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## "Not Only Men but Women Also": An Argument for Alma's Intentional Inclusion of Women

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to provide a very deliberate and nuanced understanding of the gendered language in the Book of Mormon by examining the story and sermons of Alma the Younger.



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# “Not Only Men but Women Also”

## An Argument for Alma’s Intentional Inclusion of Women

*Cassidy Nichole Pyper*

In an interestingly specific inclusion of women, Alma taught the Zoramites that “[God] imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also” (Alma 32:23). This phrase suggests that Alma had an awareness of women and their ability to receive revelation despite how little the Book of Mormon explicitly includes women in its narrative.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Mormon mentions women at drastically lower rates than even the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Some students of the Book of Mormon are concerned not only that women are rarely spoken of in the text but also that women may have been ignored or disregarded as part of the intended audience.<sup>3</sup> The loudest of the concerns stem from two

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1. Alma’s awareness of women’s ability to receive revelation is peculiar when we note that there aren’t any examples in the Book of Mormon of specifically women being ministered to by angels in the same way that Alma himself was. Reasons why this may be the case are discussed later in this article under the section “Examples of Alma Being Inclusive of Women.”

2. Camille S. Williams explains it this way: “In addition to the problems presented by biblical texts, latter-day scripture contains far fewer stories of individual women than those in either the Old or the New Testament.” Camille S. Williams, “Women in the Book of Mormon: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Interpretation,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 68, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol11/iss1/12/>.

3. Melodie Moench Charles describes the male preachers in the Book of Mormon as being oblivious to women or, worse, ignoring them completely. Melodie Moench Charles, “Precedents for Mormon Women from Scriptures,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 51. Carol Lynn Pearson calls herself an “unwelcome visitor, . . . a stranger in a strange land,” and “an outsider overhearing something important that is going on in another room.” She states that the book does

preeminent issues: (1) the lack of female representation in the text and (2) the book's frequent use of gender-exclusive (masculine) language.

Many Latter-day Saint scholars have attempted to understand and answer a myriad of questions and concerns about gender and the Book of Mormon.<sup>4</sup> On one end of the conversation, scholars point out the androcentrism of the text. For example, Lynn Matthews Anderson argues that “without exception, every word intended for readers in modern times who ‘shall receive these things’ (Moro. 10:3–5) is directed only to men: the writers, redactors, and even the translator of the Book of Mormon assumed a solely male audience for its salvific message.”<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Francine R. Bennion acknowledges that Book of Mormon women appear as “accessories to men,” but she asserts that “the wonder is not that there is so little about women in the Book of Mormon but

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not “invite women,” and she feels she needs to put away her femaleness in order to read it. Carol Lynn Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?,” *Sunstone*, March 1996, 34, <https://sunstone.org/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/101-32-40.pdf>.

4. Heather Farrell's is the most extensive work written entirely on women in the Book of Mormon. See Heather Farrell, *Walking with the Women of the Book of Mormon* (Cedar Fort, 2019). Heather B. Moore also covers the prominent women in the Book of Mormon, explaining cultural context while attempting to relate modern women to the Book of Mormon heroines and female antagonists. See Heather B. Moore, *Women of the Book of Mormon* (Covenant Communications, 2015). Camille S. Williams wrote an apologetic, with the hopes of answering many of the “big questions” regarding gender and the Book of Mormon. See Williams, “Women in the Book of Mormon,” 66–79. Other important works to note include Camille Fronk, “Desert Epiphany: Sariah and the Women in 1 Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 5–15, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol9/iss2/3/>; Jane Allis-Pike, “‘How Oft Would I Have Gathered You as a Hen Gathereth Her Chickens’: The Power of the Hen Metaphor in 3 Nephi 10:4–7,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Neal A. Maxwell Institute; Deseret Book, 2012), 57–74; Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 16–25, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol9/iss2/4/>; Kimberly M. Berkey and Joseph M. Spencer, “‘Great Cause to Mourn’: The Complexity of *The Book of Mormon*’s Presentation of Gender and Race,” in *Americanist Approaches to “The Book of Mormon,”* ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (Oxford University Press, 2019), 298–320; and Robert A. Rees, “The Midrashic Imagination and the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 3 (2011): 53–54, <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/the-midrashic-imagination-and-the-book-of-mormon/>. For a review of all the significant literature on gender in the Book of Mormon, see Joseph M. Spencer, “The Presentation of Gender in the Book of Mormon: A Review of Literature,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 29 (2020): 231–63, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/7215/>.

5. Lynn Matthews Anderson, “Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Latter-day Scripture,” *Dialogue* 27, no. 2 (1994): 188, <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/toward-a-feminist-interpretation-of-latter-day-scripture/>.

that there is so much, given the times and traditions." She adds, "Many of us fail to notice what mention there is of women in the book, either because it is what we expect or because it is not."<sup>6</sup> In a shorter but still expansive article, Jerrie W. Hurd tells the story of all the named women of the Book of Mormon, emphasizing their "power and influence." She adds that the women "are repeatedly acknowledged by Book of Mormon writers in a way few other ancient records can match."<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars such as Wendy Hamilton Christian strive to identify "less conspicuous ways that Book of Mormon women are included in the text."<sup>8</sup> Christian's conclusion is derived from clear textual evidence that women were present during relevant narrated events in the volume—for example, the delivery of sermons. Herein lies the unacknowledged problem, however. Just because the women present on such occasions *could* have been intentionally included among the speaker's addressees doesn't mean they *were*. Indeed, Melodie Moench Charles uses one of the same examples that Christian uses—King Benjamin speaking to an audience that definitively included women—to draw a conclusion in direct opposition to Christian's. The female presence at the meeting is all the more aggravating to Charles because, as she says, "throughout the speech, [Benjamin] totally ignores the adult female portion of his audience, while specifically addressing all other groups, even children."<sup>9</sup>

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6. Francine R. Bennion, "Women and the Book of Mormon: Tradition and Revelation," in *Women of Wisdom and Knowledge: Talks Selected from the BYU Women Conferences*, ed. Marie Cornwall and Susan Howe (Deseret Book, 1990), 171, 177.

7. Jerrie W. Hurd, *Our Sisters in the Latter-day Scriptures* (Deseret Book, 1987), 1.

8. Wendy Hamilton Christian, "'And Well She Can Persuade': The Power and Presence of Women in the Book of Mormon" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002), 47, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4597/>. Christian's unique contribution is her exhaustive list of "words, phrases and figurative language inclusive of women" (49). She calculates over 230 words and phrases that mean, imply, or include women, with 5,201 total occurrences of female-inclusive language (165). She bases her argument on the context in which gender-exclusive (masculine) terms are used. Her calculations "indicate over 300 instances of brethren in the Book of Mormon that reference women as well as men" (49).

9. Charles, "Precedents for Mormon Women from Scriptures," 51. Her conclusion contributes to the perception of gender inequality in the record. Both Charles and Christian interpret the intended audience of King Benjamin's speech based on their definition of the word "brethren." Neither scholar, however, dissects the use of "brethren" in its context, nor do they analyze the audience based on anything but their assumed definition of the term.

These very polarizing interpretations of the Book of Mormon demonstrate how crucial it is that we carefully read and study the text. It has been too easy for scholars to make sweeping claims based on a few citations<sup>10</sup> when what's needed is a detailed examination of relevant passages. To provide a very deliberate and nuanced understanding of the gendered language in the Book of Mormon, I will examine the story and sermons of one Book of Mormon character, Alma the Younger,<sup>11</sup> leaving for further research whether the patterns discernable there can be found throughout the Book of Mormon. Looking at one character whose presence in the text includes an extensive narrative and multiple sermons will allow for more concrete textual evidence to determine whether Alma was or was not aware and inclusive of women. First, I will examine the word “brethren,” explaining how the word is demonstrably inclusive of women in the relevant texts (whatever the term's overtones may

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10. For example, Pearson makes a sweeping claim about the feelings of the Nephite women without examining the text for evidence of her claim: “Nowhere in the book do we find the phrase, ‘My brethren and my sisters,’ or anything comparable to it. . . . ‘Arise, my sons, and be men! . . . Awake, my sons!’ Did Nephite women feel similarly ignored? Certainly, if only on a subconscious level.” Pearson, “Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?,” 34.

11. In her work on masculinity and the Book of Mormon, Amy Easton-Flake makes an important observation about Alma's conversion narrative and its connection to the published conversion experiences of nineteenth-century women. She discovered that although the nouns of address are masculine, the actual descriptions of Alma's conversion are more feminine, making Alma the Younger an important individual to dissect in regard to his sermons and gender. For example, Alma's extreme feelings of “guilt, sin, and estrangement from God,” Alma's “overwhelming feelings of relief and joy” after turning to Christ, being so overcome by the spirit that he falls to the ground, and then Alma's willingness to give up political leadership so he could preach “the word of God in much tribulation” (Mosiah 27:32) are all examples that nineteenth-century readers would have associated with women's conversion experiences at that time. Easton-Flake states, “Alma's experience parallels most closely a woman's rather than a man's conversion experience in nineteenth-century America. That this fact was likely not lost on the book's initial readers carries interesting implications, as once again the ideal male figure—even the prophet—models supposed nineteenth-century female attributes and behaviors. . . . What is much more nebulous is the text's message to (and about) women. For while women lack an overt presence in the text, their implicit presence may be felt throughout as the book continuously privileges the traits, actions, and spheres commonly associated with nineteenth-century women in conduct books and other popular literature.” Amy Easton-Flake, “‘Arise from the Dust, My Sons, and Be Men’: Masculinity in *The Book of Mormon*,” in Fenton and Hickman, *Americanist Approaches to “The Book of Mormon,”* 381; see also Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740–1845* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

be today). Second, I will explain the relationship between "people" and "brethren" and describe how they are used interchangeably in specific contexts. Third, I will demonstrate how Alma used "brethren" to intentionally speak to women as well as men and will share other evidence of him addressing the female presence in his audiences. And fourth, I will examine an account of Alma seemingly excluding women and explain how it nonetheless supports my thesis.

### **"Brethren" as a Gender-Inclusive Term?**

Charles and other similarly focused scholars arguably make their claims about the Book of Mormon being addressed to only men because that is how it reads to a more modern audience. Three of Alma's four main sermons begin with him addressing the congregation as his brethren. The only sermon that doesn't is in Alma 9, wherein Alma addresses the people of Ammonihah as a "wicked and perverse generation" (v. 8) before changing his tone and calling them his brethren (v. 30). When Alma addresses his audiences, he never addresses them as "my people" or "my brothers and sisters"—phrases that would certainly be seen as inclusive of female listeners. He consistently uses masculine terminology ("brethren," "man," and "men"), with only five specific acknowledgments of women in his sermons and the associated narratives. In an age of gender-inclusive language, it is easy to conclude that Alma and other prophets in the Book of Mormon completely ignored the women, even if it is apparent that they were present. However, an appropriate understanding of the term "brethren" and how it was used two hundred years ago brings clarity to the conversation.

Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English represents the lexicology during the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. The word "brethren" in that dictionary is defined first as the "noun plural of brother," which is how readers today often interpret the term.<sup>12</sup> Looking at the word "brother" in the same dictionary provides additional definitions. The second definition for "brother" is "any one closely united; an associate." The third definition offers another connotation: "one that resembles another in manners." The dictionary further explains that "kings [who] give to each other the title of *brother* address their

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12. American Dictionary of the English Language, Websters Dictionary 1828, under "brethren," accessed November 18, 2024, <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/brethren>.

congregations by the title of brethren. In a more general sense, *brother* or *brethren* is used for man in general; all men being children of the same primitive ancestors, and forming one race of beings.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, based on the latter two definitions of “brother” from Joseph Smith’s day, “brethren” wasn’t necessarily a male indicator and could have included women.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Google Books Ngram Viewer, in 1830 (the year the Book of Mormon was first published), “brethren” was used 9 times more than the phrase “(my) people,” 33 times more than “brothers and sisters,” and 112 times more than “brethren and sisters.”<sup>15</sup> In conjunction with the inclusive interpretations of “brethren” in the early nineteenth century, these findings could indicate that “brethren” was used more commonly because, in addition to its traditional use as a male indicator, it may have also been used as the all-encompassing and endearing term for humankind.<sup>16</sup>

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13. American Dictionary of the English Language, Websters Dictionary 1828, under “brother,” accessed November 18, 2024, <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Brother>, emphasis original.

14. Websters Dictionary 1828’s first definition of “man” is defined much the same way: “mankind; the human race; the whole species of human beings.” American Dictionary of the English Language, Websters Dictionary 1828, accessed November 18, 2024, under “man,” <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/man>.

15. Data for “brethren, my people, brothers and sisters, brethren and sisters,” 1800–1835, Google Books Ngram Viewer, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=brethren%2Cmy+people%2Cbrothers+and+sisters%2Cbrethren+and+sisters&year\\_start=1820&year\\_end=1835&corpus=en&smoothing=3&case\\_insensitive=false](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=brethren%2Cmy+people%2Cbrothers+and+sisters%2Cbrethren+and+sisters&year_start=1820&year_end=1835&corpus=en&smoothing=3&case_insensitive=false).

16. It is important to note that even if “brethren” did mean “men,” this may have been less offensive or noticeable to nineteenth-century women because they were accustomed to reading themselves into male stories. In her previously referenced article, Easton-Flake explains, “Nineteenth-century women well versed in the Bible and patriarchal church structures were accustomed to religious texts highlighting male rather than female actions; they were adept at finding meaning—and also themselves—in the stories of men. For instance, many female preachers in early America compared themselves to and drew strength from Jonah and Jeremiah, seeing these prophets as their personal models and predecessors. Consequently, for nineteenth-century women, the absence of female characters in *The Book of Mormon* may not have suggested a diminished role for women in actuality. While the text and the religion it founded certainly placed men at the head of the home and its religious institution, as Susanna Morrill points out in her article on women and *The Book of Mormon*, nineteenth-century women too found themselves within the text and made it ‘meaningful for their own lives and priorities.’” Easton-Flake, “Arise from the Dust,” 372. This could explain why no change to gender-inclusive terms would have seemed necessary in the translation of the Book of Mormon as women were adept at finding themselves in male-centered texts already. See also Susanna Morrill, “Women and the Book of Mormon: The Creation and Negotiation of

Two decades ago, controversy arose when various versions of the Bible began to be published with gender-inclusive translations. Some individuals felt this was unnecessary, stating that if masculine terms were used historically, then those terms should not be altered. Others claimed that the New Testament authors intended for "man" to mean "humankind," and "brethren" to include sisters, and therefore the Bible needed to be altered to reflect this inclusive interpretation to modern readers. Arguing in favor of making textually inclusive changes, biblical scholar Mark Strauss wrote,

The Greek masculine noun ἀδελφός can carry the sense of a physical brother but is more often used in the NT figuratively of the kinship between believers. Traditional English translations have rendered the Greek singular as "brother" and the plural (ἀδελφοί) as "brothers" (NIV) or "brethren" (NASB, RSV, KJV, NKJV). In many contexts, however, the author is clearly addressing both men and women. An example of this is Phil 4:1–2 where Paul, after addressing the Philippian congregation as ἀδελφοί (v. 1), encourages two women to live in harmony with each other (v. 2). When ἀδελφοί carries this inclusive sense, it seems that the most accurate translation would be "brothers and sisters." This is not a concession to a feminist agenda. Rather, it is exactly what the term meant in its first century context.<sup>17</sup>

Although the Book of Mormon was not written in Greek like the New Testament, its English translation of reformed Egyptian shares a lexicon with the language found in the King James Version.<sup>18</sup> Knowing other definitions for the word "brethren" were available at the time of translation allows for the possibility that Joseph Smith may have occasionally meant "brothers and sisters" when translating the word. In addition, just as Strauss argues for Paul in the New Testament, it's also possible that Alma meant "brethren" to mean "brothers and sisters."

We see this in languages still used today. For example, in Cakchiquel, a modern Mayan language, "they use itz'iin, which is basically 'brother.' But in Ch'orti' Maya [another Mayan language], the same term can be

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a Latter-day Saint Tradition," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 82–105, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol26/iss1/4/>.

17. Mark Strauss, "Linguistic and Hermeneutical Fallacies in the Guidelines Established at the 'Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 2 (June 1998): 253.

18. See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 5, 11–42.

used for brother or sister depending on the context (ijtz'in)."<sup>19</sup> We can find similar patterns in the English language. Although "brothers" and "brethren" do not currently connote the inclusion of women, English speakers have other words that do. For example, the term "guys," though technically a male indicator, can be and has been used gender-inclusively—however, not without critique.<sup>20</sup>

Understanding and explaining how male terms can be inclusive of women does not mean that we shouldn't be sensitive to how these terms sound or read today. A greater effort to convey an inclusive message to all of God's children by using non-gender-specific terms or both a male and a female pronoun is crucial in today's world. Some leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have begun to assume gender-inclusiveness in the Book of Mormon by clearly identifying sisters as a part of the intended audience. In the April 2024 general conference, Elder Shayne M. Bowen quoted the Book of Mormon (Moro. 7:27, 29) and adjusted the verse to read, "'Wherefore, my beloved brethren [and sisters], have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven? . . . Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.'"<sup>21</sup> There is wisdom in following this example in our own reading and quoting of scriptural text.

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19. Dr. Kerry Hull, email correspondence with author, August 21, 2022. Dr. Kerry Hull is a professor of religion at Brigham Young University with academic interests in Maya linguistics and anthropology and is fluent in Ch'orti' Mayan.

20. *Oxford English Dictionary*, under "guy (noun²)," additional sense, accessed November 20, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6723058808>. Even if male terms are meant to be inclusive, and the individuals being addressed are aware of the inclusivity, the fact that some universal terms are masculine in nature can be frustrating in and of itself. For example, some could argue that "the term [*guys*] is sexist because, while claiming to be gender-neutral, it actually positions men as the 'default.' . . . For women in male-dominated industries particularly, 'guys' can reinforce their sense of being in the minority." Grace Jennings-Edquist, "Is It Time to Stop Saying 'Guys' at Work?," ABC Everyday, October 16, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/is-it-time-to-stop-saying-you-guys-at-work/10240970>.

21. Shayne M. Bowen, "Miracles, Angels, and Priesthood Power," *Liahona*, May 2024, 54, brackets original. Additionally, when quoting the prophet Nephi (2 Ne. 31:19), Elder Jeffrey R. Holland adjusted the verse to read, "'My beloved brethren [and sisters], after ye have [received these first fruits of the Restoration], I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.'" Jeffrey R. Holland, "A Perfect Brightness of Hope," *Liahona*, May 2020, 83, brackets original.

## The Relationship Between the Uses of "People" and "Brethren"

Early on in Alma's story, he becomes chief judge over the people thanks to the encouragement of King Mosiah. After his sons reject their rights to the throne, Mosiah issues a proclamation concerning the status of government. It begins with these words: "Behold, O ye my people, or my brethren, for I esteem you as such" (Mosiah 29:5). Mosiah begins with a term that is inclusive of all genders, the word "people," but then he changes this to "brethren." It is important that he consciously did so because, as he says, he "esteems them" or values them as such. He is still, however, talking to all "his people." There is no reason to think that he suddenly meant to speak only to the men. Rather, he adjusted his language to demonstrate his endearment toward his readers. Mosiah apparently wanted them to feel more like family than subjects. Here, in short, it appears that "brethren" is used as a familial term. This pattern repeats throughout Mosiah 29 and continues through Alma 34.

Note that in these chapters (Mosiah 29 to Alma 34), possessive pronouns are used before "people" only when the pronoun refers to a person who led a group of people: kings, would-be kings (such as Amlici), and, most importantly, God. However, Alma never addresses his audiences as "my people." This is perhaps because, having given up his office as chief judge to fully dedicate himself to the work as high priest, he didn't want his audiences to feel like they were his subjects. He addresses them as "my brethren," which makes them his equals. As mentioned earlier, using "brethren" this way falls under the third definition of "brother" from the 1828 Webster's Dictionary.<sup>22</sup>

Almost exclusively, when there is no possessive pronoun before the term "people,"<sup>23</sup> Alma and Mormon refer to a group of individuals being talked *about*. When Alma uses the word "brethren," he refers to individuals being talked *to*. We see this illustrated helpfully in Alma 5, where Mormon begins the chapter by saying "that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people. . . . And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church" (vv. 1–2). Mormon uses the word "people" twice when talking *about* whom Alma will be preaching to, but as soon

22. American Dictionary of the English Language, Webster's Dictionary 1828, under "brother."

23. One exception is in Alma 30:32, where Alma calls the people "my people" when debating with Korihor.

as Alma begins to speak *to* the people, he says, “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren” (v. 6). Throughout the chapter 5 sermon, Alma uses the word “brethren” thirteen times. Once he uses “brethren” to refer to the people his father had baptized.<sup>24</sup> Another ten times he uses “brethren” to refer to the people he is speaking to, often using the possessive and endearing term “my” before “brethren” (see vv. 6, 8, 14, 22, 24, 26, 43, 50, 53, 58). By contrast, “people” is used eight times during this sermon. Five of those times, Alma refers to a group of people not present—they were either in the past or the future. Two other times, Mormon describes the people Alma would preach to as a narrator speaking in third person (vv. 1, 2). Alma uses the term “people” to address the group he is preaching to only once (v. 44).<sup>25</sup>

This language pattern continues when Alma preaches in Ammonihah, a city in which “Satan had gotten great hold” (Alma 8:9). Mormon seems to copy Alma’s own account, as evident in Alma 9:1: “And again, I, Alma, having been commanded of God that I should take Amulek and go forth and preach again unto this people, or the people who were in the city of Ammonihah.” Note here that Alma, when talking *about* those he would preach to, refers to them as “the people,” following the pattern from before. This time, when he actually begins to address this group, he does not call them his “brethren” but instead a “wicked and perverse generation” (Alma 9:8). However, he eventually changes his tone in verse 30: “Ye are my brethren, and ye ought to be beloved.” Again, we see Alma’s use of the word “brethren” is meant to convey a loving, kindred relationship. The people of Ammonihah do not respond in a way that reflects the sibling-like relationship Alma experienced before, yet he calls them “brethren” in the hopes that they will live up to that endearing title. This demonstrates that when Alma uses “brethren,” he is

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24. Alma explains that his father baptized “his brethren in the waters of Mormon” (Alma 5:3). Mosiah 18 records Alma’s father doing so: “As many as believed him went thither to hear his words. . . . And after this manner he did baptize every one that went forth to the place of Mormon; . . . and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon” (vv. 6, 16). The emphasis is on *everyone*, not every *man*. The first three individuals baptized are male, but that is the only time gender is specified. There is no reference to men or even the word “brethren” in this chapter, while “people” is used eleven times. Later, in Mosiah 24:22, women are mentioned as a part of the group who left the land of Helam with Alma. Therefore, in Alma 5, Alma’s use of the word “brethren” included his father’s people, both women and men.

25. For example, in Alma 5:4, Alma refers to “the people of king Noah,” and in verses 21 and 27, he speaks of Christ’s people. Alma does say in verse 44 that he is commanded to stand in front of “this people,” but even there, he is referring in the third person to the people he is talking to.

not being exclusive of gender. Rather, his word choice is about affiliation and camaraderie.

Continuing on to Alma 32 and Alma's sermon to the outcast Zoramites, we see Alma's frequent use of the term "brethren" and its connection to Mormon's use of the term "people." Alma consistently addresses the Zoramites as "my brethren" (Alma 32:24, 43; 33:14, 17, 21, 23),<sup>26</sup> but when Mormon prefaces Alma's sermon, he refers to Alma's Zoramite audience as "the people," "the poor class of people," and "the people upon the hill Onidah" (Alma 32:1–4). Because Mormon uses the term "people" when referring to Alma's audience in third person, we cannot necessarily infer that it was a male-only audience, nor can we assume that Alma meant to address only the men. With Mormon's third-person sermon introduction, it is equally possible that Alma spoke to men and women.

Taken together, these examples present a consistent distinction in the narrative of Alma the Younger that makes "brethren" a translation of the gender-inclusive word "people" in the form of direct address. This is encouraging for readers of the Book of Mormon, as it sets forth the possibility that the prophets and writers were not always using the word "brethren" to be gender-exclusive, but rather often used it to express a relationship and an equality between themselves and their congregations.

## Examples of Alma Being Inclusive of Women

There is much evidence to support that "brethren" *can* be an inclusive term, but what evidence is there that Alma spoke intentionally to women? Alma's inclusion of women within masculine terms begins with his first spoken words after his intense repentance scene in Mosiah 27.<sup>27</sup> Arising from his coma, Alma acknowledges his redemption through Christ and then quotes what the Lord said to him: "Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God" (v. 25). Here, Alma immediately uses

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26. Alma uses "people" only when talking about a separate group of people during the time of the prophet Zenock (see Alma 33:16, 17) or when speaking of the Son of God who "will come to redeem his people" (Alma 33:22), using a possessive pronoun before "people" because Christ is their leader.

27. Not only is Alma explicitly inclusive of women when he preaches after his coma, but as noted earlier, Alma's conversion experience is laced with feminine characteristics. "For while the vast majority of conversion narratives in *The Book of Mormon* focus on men, the description mirrors most closely the conversions of women. . . . Alma's experience parallels most closely a woman's rather than a man's conversion experience in nineteenth-century America." Easton-Flake, "Arise from the Dust," 379–81.

Christ's words to teach his audience what he wants them to understand. When he says "all mankind," he clearly means women and men. The doctrine he has been called to teach applies to all of them.<sup>28</sup> This inclusive ideology may have been new to Alma, as the Lord's first words to him were "marvel not" (v. 25).<sup>29</sup> But it is also possible that Alma marveled over the method of being saved rather than who can be saved.<sup>30</sup>

Whether Alma was originally egalitarian or whether God's redemption for all humankind inspired him to become so is not entirely clear. Regardless, there is textual evidence of Alma's efforts to be inclusive throughout his ministry. In Mosiah 27:30, Alma says because the people can "foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all." From the time Alma was "born of the Spirit" (Mosiah 27:24), he made it clear that Christ redeems all genders, races, and people, and Alma continued to support these claims throughout his mission.

At the conclusion of his repentance story, Mormon summarizes Alma's efforts: "Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to *all the people* the things which they had heard and seen" (Mosiah 27:32, italics added). In Alma 5:44, Alma declares to the people in Zarahemla that he is "commanded to stand and testify unto this people." In Alma 29, he acknowledges that his greatest wish is to "declare unto *every soul* . . . repentance and the plan of redemption" (v. 2, italics added). To his son Helaman, he declares that he has labored to "bring souls unto repentance" and that "because of the word . . . many have been born of God" (Alma 36:24, 26). The use of words like "all," "people," and "souls" illustrates that Alma knew he was called to invite everyone to come unto Christ. If one carries

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28. In their recently published work, Fatima Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming make a similar observation on the inclusivity of Alma's word choice. They also note the gendered language in the metaphor of a second birth: "Birth requires a womb. Therefore, to be born of the spirit would require the spirit to have a womb. Until we repent and follow God, we are waiting in a womb, waiting for spiritual birth. This is particularly gendered language, tied closely to God and the Spirit." Fatima Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming, *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, vol. 2, *Mosiah–Alma* (Common Consent Press, 2022), 117.

29. Kylie Turley, conversation with author, September 16, 2023.

30. When retelling the experience to his son Helaman, Alma reiterates that he has been "born of God" and that others need to be as well. He focuses on this aspect of the original revelation more than the "all mankind" portion of the revelation (see Alma 36:23–26 compared to Mosiah 27:25).

this understanding into the remainder of Alma's sermons and stories, it clarifies the likelihood that Alma preached to both women and men throughout his work.

### Male-Exclusive Terms That Could Include Women

We see in Alma 1 how the word "man" could be inclusive of women. Here Mormon explains what happened when Alma and the priests went to preach: "And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength" (Alma 1:26). Before Mormon wrote that "every man" labored "according to his strength," he wrote that when the priests spoke, "the people" (a term that could be inclusive of women) "left their labors." If women were included in the people who left their labors, it naturally follows that they were also included in those who labored "according to his strength."<sup>31</sup>

When we proceed to the next chapter in the book of Alma, we see that in certain contexts, "brethren" was used to identify only men. I will explain this more in the following section, but in the story of the Amlicites, the word "brethren" is used to describe both a "plural of brother"<sup>32</sup> and those "closely united."<sup>33</sup> The leaders who were sent to watch the camp of the Amlicities returned to Alma with the grave news that the Amlicities were "upon our brethren in that land; and they are fleeing before them with their flocks, and their wives, and their children, towards our

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31. A further hint that "men" included the female laborers is found in the prosperity that occurred because of the consecration of the people. The people began to be unified, which led to prosperity, specifically in "silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth" (Alma 1:29). Anciently, these materials were associated with women. "One of the best documented female roles in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica was in relation to textile production, and archaeological spindle whorls provide an abundant data set for interpreting female economic contributions." Geoffrey G. McCafferty and Sharisse D. McCafferty, "Canadian Contributions to Mesoamerican Gender Studies," in *Canadian Journal of Archaeology/Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* 36, no. 1 (2012): 69.

32. American Dictionary of the English Language, Websters Dictionary 1828, under "brethren."

33. American Dictionary of the English Language, Websters Dictionary 1828, under "brother."

city” (Alma 2:25). We know that women are not included this time in “brethren” because they are mentioned separately.

But Mormon uses similar phrasing inclusively in the next chapter. In Alma 3, Nephite warriors had died in battle, and “many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed” (Alma 3:2). Then chapter 4 refers back to this same verse when discussing the survivors’ remorse and potentially uses “brethren” gender-inclusively in doing so. Alma 4:2 explains, “But the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds.” Rather than repeating the mention of Nephite male soldiers who were slain in battle plus “women and children,” Mormon combines them all into “brethren.”<sup>34</sup> When Mormon does not acknowledge women individually, as in Alma 3:2, he may acknowledge women collectively by the gender-neutral use of the term “brethren,” as seen in Alma 4:2.

In Alma 5, Alma defines what he means by the term “brethren.” He begins his sermon by addressing the people thus: “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren.” He then explains what he means by “brethren” in the next phrase: “you that belong to this church” (v. 6). Later, in verse 49, he states that he was called to “preach unto my beloved brethren,” and then adds: “Yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation.” In this list, Alma does not specify that he is speaking to both genders, as he does with age and class. This could be because he has already established that “brethren” means “church members” earlier in the chapter. Whether or not Alma intended to define what he meant,<sup>35</sup> he makes it clear he preached to all people.

In their recently published second volume of *The Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, Fatimah Salleh and Margaret Olsen Hemming note that “this verse is distinct in its focus on age rather than sex or race. Alma nods toward generational divides multiple times only to underline their lack of importance before God. This may hint at the conflicts

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34. Mormon does a similar thing with “flocks and herds.” In Alma 2:25, Mormon only uses “flocks,” but in Alma 3:2 and Alma 4:2, he specifies “flocks and their herds” or “flocks and herds.”

35. During Alma’s conversion experience, Alma said that the Lord defined “mankind” as “men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people” (Mosiah 27:25).

within Zarahemla's society; Alma's community may need a prophetic call to generational healing."<sup>36</sup> This is an important observation because it gives insight into why at certain times Alma would be more specific about age and other demographics. He speaks to the needs of the population he is talking to, seeing their cultural struggles and not ignoring them. We will see him do this with gender in Alma 32. When Alma does not address his audience by gender, it could be because that particular audience did not need it clarified.

As Alma continues his preaching, Mormon makes a point of acknowledging the universality of Alma's mission: "The word of God was liberal unto all, that none were deprived of the privilege of assembling themselves together to hear the word of God" (Alma 6:5). This emphasis on "all" and "none" leaves little doubt that women were invited to these meetings. There may have been specific meetings that were for men alone, as we will demonstrate later, but here Mormon reiterates that Alma's preaching in Zarahemla (in Alma 5) was to *all*.

### Sermon in Alma 13 and Women

Many read the Alma 13 sermon as addressed only to men because of Alma's references to ordination. In verse 2, Alma mentions the priests who "were ordained after the order of [God's] Son," and in verse 6, they are called "to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest." Here, Alma refers to those ordained in the third person, as if they were not in attendance. As Alma's sermon continues, Alma never invites this audience to enter into this order of the high priesthood. Instead, in verse 10, Alma explains that "there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God . . . on account of their exceeding faith and repentance." Then addressing his audience in verse 13, Alma invites them to "humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest." It could be that entering into the rest of the Lord may have included ordination in the days of Melchizedek, but according to Alma and this audience, "rest" could also result from faith and repentance. Because Alma never explicitly invites them to enter into the order, it leaves the possibility open that women were included in the audience—women who were invited to repent and enter into the rest of the Lord.

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36. Salleh and Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 2:154.

In addition, in verses 21–22 Alma declares that “now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh; Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; . . . and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people.” We know that by the time Alma gives his sermon in Alma 32, Alma believes God’s word is given by angels to men, women, and children. Possibly, Alma did not believe this until after seeing the brave testimony of the women and children in Alma 14. Regardless, based on the idea that all are invited to enter into the Lord’s rest and that Alma believed that “glad tidings” are made known to all genders, it seems possible that this chapter was also addressed to women.

### **Martyred Women in Alma 14**

We see further indication of the probability of women’s attendance in the very next chapter, which relates one of the most heartbreaking stories in the Book of Mormon. Alma ends his preaching to the people of Ammonihah with words that must have been comforting to those who would soon be martyrs: “Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest” (Alma 13:29). According to the text, many in Ammonihah believed him and began to repent. But many would not repent, and instead, they were angry with Alma and Amulek to the point of retaliation. They bound Alma and Amulek and took them to the chief judge. Many testified against Alma and Amulek before the chief judge, but Zeezrom, formerly their antagonist, tried to defend them (see Alma 14:1–5).

Zeezrom was cast out along with “all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek” (v. 7). The words “all those” initially appear inclusive, but then the next verse says that the angry mob “brought [the believers’] wives and children together, and . . . caused that they should be cast into the fire” (v. 8). This passage could lead the reader to deduce that only men, or mostly men, were among those cast out during the scene with the chief judge. This understanding, supported by the statement that “all those who believed” were cast out (v. 7), suggests that only men had been taught by Alma and Amulek as they preached in Ammonihah. Nonetheless, a more careful reading of the text challenges this assumption.

First, it is not known how much time passed between the ending of the sermon and the trial. Enough time had to have passed, however, for

those who believed to search the scriptures (see Alma 14:1). Everything from the sermon to the burnings could have taken place in one day or multiple days; the text is not explicit.<sup>37</sup> Either way, Alma and Amulek were removed from the area in which they preached their sermons and taken to the chief judge. Multiple believers followed them to the chief judge, most likely with the intent to save their preachers (as Zeezrom's presence at the trial suggests). Women and children who may have been in attendance for Alma and Amulek's preaching, however, might not have been present for the trial. One can imagine that mothers especially would have taken their children elsewhere, not wanting to take them into a situation that was bound to be hostile. Even if this was not their reasoning, the text reports that people "brought [the believers'] wives and children together" to kill them, possibly suggesting that they weren't present at the end of the trial (v. 8). Based on verse 7, which says that "all those who believed in the words" were cast out, "all" may refer to all *who were in attendance in the court* who believed in Alma and Amulek—not all those who had been in attendance at the sermon. But if they were in attendance at court and believed in Alma and Amulek's teachings, they must have heard Alma's sermon in person or heard about Alma's sermon in order to believe.

Further indication that women were present at and intended receivers of the sermon, even and especially if they were not at the trial, is found in verse 8, which reads, "Whoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God [was] cast into the fire." When would these women and children have heard the word of God or been taught the word of God, such that they could be believers at that point? They don't seem

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37. The text is explicit, however, on dates of certain events at Ammonihah. The angel visited Amulek on "the fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year" (Alma 10:6), the same day in which Amulek encountered Alma. They were together for "many days" before they began their public preaching (Alma 8:27). Three months and a week later, "on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year" (Alma 14:23), after having been imprisoned for "many days" following the martyrdoms of the women and the children, the prison walls crumbled, and Alma and Amulek were miraculously set free (see Alma 14:23–28). As all the events concerning Ammonihah mentioned in this paper occurred between the visit of the angel to Amulek and the prison crumbling, we know that the Ammonihah sermon and the subsequent martyrdom took place within approximately a three-month period, giving the possibility for more time between the sermon and the martyrdom. These details were presented to me in conversation with Dr. Joseph M. Spencer, professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, in 2023.

to have been believers from an earlier point in time. At the beginning of Alma's preaching in Ammonihah, he was rejected and cast out without anyone making a defense for him (see Alma 8:13). It seems evident that few or none believed in the word of God when Alma began his mission there, and none were converted until he and Amulek began preaching together. Even Amulek, who became Alma's companion, acknowledged that he had hardened his heart and "would not hear" until his angelic visitation (Alma 10:6).

Moreover, in Alma 14:1, "after he had made an end of speaking unto the people [note the gender-inclusive language here] many of them did believe on [Alma's] words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures." If the sermons, trial, and martyrdom all happened on the same day, who would have had time to search the word of God *except* the women who had returned home (that is, if only the believing men trailed Alma and Amulek to the courtroom)? If the sermons, trial, and martyrdom happened over several days, the women and children may have attended the court scene, been cast out for believing, and then been forced into the fire another day. Possibly, they willingly entered the fire, refusing to deny their testimony of Christ.

The martyred women and children's lives may be another suggestive element of their presence at Alma's sermons. Although this point is not conclusive, it is worth exploring. The women were not just deemed guilty by association because of their husbands', brothers', or fathers' belief. According to the text, "whosoever believed" was cast in the fire (Alma 14:8). It thus appears that these woman had a chance to deny the faith and escape their fate. It is not difficult to imagine that the women who were burned saw themselves in the words Alma had taught: "Death comes upon mankind," but there is "a plan of redemption laid, which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead" (Alma 12:24–25). These brave women were possibly willing to suffer physical death, believing it was a better fate than the "second death" Alma spoke of (Alma 13:30), having been taught that they would soon "enter into the rest of God" (Alma 12:37). If one assumes that women were ignored in sermons, one would assume also that their experiences would be ignored too, but these and other examples highlight that they were not.

### Alma's Inclusion of Women in Alma 32

Alma's next sermon comes some chapters later. In Alma 32, while preaching among the Zoramites, he offers "one of the most inclusive

verses in the Book of Mormon."<sup>38</sup> This time he includes women explicitly, making sure that they understand that what he is teaching is for them. "And now," he says, "[God] imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also" (v. 23). Kylie Turley interprets this passage as signaling how Alma had changed after watching the burning of the women and the children; only now, after witnessing that awful event, does he choose to acknowledge women explicitly.<sup>39</sup> Joseph Spencer in turn uses this verse to explain how Alma may have wanted to address women more directly after Korihor's success among them (see Alma 30:18).<sup>40</sup> Although I agree with Turley that Alma must have been changed by the scenes he witnessed in Ammonihah, and I agree with Spencer that Alma would have been increasingly concerned about women in Korihor's aftermath, Turley's and Spencer's arguments fail to note evidence (reviewed previously) that Alma may have been acknowledging women before he spoke to the Zoramites, before Korihor, and even before Ammonihah. Alma 32:23 may not be an exception to male-exclusive content; it could be another clear indication of female inclusion and of Alma's awareness of women.

However, it is worth analyzing why Alma was more direct and explicit about his inclusion of women in Alma 32 than in previous sermons. Both Turley and Spencer note the rareness of Alma addressing women independent of men. Using the evidence they introduce in their articles, and pairing it with what has been mentioned thus far, perhaps the experience at Ammonihah and the interaction with Korihor made Alma aware of the fact that although he knew he was speaking to women as well as men, his use of language was not effectively portraying his inclusive intent to his audience (as it doesn't clearly do so in modern language). Alma may have felt the need to point out that angels can come to women (and children, as also stated further along in the verse) to debunk a cultural myth that angels only come to men.<sup>41</sup> Both Alma and

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38. Salleh and Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 2:267.

39. Kylie Turley, "Alma's Hell: Repentance, Consequence, and the Lake of Fire and Brimstone," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 33–34, <https://scholars.archive.byu.edu/jbms/vol28/iss1/2/>.

40. Joseph M. Spencer, "Women and Nephite Men: Lessons from the Book of Alma," in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Contexts Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2019): 235–53.

41. Dr. Joseph M. Spencer, conversation with author during winter 2023.

Amulek had been visited by angels (see Mosiah 27 and Alma 10:7), and because they were both male, Alma may have wanted to make it clear that it was not their genders that invited the heavenly visitations. As seen before, Alma addressed certain demographics explicitly (like gender or age) when cultural circumstances called for it. But when gender wasn't specified, it may have been because Alma felt that women were naturally included in his audience.

### **Alma 7: A Potential Exception to Alma's Gender-Inclusive Language**

In the preceding sections, I have made the case that Alma's sermons are generally intended to be read as addressed to women as well as men.<sup>42</sup> Are there any clear exceptions to this rule? As it turns out, there is one sermon for which there is suggestive evidence that Alma explicitly addresses only men. In Alma 7:1, Alma addresses the crowd as "my beloved brethren" and continues to refer to them as such three other times, in verses 17, 22, and 26. Given the evidence prior to this section, one might assume that an accurate twenty-first-century translation would be "brothers and sisters" in the place of every "brethren"—but the concluding verse of the sermon complicates things. There, Alma leaves a blessing on the congregation: "And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, *your women* and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever" (Alma 7:27, emphasis added).<sup>43</sup> To Pearson, this verse makes it appear as if women are property.<sup>44</sup> Based on Kevin and Shauna Christensen's rebuttal to that reading, if we remove the list of possessions as part of a nonessential phrase, the verse could also read, "May the peace of God rest upon you,

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42. There are times when "brethren" is used to talk about a group of men exclusively. We see this in Alma 27, when Alma runs into his former comrades. "Now the joy of Alma in meeting his brethren was truly great. . . . And now it came to pass that Alma conducted his brethren back to the land of Zarahemla" (Alma 27:19–20). We again see this use of "brethren" when the text references Alma and his missionary companions, who are listed as all men (see Alma 31:6, 11–12, 19).

43. Brant Gardner, in his Book of Mormon commentary, points out that it is significant here that Alma "does not bless a city. He blesses families. . . . He blesses the lands and flocks required to support that family." Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Alma* (Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 137.

44. Pearson, "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?," 35.

your women, and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever."<sup>45</sup> Even with the second interpretation, women are still "not the subjects of the sermon."<sup>46</sup> If there were women in the crowd, then Alma appears to ignore them in this verse and potentially ignores them for the entire sermon.<sup>47</sup>

As explained earlier, what makes "brethren" confusing is that it can mean "brothers and sisters," but it can also mean just "brothers." In Alma 7, then, it is possible that Alma is addressing only men in verse 27 because he was talking to a solely male audience throughout the sermon. Other textual evidence is in fact suggestive here. For example, in the previous chapter, Mormon introduces the story of Alma going to the Gideonites as follows: "And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon" (Alma 6:8). In other accounts of Alma going to visit a people, Mormon introduces those interactions with the following: "[Alma] began to teach the people in the land of Melek" (8:4), and "Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla" (5:1). However, in the land of Gideon, Mormon indicates that Alma specifically goes to "the church." It is possible that Alma taught church members in different groups and that his sermon to the church in Gideon, recorded in Alma 7, was taught just to men. In fact, Mormon acknowledges that there was more taught to the people of Gideon than is recorded in Alma 7: "And now it came to pass that Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written" (Alma 8:1). If Alma gave more instruction in Gideon than what was recorded, this leaves space for the possibility that multiple gatherings occurred with other groups that did include women.

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45. "Pearson claims that women in Nephite culture are marginalized and viewed as property. The longer we have worked on this response, the less inclined we are to accept this charge. Pearson reads a blessing that the peace of God may 'rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children' (p. 35, quoting Alma 7:27). The reference to women and children comes after the summary statement 'all that you possess,' not before. Even so, there are instances when women speak of 'my husband; . . . my sons' (1 Nephi 5:8; compare Mosiah 21:9; Alma 19:4–5)." Kevin Christensen and Shauna Christensen, "Nephite Feminism Revisited: Thoughts on Carol Lynn Pearson's View of Women in the Book of Mormon," in *FARMS Review of Books* 10, no. 2 (1998): 42.

46. Salleh and Hemming, *Book of Mormon for the Least of These*, 2:159.

47. It is possible that it was not appropriate for Alma to bless the women directly due to cultural customs. However, there is neither historical nor scriptural evidence that such a tradition existed.

However, Mormon's introduction to Alma's chapter 7 sermon in Alma 6:8 deserves closer attention in this regard. It is probable that the "holy order" portion of Alma 6:8 should be read adjoined to the rest of the verse: "And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word . . . , and according to the spirit of prophecy . . . , according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, . . . and the holy order by which he was called." With this reading, Alma went to speak to the church in Gideon because he was called to preach the redemption of Christ. The "holy order" could refer to his covenant to preach the word, not the group of people he addressed.

Depending on how one punctuates the text, other readings are also possible. If the verse's middle three sentences are placed between em dashes or parentheses, such that the first and the last sentences are continuous, the text reads, "And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, . . . and the holy order by which he was called." Such a rendering could suggest that Alma went to declare the word to the church (the general population of the membership) and to the "holy order." We could assume "holy order" means those who were ordained to the priesthood, but it could also mean those who were in covenant relationship with Christ through their baptism. Both meanings coincide with Alma's explanation for why he preached to the church in Gideon in Alma 7:22: "that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received."

Alma 5:54 is another instance where we read "the holy order of God." Alma mentions those who have humbled "themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance." Thus, with repentance being the qualification to "walk after the holy order of God," those mentioned in Alma 5 could have been male or female. As Alma 7:22 also uses the phrase "walk after the holy order of God," we could assume the same. However, 7:22 includes the phrase "after which ye have been received." When Alma uses the word "received" in 7:22, it echoes the use in Alma 13:18, where "Alma speaks of the high priest Melchizedek who 'received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God.' We see here that *received* is the term Alma used to denote those who were ordained to an office of the priesthood. In Alma 7:22, then, it seems that

Alma directly speaks to priesthood bearers, increasing the probability of his audience in Alma 7 being exclusively male."<sup>48</sup>

But even if Alma spoke of Christ's ministry to a male-only audience in Gideon, he still uses inclusive language: "And [Christ] shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of *his people*. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind *his people*; and he will take upon him their infirmities, . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor *his people* according to their infirmities. . . . The Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of *his people*" (Alma 7:11–13, emphasis added). Moreover, Alma admits in verse 9 that the Spirit admonished him to "cry unto this people." The message Alma wanted to make clear throughout all his sermons, it seems, no matter the demographic of the actual audience, is that Christ is the Savior of everyone and that Alma was sent to teach Christ's redemption to all people, including women.

## Conclusion

Although the stories and sermons of Alma are apparently written entirely by men, male authorship does not automatically equate to the text being exclusive of women. Alma's conversion speech, the sermons he gives, the narrative of the converts in Ammonihah, and even the possible intentional exclusion of women in Alma 7 all point to Alma's overall intended audience including women. Alma's teaching that "[God] imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also" (Alma 32:23) helps us recognize that women weren't just meant to hear what was being taught—they were meant to experience it. We can also see that Alma believed that they did hear and experience and would continue to do so. Not only *could* Alma have been intentionally inclusive of women, but the text offers support that he was.

While the general lack of female representation in the text remains a question for readers and scholars to wrestle with, careful analysis suggests that a slow and deliberate reading of the Book of Mormon may reveal a much less androcentric text than many readers have perceived it

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48. Cassidy Nichole Pyper, "I Say unto You, My Brethren': Helping Female Students See Themselves in the Book of Mormon," *Religious Educator* 24, no. 3 (2023): 104, <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-24-no-3-2023/i-say-unto-you-my-brethren>.

to be. That itself is good news for those who embrace the book as scripture in the twenty-first century. Joseph Spencer agrees that “the Book of Mormon, despite initial appearances, has much of interest and relevance to say about gender.” He continues, “It seems to me that we will not get far on difficult topics like this without slowing down and investigating the details we are too likely to miss when we zoom out and try to take in the big picture.”<sup>49</sup> To discover more insight into gender and the Book of Mormon, readers must do as Spencer prescribes and carefully and meticulously study the Book of Mormon’s words to understand the author’s intent, especially regarding gender.<sup>50</sup> I hope this paper is one of many others still to come where the experiences and sermons of other Book of Mormon authors, editors, and speakers are carefully explored on whether and how they, like Alma, intentionally included women.

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49. Joseph M. Spencer, “Mothers, Daughters, Wives, and Women: Notes on Gender in First Nephi,” in *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*, vol. 1 (Greg Kofford Books, 2021), 235.

50. The following questions about the Book of Mormon have aided me in my research: Were women seen as lesser by prophetic voices in the Book of Mormon? Did those prophets aim for women to hear or read them, or did they see males as their primary and desired audience? In an explicitly devotional sense, did God intend the Book of Mormon to be for women?