the land.

The cultural affinity of dissenters among the Nephites can frequently be discerned based on their names, as Lyle Hamblin points out for names containing the *mlk* Hebrew element.¹⁷ In addition to a strong affinity for “kingly” names, Mulekites also seem to frequently bear names that were popular among the Jaredites. John Welch explains that the Jaredite names borne by many of the chief troublemakers in the Book of Mormon narrative suggests that “some of the political turmoil and civil wars that arose in the land of Zarahemla in the first century BC were instigated by disgruntled Mulekites who had grown weary of Nephite rule.”¹⁸ John Tvedtnes speculates that the Mulekites may have carried Jaredite cultural traditions across generations up to the era of the Gadianton robbers.¹⁹

For these reasons, the remainder of the paper builds upon the speculation that those who bear Jaredite names in the Book of Mormon are likely to have a Mulekite genetic heritage. The effect of that heritage on the actions and political affiliations of its bearers may help explain why the constitutional order of the Nephites changed in the specific ways narrated in the record.

16. J. M. Sjodahl, “Have the Lamanites Jaredite Blood in Their Veins,” *The Improvement Era*, November 1927, 56–57, scripturecentral.org/archive/periodicals/magazine-article/have-lamanites-jaredite-blood-their-veins.

17. Hamblin, “Proper Names and Political Claims.”

18. John W. Welch, “Benjamin, the Man: His Place in Nephite History,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1998), 23–53, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/46.

19. John A. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 165, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/tvedtnes/2021-07-12/14_john_a._tvedtnes_book_of_mormon_tribal_affiliation_and_military_castes_296-326.pdf.

Bloodlines and the Right to Rule

Questions of rightful rule pervade the Book of Mormon. Noel Reynolds has proposed that Nephi's own writings function as a "lineage history" intended to justify his claim to lead and to teach.²⁰ Nephi was highly sensitive to issues of political legitimacy, and he used a number of strategies common to the culture of the Ancient Near East to bolster his claims to the legitimate leadership of his group.²¹ That same anxiety over legitimacy resurfaces generations later in the wars of Alma₂'s time.

For example, Zerahemnah's invasion sought to impose Lamanite dominion on the Nephites, a claim explicitly tied to ancestral rights (Alma 44:3–7). Later, Ammoron, a Zoramite with a Jaredite-derived name, accused the Nephites of usurping the "right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them" (Alma 54:17–18). His genealogy and rhetoric show the complex intermingling of rival claims. Names such as Ammoron (possibly "people of Moron," the Jaredite capital) suggest deep cultural memory derived from Jaredite roots.²² The complex interplay of different groups and tribes within the Nephite polity—including a Jaredite remnant, the Mulekites, the Zoramites, the Zeniffites, converted Lamanites, and the heterogeneous tribes labeled generically as Nephites—indicates the presence of many different cultural heritages vying for supremacy within the group. This complex interplay, Daniel Belnap suggests, points to evidence of enduring contention over "Nephite identity."²³

A subset of the Mulekites seem to have looked to their ancient Jaredite heritage for legitimacy and cultural inspiration in direct opposition to the dominant Nephite cultural tradition that hearkened back to ancient Hebrew customs. However, it is clear that not all Mulekites looked to Jaredite traditions for their religious and cultural cues. The record shows that some of the staunchest supporters of the Nephite traditions had Jaredite-derived names. Moroni and Teancum are

20. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension," 15.

21. Noel Hudson, "Irregular Kings and Precious Things," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, forthcoming.

22. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. "Ammoron," onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=AMMORON.

23. Daniel L. Belnap, "'They are of Ancient Date': Jaredite Traditions and the Politics of Gadianton's Dissent," *Illuminating the Jaredite Records*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020): 5, rsc.byu.edu/illuminating-jaredite-records/they-are-ancient-date-jaredite-traditions-politics-gadiantons-dissent.

examples of men with likely Jaredite roots who nonetheless adopted the Nephite explanation of history.

Given the tensions between competing cultural identities among the Nephites, were violent contentions between the various groups inevitable? The Nephite kings who ruled the heterogeneous groups appear to have thought that integration and peaceful coexistence was possible. Benjamin and Mosiah₂ both implemented extensive measures to try to minimize conflict.²⁴ Their efforts at integration were largely, although not completely, successful.²⁵ King Benjamin's public promulgation of a theology of unity accompanied by a covenant of loyalty indicates that the project of integration was strongly supported by the throne and was well on its way to a successful conclusion by the time of the coronation of Mosiah₂.²⁶ However, when all of Mosiah₂'s heirs refused the throne and left the kingdom, a succession crisis threw the entire project into commotion.²⁷

Val Larsen identifies Aaron, the son of Mosiah₂, as the last potential bridge between the Nephite and Mulekite lines. Aaron's refusal of the throne removed the last figure capable of uniting the two peoples through shared descent. His decision set the stage for Alma₂'s troubled judgeship. Mosiah₂ seems not to have recognized just how important the issue of bloodlines was to his partially integrated polity. Larsen points out that:

Evidence suggests that the sons of Mosiah₂ were direct descendants of Zarahemla, the last Mulekite king, and were at least half and, possibly, as much as three-quarters Mulekite. Bloodlines probably explain, in part, the explosion of unrest that occurs when Alma₂, a pure-blooded Nephite with Zeniffite roots, is appointed as first chief judge.²⁸

24. Scripture Central, "Why Were Benjamin and Mosiah Such Beloved and Effective Leaders?" KnoWhy #84, 9 September 2019, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-were-benjamin-and-mosiah-such-beloved-and-effective-leaders.

25. Andrew Miller, "King Benjamin's Sermon as a Type of Temple Endowment," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 61 (2024): 30–31, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/king-benjamin-sermon-as-a-type-of-temple-endowment/.

26. Welch, "Benjamin, the Man," 58.

27. Dan Belnap, "'And it came to pass...': The Sociopolitical Events in the Book of Mormon Leading to the Eighteenth Year of the Reign of the Judges," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 104–5, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol23/iss1/7.

28. Larsen, "In His Footsteps," 100.

With the removal of the leaders that had likely embodied both the Nephite and Mulekite bloodlines, the Mulekite-majority subpopulation quickly grew restless. Lyle Hamblin has described how the Mulekite dissenters led a series of rebellions beginning with the Amlicite uprising and continuing all the way to the founding of the Gadianton Robbers. These dissenters had as their purpose recovering the “rights of government” (3 Nephi 3:10) that they perceive had been taken from them.²⁹

The Crisis of Legitimacy Under the Judges

Legitimacy profoundly shaped the success of leaders in the Nephite record.³⁰ Mosiah₂, heir to centuries of royal tradition and sacred relics such as the Liahona and the sword of Laban, reigned during a period of relative unity and peace.³¹ Alma₂ by contrast, as the head of a newly introduced form of government lacking the weight of historical precedent as well as royal pedigree, seems to have suffered from a deficit of legitimacy. In addition, this transition of government came at a time of profound social ferment as the merging of multiple cultures caused religious and social upheaval.³² For this reason, his years as chief judge were characterized by unrest and civil war.³³

The instability of the new system

There are several hints throughout the record that the office of chief judge lacked prestige and therefore depended on the monarchy that preceded it for its legitimacy. For example, in pronouncing his sentence after determining that Nehor was guilty of murder and priestcraft, Alma₂ said:

Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has

29. Hamblin, “Proper Names and Political Claims,” 435.

30. Christopher J. Peterson, “Our Leaders Were Mighty: Identifying Modern Leadership Philosophies in the Book of Mormon,” *Theses and Dissertations*, (2019): 7581, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/7581.

31. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Volumes 1–7 (2016): 21, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wordcruncher/10.

32. Scripture Central, “Why Did Alma Face Such Great Political Challenges as the Chief Judge?” *KnoWhy* #563, 1 June 2020, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-alma-face-such-great-political-challenges-as-the-chief-judge.

33. John W. Welch, “The Testimony of Alma: ‘Give Ear to My Words,’” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 2 (2010): 67–87, rsc.byu.edu/vol-11-no-2-2010/testimony-alma-give-ear-my-words.

been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law. (Alma 1:14)

Why did Alma₂ feel it necessary to appeal to both the authority of the previous king and the will of the people when pronouncing this sentence? John Welch comments:

One may wonder why Alma appended this additional justification for the sentence he imposed. Alma's reminder may have been designed to quell the protests from Nehor's followers that surely were to follow. Alma's resort to popular authority may also have served to reinforce the power of the newly arranged system of judges to impose the death penalty.³⁴

Welch suggests that when Alma₂ decided to execute Nehor (Alma 1:15), this ruling likely contributed to the polarization of Nephite society noted in succeeding verses.³⁵ The newly formed government was ineffective in stemming the spread of priestcraft, as noted in Alma 1:16. Such an effort would certainly be difficult to enforce in an experimental system that was designed to allow for unprecedented religious freedom (an aspect of Mosiah's reforms mentioned in Alma 1:17 and 30:7–9); however, the lack of legitimacy for the system of judges meant that the government was ineffective not only in controlling the rapidly spreading religious innovations but also in maintaining social order in the face of the religious schism (Alma 1:19–20).

In an effort to get things under control, Alma₂ and the other judges seem to have had to engage in a judicial crackdown (Alma 1:32–33). This temporarily restored order, but the effect was short lived. Within three years of Nehor's execution, the social unrest that began in the first year of the rule of Alma₂ as chief judge erupted into full-scale civil war, with Amlici leading the reactionary elements of Nephite society in a bid to overturn the reforms put in place by Mosiah₂, Alma₁, and Alma₂.³⁶ The newly minted king, Amlici, sought to eliminate the system of judges (Alma 2:2), to destroy the Church (Alma 2:4), and likely to enact the reactionary agenda championed by Nehor (Alma 2:1).

The success of Amlici in raising a rebellion that bid fair to destroy both the Church and the system of judges is a strong indication that

34. John W. Welch, "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon," *Maxwell Institute Publications* (2008): 233–34, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/49/.

35. Welch, "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon," 233–34.

36. Welch, "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon," 234.

these two newly formed entities suffered from a lack of political legitimacy. Social unrest, military conflict, and economic disaster are a common outcome when a government that suffers from a deficit of legitimacy takes power.³⁷

One great weakness of the new government of the judges was that it replaced the king with a man who had all the same responsibilities as the king but who no longer had the dynastic structure to support him. Alma₂ had to deal with religious challenges (Alma 1:16), military challenges (Alma 2:16), economic challenges (Alma 3:2), and judiciary challenges (Alma 1:14), all while having to work out the nature of the relationships between the new government elements, such as the different tiers of judges, and the existing structures such as the chief captains (Alma 2:16). Welch notes that:

When Nehor was brought before Alma to be judged, his trial was a major test of Alma's political and judicial power in the fledgling reign of the judges. How would the new system of judges work? What would the power of the chief judge be? Would Alma be able to enforce his verdicts? Did the lower judges or the voice of the people (Mosiah 29:28–29) have jurisdiction over a landmark case such as this, or did the chief judge have authority to hear this case entirely on his own?³⁸

The stated purpose of the creation of the system of the judges was avoiding the evils of a monarchical system with its concentration of power in the hands of a single man (Mosiah 29:16–23). However, the new system had concentrated arguably even greater power in the hands of the chief judge, while simultaneously removing some of the structures that would enable the effective use of that power. For example, King Mosiah apparently had a privy council of full-time priests who advised him (Mosiah 27:1). Alma, however, could only interact with part-time priests who more than likely had to work a day job to support themselves and their families, and who seem to have been entirely focused on the ecclesiastical ministry at the local level (Alma 1:26). It seems Alma₂ even had to labor for his own support while

37. Noel Hudson, "Irregular Kings and Precious Things: Viewing Nephi and Joseph Smith through the Lens of Ancient Near Eastern Kingship," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 67 (2025): 229, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/irregular-kings-and-precious-things-viewing-nephi-and-joseph-smith-through-the-lens-of-ancient-near-eastern-kingship.

38. Welch, "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon," 220.

performing all of these functions (Alma 30:32). Despite these handicaps, Welch notes that the actions of Alma₂ early in his tenure as chief judge "claimed or expanded the power of the highest judge beyond anything stated explicitly in the reforms of Mosiah."³⁹ It seems that in his attempt to establish order and deal with all of the many social, religious, economic, and military crises that arose, Alma₂ was spreading himself too thin.

In addition to the juridical power that he wielded as chief judge, and the ecclesiastical power he wielded as high priest, Alma₂ also wielded supreme military power. Like many of his monarchical predecessors, Alma₂ seems to have been skilled in gathering and leading troops. This was an especially critical skill for one with a perceived lack of legitimacy, since for such a ruler, successful military action is frequently the only way to retain control of the government.⁴⁰ Thus, not long after Alma₂ was elected chief judge, he personally led the Nephite armies in putting down both the civil wars and Lamanite incursions that erupted during his administration. Such military leadership seems to have been an inherent duty of the office of chief judge:

Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle. (Alma 2:16)

Thus, the initial attempt of the system of judges to address the danger of monarchy—the concentration of power in the hands of a monarch—had, in fact, resulted in a system with the power concentrated in the hands of a chief judge who wielded even more power than the previous king.⁴¹ Yet at the same time, the end of the monarchy had stripped the chief judge, and the government that he represented, of the prestige and the weight of history and tradition that stabilized the earlier monarchy. In fact, it led to shocking disrespect in some quarters. This disrespect is illustrated by the reaction of the people of Ammonihah when they saw that Alma₂ was no longer the chief judge but "only" the high priest. They "reviled him" by saying,

39. Welch, "The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon," 223.

40. Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, SBL Press, 2015), 4:51.

41. Mosiah₂ had given Alma₁ the ecclesiastical control over the Church (Mosiah 25:19), and therefore he did not embody the juridical, military and ecclesiastical powers as Alma₂ did.

Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church . . . And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephiah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us. . . . Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city. (Alma 8:11–13)

The combination of power concentrated in the hands of the chief judge and the lack of respect for the new government across a broad range of religious and political dissenters would have made for an unstable situation in the Nephite government. It is likely that the recognition of the instability of the system led Alma₂ to take steps to restore balance by dividing the power he wielded among multiple leaders. The record clearly indicates how ecclesiastical and juridical power were divided when Alma₂ appointed Nephiah as his successor to the office of chief judge (Alma 4:15–20). However, the transition of military power is not addressed in the record with the same clarity. The next section will attempt to identify the steps that were taken in establishing the relationship of the military organization to the other branches of Nephite government at this time.

The question of military leadership

The tradition of Nephite heads of state personally leading the troops into battle follows a precedent set by Nephi (Jacob 1:10). Such military leadership was, of course, the norm for rulers in the Ancient Near East (and elsewhere),⁴² and this tradition was still followed hundreds of years later by Nephite kings (Words of Mormon 1:13). Even Zeniff, “in my old age” (Mosiah 10:10), led his troops against the Lamanites (around 178 BC). And yet, by the reign of Nephiah (around 83 BC), the Nephite head of state no longer personally led the military.⁴³ With hundreds of years of tradition requiring even elderly Nephite leaders to lead their troops, what might have been the motive for the sudden change during the reign of Nephiah?

42. Harry Hagan, *A Literary Study of Battle Narrative in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Indianapolis: Palni Press, 1993), 65–69, pressbooks.palni.org/mightyinbattle/front-matter/introduction/.

43. David L. Rockwood and J. Gordon Daines III, “Contrasting the Leadership Styles of Moroni and Amalickiah,” *Religious Educator* 21, no. 2 (2020): 120, rsc.byu.edu/vol-21-no-2-2020/contrasting-leadership-styles-moroni-amalickiah.

After the war with the Amlicites and Lamanites, Alma₂, who had embodied the offices of high priest, chief judge, and military leader, relinquished the judgment seat and designated Nephihah as his successor. This designation occurred in the eighth year of the reign of the judges. By the eleventh year of the reign of the judges, when the city of Ammonihah was destroyed, it was the chief captain, Zoram, and not Nephihah, who led the troops against the Lamanites in response.

Since hundreds of years of tradition are not set aside lightly, it seems likely that more was involved in Alma₂ stepping down than a mere transfer of executive power. The withdrawal of Alma₂ appears to have precipitated a broader constitutional reform. The record notes that Nephihah "sat in the judgment-seat to judge and to govern the people," but that Alma₂ "did not grant unto him the office of being high priest" (Alma 4:17–18). Concurrent with the changes in the executive office, John Welch also sees an evolution in how the military affairs of the Nephites were administered occurring at this same period:

The change from kingship to judgeship was put into effect by the law of Mosiah promulgated and acknowledged in Mosiah 29. It appears from the record that the law of Mosiah did not contain any concrete provision establishing the office of a military leader, but rather the law anticipated that the chief judge would assume military leadership as occasions demanded. Over time, the position of chief captain evolved among the Nephites.⁴⁴

The division of ecclesiastical and civil power appears to have been accompanied by the separation of military command as well. The creation of a military leader who operated independently of the chief judge is first mentioned in the case of Zoram (Alma 16:5; around 81 BC). These changes seem likely to have been related to the unrest that plagued the administration of Alma₂, with the innovations in military affairs also being driven by the civil unrest that may have been responsible for driving the ecclesiastical and juridical changes.

To repair this weakness, two steps were taken. First, the new chief judge was likely selected based on his ability to restore some measure of the lost legitimacy of the office of chief judge. Nephihah's name itself, echoing the line of Nephi, may imply descent from a recognized

44. John W. Welch "Law and War in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 53.

royal branch, lending symbolic weight to his appointment.⁴⁵ Second, the office of chief captain seems to have been created as an independent entity that was no longer subject to the chief judge. Welch, speaking of the office of chief captain, states:

This office was legally constituted as a result of the division of governmental powers that resulted when Alma relinquished the judgment seat . . . Evidently, military power was given to the chief captain. Neither Nephiah nor any subsequent chief judge is ever mentioned as leading the Nephite military.⁴⁶

Such fundamental constitutional changes may explain some of what commentators such as John and Greg Welch and Oralyn Moran see as the weakness or ineffective wartime leadership of both Nephiah⁴⁷ and Pahoran. Moran muses “We have to wonder why [Pahoran] was able to respond quickly to a threat from Moroni but not to appeals for assistance.”⁴⁸ This apparent lack of ability on their part may, in fact, have been due to a flaw, or perhaps even an intentional feature, of the revamped constitutional order, as will be discussed below.

The balance of power

As mentioned above, the primary reason for the creation of the system of the judges was the premise that concentrating power in the hand of a monarch made the entire system unstable and susceptible to the whims of a single man (Mosiah 29:16–18). Given this premise, the first chief judgeship could be viewed as a failure in rebalancing the system. As pointed out earlier, if anything, Alma₂, as chief judge, high priest, and military supreme commander had *more* power and responsibility than the king he replaced, making it difficult for Alma₂ to be effective in performing all of his required duties. Brent Merrill suggests that “a need to relieve Alma the Younger of this responsibility might have

45. There is some debate about the exact meaning of the *-ihah* suffix, but it may indicate some form of kinship bond with the principle name, such as indicating that Nephiah is a relative of Nephi. See for example, Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Ammonihah,” onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=AMMONIAH.

46. Welch, “Law and War,” 53–54.

47. John W. Welch and Greg Welch, *Nephiah as Chief Judge: Years 9–24 of the Reign of the Judges* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 3–36, scripturecentral.org/archive/media/chart/nephiah-chief-judge-years-924-reign-judges.

48. Oralyn Moran, “Moroni and Pahoran,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 3 (2014): 103–15, rsc.byu.edu/vol-15-no-3-2014/moroni-pahoran.

prompted Zoram₂'s appointment."⁴⁹ (Zoram₂ was "the chief captain over the armies of the Nephites in 81 B.C.")⁵⁰

Alma₂ retained the office of high priest because he believed that devoting himself to the preaching of the word rather than dividing his attention would allow him to maintain the greatest influence among his people. This conclusion is made clear in Alma 31:5:

And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them.

When this realization struck Alma, and perhaps other Nephite leaders involved in the constitutional reformation, they seem to have decided to "balance the ticket"⁵¹ in a bid to win over some of the detractors of the system of judges. They appear to have done this by appointing Nephiah (likely of Nephite royal lineage) to appeal to monarchist Nephites who longed for the previous regime, and by appointing Zoram₂ to appeal to those who considered themselves outsiders to the Nephite social order.

The failure of the new constitutional order

The Amlicite civil war violently demonstrated just how dissatisfied many of the Mulekites had become with the constitutional reforms that created the reign of the judges. The Zoramites likewise seem to have felt detached from the Nephite government in Zarahemla. Indeed,

49. A. Brent Merrill, "Nephite Captains and Armies," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 150.

50. See *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), s.v. "Zoram," archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/zoram.pdf. Ellis has speculated that Zoram₂ may have apostatized and became the same person as Zoram₃ of the Zoramites. See Godfrey J. Ellis, "The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite: A New Look at the Failed Mission of an Agent of Zoram" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 48 (2021): 92n57, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/the-rise-and-fall-of-korihor-a-zoramite-a-new-look-at-the-failed-mission-of-an-agent-of-zoram.

51. US presidents frequently choose vice presidents as their running mates based on their appeal to certain subsegments of the United States. In many cases the vice president is selected from an important subpopulation among whom the president is weak in order to increase the appeal of the political party to that subpopulation, a practice known as "balancing the ticket." Elaine C. Karmack, *Picking the Vice President*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Picking-the-Vice-President.pdf.

both groups united in their opposition to Nephite leadership a few years later.⁵²

The political opposition of the Zoramites and Mulekites reflected their religious and cultural heterodoxy in opposition to the Nephite orthodoxy. It was rare in the ancient world to have any sort of separation between church and state. There is a good reason why it was rare. Such a separation “created societal strains that were difficult to manage within ancient worldviews,”⁵³ and in the case of the Nephites, it seems to have served to detach a segment of the people from not only their religious beliefs but also from their loyalty to the government, as illustrated in the case of Amlici (Alma 2:4).

Throughout the record, Nephite authors seem to have taken the position that political dissent was equivalent to spiritual rebellion.⁵⁴ This position was a natural consequence of ancient worldviews in which politics and religion were inextricably intertwined. Prior to the creation of the system of judges, the Nephite king had also been the head of the Church.⁵⁵ The government of the judges was identified so closely with the state religion that dissidents were also seen as unbelievers.⁵⁶

When Alma₂ decided to devote his time to the preaching of the gospel, he was likely also hoping to resolve the underlying issues leading to political dissent. Converting a Mulekite to Christianity would have also converted him to support for the government of the judges, which was seen as ordained of God (Alma 46:10–18). Likewise, conversion of the followers of Nehor might address some of the unrest that erupted earlier, after the execution and humiliation of that religious leader.⁵⁷ Of course, there were also unforeseen consequences involved with this approach. Alma₂ himself would likely have struggled to establish

52. Belnap, “And it came to pass,” 126.

53. Scripture Central, “Why Did Alma Need to ‘Establish the Order of the Church’ in Zarahemla Again?” KnowWhy #113, 19 May 2017, scripturecentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-alma-need-to-establish-the-order-of-the-church-in-zarahemla-again.

54. Val Larsen, “Prophet or Loss: Mosiah1/Zeniff, Benjamin/Noah, Mosiah2/Limhi and the Emergence of the Almas,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 60 (2024): 395, interpreterfoundation.org/journal/prophet-or-loss-mosiah1-zeniff-benjamin-noah-mosiah2-limhi-and-the-emergence-of-the-almas/.

55. Gregory Steven Dundas, “Kingship, Democracy, and the Message of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 56, no. 2 (2017): 8–9, byustudies.byu.edu/article/kingship-democracy-and-the-message-of-the-book-of-mormon.

56. Hamblin, “Proper Names and Political Claims,” 422.

57. Welch, “The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon,” 232.

a relationship of trust with the followers of Nehor and so he might have been seen as a polarizing personality when he went out to preach.⁵⁸

Alma₂ and his companions were overwhelmingly successful in their efforts to employ "the word" (Alma 31:5) to convert many of the poorer Zoramites. However, arguably the primary goal of their intervention and mission was aimed at retaining all the Zoramites within the Nephite Empire and thereby avoiding impending dissension and war if they joined the Lamanites (Alma 31:4). Unfortunately, they failed to resolve the fracturing social order.

Additionally, the record suggests that the Zoramite wealthy benefited from free labor by maintaining a portion of their populace in poverty (Alma 32:5). No doubt the loss of this resource, due to conversion and being taken out of their society, exacerbated the way in which the Zoramites viewed Alma₂ and his companions. The wealthy Zoramites simply could not countenance the religious conversion and physical departure of members of their populace. When their demands that Alma₂ return the converts, now called the people of Ammon, were refused, "this did stir up the Zoramites to anger" (Alma 35:8–9). Joining the Church had had the effect of tying the converts to the Nephite government at a time when the Zoramite elites were actively working to align themselves with the Lamanites. All these social, political, and economic dynamics resulted in the defection of the Zoramites. The greatest fears of the Nephite's came to pass when serious conflict still erupted despite the best efforts of Alma₂.

If the purpose of the restructuring of the government was to stem the tide of dissension and civil dispute among the Nephites, the new structure proved unequal to the task. Despite his success in preaching the gospel, the privileged class of the Zoramites rejected the teachings of Alma₂ and dissented en masse from the Nephites to join the Lamanites (Alma 43:4). The Zoramites seem to have been accompanied by a contingent of Mulekites as well, for the war leader who came against the Nephites in the battle that followed was a man by the name of Zerahemnah (v. 5) who likely was a descendant of Zarahemla.⁵⁹

58. Kylie Turley, "Alma's Hell: Repentance, Consequence, and the Lake of Fire and Brimstone," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 28, no. 1, (2019): 3, scholars.archive.byu.edu/jbms/vol28/iss1/2.

59. Matthew L. Bowen, "'He Is God, and He Is with Them' Helaman 8:21–23 and Isaiah's Immanuel Prophecy as a Thematic Scriptural Concept," *BYU Studies* 62, no. 1 (2023): 151–52, byustudies.byu.edu/article/he-is-god-and-he-is-with-them.

He “appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites” (v. 6).

Even worse, scarcely had the battle with Zerahemnah and the Zoramites ended before Amalickiah began stirring up the Mulekites who had remained in the land in a bid to capture the government. This unrest was likely a continuation of the hostilities initiated during the Amlicite rebellion.⁶⁰ Perhaps Amalickiah believed that the earlier Nephite battle with the Zoramites had significantly weakened the Nephites to the point that a takeover was now possible. And indeed, the paralysis in the Nephite government that accompanied the rise of Amalickiah suggests that his analysis was largely correct.

Captain Moroni as a Savvy Political Appointee

Alma 46:34 makes it clear that Moroni was appointed as chief captain “by the “voice of the people,” just as the judges had been. However, there is no context given for understanding the *reason* for his appointment. The fact that Captain Moroni was appointed at the age of twenty-five (Alma 43:17) makes it highly likely that factors other than battle-field experience led to his selection. The political turmoil that rocked the Nephite polity during this time hints that the major consideration for such a powerful office would be loyalty to the regime. This was a characteristic Moroni clearly demonstrated early in his career as he fought to defend the system of the judges when even some of those who served as judges were defecting (see Alma 46:4, 24). If the office of chief captain were vacant for some reason, such loyalty would be doubly important in the new appointee.⁶¹

Nearly as important as loyalty to the regime would be the ability to bridge the cultural divides that were leading to so much dissension. Possessing broad appeal would have been critical for the military leader in order to recruit and lead soldiers from the large Mulekite sub-population. During a time when armed conflicts between Mulekites

60. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 113, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol14/iss1/12.

61. If the office of chief captain was a standing duty, Moroni’s appointment would have been caused by a vacancy in the office. This vacancy may have been caused by the death of Zoram₂ or even apostasy and defection (becoming Zoram₃) as speculated by Ellis, “The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite,” 48n57. Alternatively, Welch has suggested that chief captains may have been only assigned in times of war, so defection of the former chief captain may not have been an issue. See Welch, “Law and War in the Book of Mormon,” 29.

and Nephites were far too common,⁶² the Mulekites would almost certainly be wary of a chief captain who was a pure-blooded Nephite. Such an appointment could be interpreted as sending a message that the Nephite rulers intended to use violence to deal with the civil unrest. On the other hand, appointing someone of Mulekite heritage to the position would likely be seen as offering an olive branch to the incensed Mulekites. Because of this friction between the Nephites and the Mulekites, the political considerations for the selection of the chief captain at this time would be critical. Indeed, the political acceptability of any candidate for the position would need to consider a number of factors rather than military prowess alone, as discussed in greater detail below.

Captain Moroni's likely Mulekite connections

One possible reason for Moroni's elevation to the leadership of the Nephite armies, then, would have been his association with the Mulekite bloodline and cultural tradition. As with the Jaredite and Mulekite cultural affiliations mentioned earlier, the linking of captain Moroni to a Mulekite cultural tradition may be done through onomastics. The name "*Moroni*" likely means "of Moron,"⁶³ indicating a possible affinity with the ancient Jaredite capital city.

John Tvedtnes identified the likely link between the name Moroni and the land of Moron, which he says is "where, I assume, Moroni was born."⁶⁴ If Moroni was chosen because of his Mulekite bona fides, such a move would have allowed for the use of military force in situations that would have been politically fraught for a Nephite.

Sending troops into unstable political situations

The complete lack of a response from the judges when the people of Morianton took up arms against the city of Lehi (Alma 50; around 68 BC) is strange. One possible explanation is that the Nephite central government may have been walking on eggshells for fear of provoking a backlash from the Mulekites in the immediate aftermath of the recent Mulekite and Zoramite conflicts. Recall that beginning in

62. Tvedtnes, "Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes," 161–62.

63. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. "Moroni," onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=MORONI

64. John A. Tvedtnes, "What's in a Name? A Look at the Book of Mormon Onomasticon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 8, no. 2 (1996): 41, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol8/iss2/6.

about 87 BC the Amlicites rose up in civil war against the Nephites (Alma 2). Then in about 74 BC an army led by Zerahemnah, made up of Lamanites, Zoramites, Amalekites and other dissenters, came against the Nephites (Alma 43). Just two years later, in about 72 BC, Amalickiah led a combined army of Lamanites and Mulekite dissenters against the Nephites (Alma 49). All three of these conflicts were existential threats to the Nephites, so when Morianton fomented another conflict that threatened the peace between the Mulekite and Nephite subpopulations just five years later, in about 67 BC, the government would naturally be hesitant to engage in violence.

An armed intervention by the Nephite government, which would inevitably result in Mulekite deaths, could be used as a pretext for another civil war. Indeed, the naming conventions that are so evident throughout the book of Alma can once again provide clues about the nature of the conflict between Morianton and Lehi. The people of Morianton seem likely to have been members of the Mulekite cultural tradition (Morianton is a Jaredite name; see Ether 10:9–13) while the people of Lehi, based on the name of their city, seem most likely to have been ethnic Nephites. In other words, the conflict between these two cities was likely a reflection of the broader conflict between Mulekites and Nephites that had been taking place throughout the polity for over a generation.

With the central government possibly afraid to act for fear of provoking a broader conflict, Morianton may have thought he was in a position to literally get away with murder. However, if Morianton thought that he could count on cultural tensions to give him cover for his land grab, he failed to account for the possibility of interference from Moroni. The people of Lehi showed great wisdom in appealing to Moroni, rather than to Nephihah. Due to the actions of the people of Lehi, Morianton could no longer count on the culture war to give him cover.

Morianton's decision to flee makes complete sense when Moroni, rather than a general of pure Nephite ancestry, became the arbiter of the land dispute. The record provides additional evidence that the Mulekite/Nephite divide was a major factor in Morianton's plans. Supporting this conjecture is the observation that, when his machinations went awry, Morianton decided to flee northward, to the Jaredite heartland near Bountiful and Desolation (Alma 50:32–33).⁶⁵

65. Jerry D. Grover Jr., *The Swords of Shule: Jaredite Land Northward Chronology*,

The record notes the potential for major negative consequences if Morianton were to be successful in his flight, stating that if Morianton had been able to carry out his plans, it would have been a "cause to have been lamented" (v. 30). This is because Morianton would have endeavored to stir up the Mulekites in that area against the Nephite government (v. 32) or, at the very least, remained as a potentially threatening conclave of separatist sentiment for generations.

Moroni's assignment of Teancum (Alma 50:35; around 67 BC), another man of likely Mulekite heritage,⁶⁶ to round up the people of Morianton provides additional evidence that political considerations were a factor in the handling of this delicate matter. As a man of Mulekite heritage, Teancum would be free to employ force while a Nephite in the same situation might have been hesitant to do so. Teancum likely also would have known the geography and the people of the area, as suggested by the proximity of the later city, *Teancum*, to the land of Desolation (Mormon 4:3). Perhaps the reason that Teancum was later eulogized as a "true friend to liberty" (Alma 62:37) rather than as "a just man" who "did walk uprightly before God" (Alma 63:2) was based on the fact that he was a Mulekite who remained loyal to the Christian Nephite government, while perhaps he was not a Christian himself.

Captain Moroni's likely Nephite connections

The high praise lavished on Captain Moroni by Helaman (Alma 48:11–13), and his broader acceptability to the government leaders, suggests that he likely had Nephite bona fides in addition to his clout among the Mulekites. Certainly, he was loyal to the Nephite-dominated central government and considered himself a Christian (Alma 46:13–16). Those were two attributes that many of those with Jaredite names seem to have lacked. Captain Moroni's oath to defend his people, country, rights, and the Christian religion also place him firmly within the Nephite cultural tradition. When he raised the Title of Liberty, Captain Moroni demonstrated an intimate knowledge of the key events that had shaped Christianity among the Nephites over the previous generation, suggesting that he was quite familiar with Nephite Christian traditions.⁶⁷

Geography, and Culture in Mesoamerica (Provo, UT: Challex Scientific Publishing, 2018), 149–93.

66. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. "Teancum," onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=TEANCUM.

67. Noel Hudson, "The Title of Liberty as a Response to Generations of Trauma," unpublished.

In addition to these indirect clues about Captain Moroni's affiliation with the Nephite cultural tradition, his words to those who flocked to his banner when he raised the Title of Liberty indicate that he considered himself a Nephite by blood as well as by loyalty. He says:

Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain. Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph. (Alma 46:23–24)

This assertion of affiliation with Joseph, the Hebrew cultural hero for the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and the famous ancestor of Lehi, indicates that Captain Moroni also likely possessed a Nephite bloodline. While it is not clear exactly where Moroni made this speech, nor the ethnic composition of his audience, what is clear is that he was speaking to a group who considered themselves to be descendants of Joseph, and that he, too, considered himself to be a descendant of Joseph.

As a man of possibly mixed Nephite and Mulekite heritage, Captain Moroni may have been much more capable of commanding the loyalty and obedience of all the Nephite populace than someone who had bloodlines from only one or the other of the two major component peoples. The various generals who were subordinate to Moroni might have been either exclusively Nephite (Helaman, Lehi) or exclusively Mulekite (Teancum) and therefore were unable to command the loyalty of the entire populace. This use of leaders from both bloodlines suggests that Captain Moroni was an effective political general, attuned to the ethnic sensitivities of his army. It suggests that he was acting, within his scope of influence, to make one people out of two by affirming both ethnicities as integral parts of the larger whole defending their shared rights.

Another Challenge to the Government of the Judges

As we have seen, the perceived lack of legitimacy of the system of the judges by some of its citizens led to internal conflict and civil war shortly after the creation of the institution. Reforms in the wake of the Amlicite rebellion were unable to prevent the defection of the Zoramites together with a second contingent of Mulekites, a fact that

led to a second civil war. The appointment of Moroni as chief captain of the armies allowed for the successful conclusion of the civil unrest stirred up by Morianton and the much more significant revolt of Amalickiah, but a lacuna in the new constitutional order led directly to the success of a man named Pachus (Alma 62:6) and the king men.

The oversight in the constitutional order that allowed Pachus to take the city of Zarahemla and expel the unpopular Pahoran, apparently without the shedding of blood (Alma 61:3–5; about 62 BC), was the serious problem of designating to the chief judge the task of recruiting men and gathering arms for the army. As stated in Alma 60:2: "Ye yourselves know that ye have been appointed to gather together men, and arm them with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind." Additionally, though the details of how it was carried out are lacking, it appears that the chief judge was charged with requisitioning other supplies to support the army ("But behold, this is not all—ye have withheld your provisions from them"; Alma 60:9).

Such a division of labor made sense as the chief captain of the armies would necessarily be sent to the fringes of Nephite territory to direct the battles against the Lamanites while the chief judge would reside in the center of their lands where supplies and manpower were much more plentiful. However, this also meant that the Nephite chief judge would have the unenviable task of drafting men and requisitioning food and other supplies from the majority Mulekite population.⁶⁸ (Zarahemla was originally a Mulekite city and likely continued to be the center of Mulekite culture at this time.)⁶⁹ While Moroni or Teancum might have been capable of performing such a task without stirring up significant resentment, Pahoran clearly was not.

Why, then, did Pahoran not apprise the generals of the situation and ask for their help? In her study, Oralyn Moran examines the ignorance

68. Mosiah 25:2 indicates that the Nephite polity in fact consisted of a majority Mulekite population. The percentage of the people that were Mulekites would have shifted after the many dissensions that took place throughout the book of Alma, but different ethnic groups would likely have continued to form enclaves in different parts of the land for as long as they existed as a separate entity. See John Sorenson, "Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 B.C.," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen Ricks, Donald Parry, and Andrew Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 163–208, scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book-chapter/religious-groups-and-movements-among-nephites-2001-bc.

69. Sorenson, "The Mulekites," 17.

of Helaman and Moroni about the perilous state of politics in the Nephite heartland while they and their men were fighting and dying due to the lack of reinforcements and supplies. Moran concludes that this situation could have easily been remedied by a quick message from Pahoran.⁷⁰ However, Pahoran's reticence might have a different explanation than the fecklessness that Moran attributes to him. If word spread of a successful coup in Zarahemla, it could easily have led to additional uprisings across the polity. Likewise, if the office of chief captain had become vacant due to the defection of Captain Zoram₂ (a possibility that is clearly speculative but that other scholars have also posited),⁷¹ Pahoran might have wondered if he could trust the half-Mulekite Moroni with detailed knowledge of just how dire affairs had become in Zarahemla. In his epistle to Pahoran, Moroni makes his loyalty to the principle of freedom and to the cause of the Christians abundantly clear. This clear signaling may have helped resolve any doubts Pahoran might have had about Moroni's loyalty.

Another possibility is that Pahoran was aware of the difficulties faced by Helaman and Moroni at the battlefield. He might have believed he was capable of resolving the situation, and he might have been hesitant to request aid at a time when the need for troops at the front was already critical. It was not until Moroni's letter convinced him that time had run out, and that the dire situation necessitated an emergency response, that he acted.

Despite many efforts to address the problem of integration, the Nephite government seems to have continued to struggle with an unhappy and contentious subpopulation of Mulekites up until the coming of Christ.⁷² Even Moroni's vigorous response to the king men was not sufficient to deter a Lamanite attack inspired by dissenters. These Mulekite dissenters, together with an army of the Lamanites, were successful in taking the city of Zarahemla and placing a descendant of Zarahemla on the throne (Helaman 1:15–22, about 50 BC).

Even after Coriantumr was defeated, the problem of Mulekite dissenters did not go away. Daniel Belnap and Lyle Hamblin both suggest that the Gadianton robbers were following Jaredite philosophies and may have been an alternative way for Mulekite dissenters to fight back against the Nephite government.⁷³

70. Moran, "Moroni and Pahoran," 12.

71. Ellis, "The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite," 48n57.

72. Sorenson, "The Mulekites," 18.

73. Belnap, "They are of Ancient Date": Jaredite Traditions and the Politics of

Summary and Conclusion

This paper advances the argument that the wars, rebellions, and political turmoil in the book of Alma are best understood as manifestations of dynastic rivalry between the Nephite and Mulekite bloodlines, complicated by the aspirations of other groups present in the heterogeneous Nephite polity. It interprets the frequent dissensions and leadership changes as struggles for legitimacy rooted in ancient traditions of hereditary rule.

Following the transition from monarchy to the government of the judges, Alma₂ inherited a political structure that lacked dynastic legitimacy. The subsequent unrest, including the Amlicite rebellion, the Zoramite dissension, the rise of Amalickiah, the advent of the king-men, and continuing civil discord, reflects a deep cultural and genealogical division between Nephite and Mulekite factions. The abdication of Alma₂ and the separation of ecclesiastical, judicial, and military powers may be seen as a deliberate political reform designed to stabilize a fragile system.

The study has attempted to highlight how naming patterns, cultural intermixing, and bloodline associations may provide clues to underlying tensions. The mixed Nephite–Mulekite heritage of figures such as Captain Moroni may explain their political utility and capacity to unify divided constituencies. Moroni's possible Jaredite or Mulekite connections would have strengthened his acceptability among Zarahemla's population while his Nephite descent and Christian faith preserved his legitimacy with the ruling class. In this reading, the "Title of Liberty" episode, the campaigns against the Amalickiahites, and the handling of dissensions like Morianton's rebellion reveal careful efforts to reconcile lineage-based rivalries through shared religious and national ideals.

Viewing the book of Alma through the framework of dynastic dynamics reveals a deeper political and theological logic behind its wars and leadership crises. What might otherwise appear as sporadic rebellions emerges instead as a sustained negotiation of legitimacy between the competing hereditary lines of the Nephites and the Mulekites.⁷⁴ The shift from monarchy to judgeship did not erase these rivalries but reconfigured them within new constitutional structures.

By examining bloodlines, naming conventions, and the distribution

Gadanton's Dissent," 1–42, Hamblin, "Proper Names and Political Claims," 435.
74. Hamblin, "Proper Names and Political Claims," 409–44.

of authority, this study has further attempted to show that the abdication of Alma², the reduction in the powers that Nephiah and Pahoran could exercise as chief judge, and the elevation of Captain Moroni by the voice of the people all served to balance the competing claims of royal descent and divine approval. These changes in the government are important to recognize because they strongly suggest that the Book of Mormon preserves not only a record of spiritual conflict but a sophisticated portrait of political theology in which faith, lineage, and legitimacy intertwine. Ultimately, the Nephite struggle mirrors the universal human challenge of establishing righteous authority amid inherited divisions. That is a challenge that continues to resonate into our own day.



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