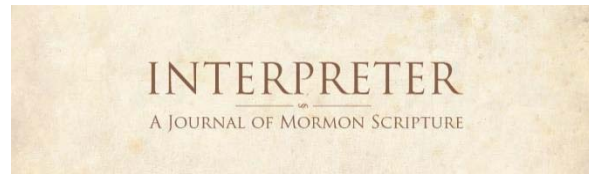




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In His Footsteps: Ammon 1 and Ammon 2

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In His Footsteps Ammon₁ and Ammon₂

Val Larsen

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IN HIS FOOTSTEPS AMMON₁ AND AMMON₂

Val Larsen

Abstract: Mormon is a historian with a literary sensibility and considerable literary skill. Though his core message is readily apparent to any competent reader, his history nevertheless rewards close reading. Its great scope means that much that is said must be said by implication. And its witness of Christ is sometimes expressed through subtle narrative parallels or through historical allegory. This article focuses on parallel narratives that feature Ammon₁ and Ammon₂, with special attention to the allegorical account of Ammon₂ at the waters of Sebus. To fully comprehend the power of the testimony of Christ that Mormon communicates in his Ammon narratives, readers must glean from textual details an understanding of the social and political context in which the narratives unfold.¹

Compared with other works of scripture of the world's great religions, the Book of Mormon is distinguished by the length and complexity of its integrated narrative. But its remarkable comparative length and complex unity notwithstanding, the Book of Mormon recounts less than the hundredth part of what happened during the time period it covers (Words of Mormon 1:5). The brevity of the account relative to the historical period covered has two important consequences: first, there was ample scope for Mormon to select content that served his rhetorical and aesthetic purposes, and second, much

1. Peter Eubanks, Brant Gardner, Grant Hardy, and two reviewers at *Interpreter* read and helpfully commented on an a previous draft of this article.

of the history will be present—if it is present at all—only by implication.

With respect to the first consequence, Mormon's history, like other ancient histories, is not primarily empirical. His account is shaped by a clear rhetorical purpose: to bear testimony of Christ and illustrate the consequences of accepting or rejecting him. Since his history is so brief, Mormon has the option—and has exercised it—of selecting material that is aesthetically unified, that can be arranged to feature narrative parallels and contrasts that anticipate, echo, and amplify.² If we recognize his literary sensibility, we will be better prepared to see important dimensions of meaning that he communicates allegorically or implicitly in the micro and macro structure of his history.

With respect to history present only by implication, it can be classified under four broad headings: (a) some meanings are obscured by identifiable errors in the production or transmission of the text that can be corrected through textual criticism; (b) some events happen mostly off stage because they are not the main focus of the narrative but add important context if reconstructed through a close reading of their fragmentary appearance in the main narrative; (c) some things the author meant to say are unclear because he assumes background knowledge that most readers don't have but that can be deduced from what he does say; and (d) some things the author meant to hide but couldn't fully eliminate because they were too important a part of the story to fully disappear.

The methodological objective of this article is to argue for and illustrate an explicitly literary method of reading the Book of Mormon that highlights the rhetorical unity of the text and reveals new dimensions of implicit meaning. The substantive objective is to deepen understanding of two interrelated nar-

2. Richard Dilworth Rust, "Recurrence in Book of Mormon Narratives" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 3/1 (1994): 39–52.

ratives in the books of Mosiah and Alma that feature Ammon₁ and Ammon₂.

Method

As is true for almost all writers, Mormon faces the difficult task of getting into the head of his readers and anticipating what they already know and what must be explained for them to understand his intended meaning. Because his audience is diverse and distant in both culture and time, this normal writing task is an especially daunting one for Mormon. Although, like Moroni (Mormon 8:35), he undoubtedly had a measure of prophetic insight into his audience, he could not be fully conscious of tacit knowledge that he unreflectively assumed readers would share.³

Given these unavoidable difficulties Mormon faced as a writer, modern readers cannot be passive if they want to fully understand the testimony Mormon has handed down to them. They must meet him and his sources half way. Reading carefully between the lines, they must look for the subtle linkages that reveal the underlying unity and coherence of the real lives and real cultures he describes. They must do this because unconscious and unstated background knowledge and off-stage actions that are present only by implication will sometimes be the key to a fuller understanding of an intended meaning. Thus, to fully comprehend the reality Mormon experienced and what he meant to say (or not say), readers must sometimes ransack the nooks and crannies of his text looking for information it did not occur to him to explicitly tell us, i.e., cultural norms

3. See Deborah Brandt, *Literacy as Involvement: the Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990) on the challenges and mutual obligations writers and readers face as they co-create meaning for a text .

and implicit knowledge about life and people that form the matrix of the meanings he meant to communicate.⁴

One key to discovering these implicit narratives is structural corroboration—the convergence of an array of facts and plausible conjectures upon a compelling conclusion.⁵ Taken together, in some cases fact and conjecture may form a clear or even obvious account of what occurred. In reconstructing implicit history, the most important support for an interpretation is found in tangential facts explicitly mentioned in the text. These facts may be a minor element of the main narrative but critically important in the implied narrative. Particularly significant are anomalous facts that seem inconsistent with other textual details. Anomalies of this kind suggest that there is more going on than meets the eye. Since they are not consciously intended to develop the implied narrative, these tangential facts are often not fully developed and may not be entirely on point in that narrative. Taken singly, they may not provide dispositive support for the reality they imply. But taken together, the constellation of tangential facts may powerfully converge upon a compelling conclusion and clearly develop another dimension of the narrative.

In addition to tangential facts within the text, support for a conclusion may come from outside the text. A reading may be supported by information from the Bible and other ancient works. Or we may plausibly fill in gaps in a narrative by assuming that people off stage will behave as people ordinarily do in

4. For an excellent discussion of the relevant issues, see, Brant A. Gardner, “The Case of Historicity: Discerning the Book of Mormon’s Production Culture,” accessed 12/13/2011 at http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2004_Case_for_Historicity.html. See also Gardner’s principal source, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

5. See Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970) for a discussion of structural corroboration.

like circumstances. Thus history or social science may deepen our understanding.

Mormon's literary sensibilities and rhetorical habits may also be apparent in and support a reading. Though he is often didactic in his writing, Mormon also develops themes subtly through parallel and contrast at the macro level of his narrative.⁶ Readings that show him again using habitual rhetorical strategies may have enhanced plausibility. Readings may likewise be more plausible if they are thematically consistent with the rest of Mormon's oeuvre, i.e., when the proposed reading powerfully testifies of Christ.

When reading between the lines as proposed in this article, the persuasiveness of the reading must be a function of the constellation of convergent evidence rather than of the intrinsic aptness of any single supporting datum. *Ex hypothesi*, the tangential evidence has some other purpose in the text than developing the implicit narrative. But though individual pieces of evidence will often not be precisely on point, when combined to fully develop the implied narrative, the data should fit together without contradiction and have cumulative persuasive force because they recount the real lives of real people.

The Amlicite Amalekites

An example of the fruitfulness of readings based on structural corroboration is the insight that the Amlicites and Amalekites are the same people and that they were motivated by a desire to restore the Davidic monarchy after the Nephite royal line that began with Mosiah₁ and ended with Mosiah₂ renounced power. Christopher Conkling makes a cogent case

6. Mormon's didacticism and literary subtlety are discussed in Heather Hardy, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ: Mormon's Poetics," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 16 /2 (2007): 16–27.

for their sameness, drawing upon a large body of internal textual evidence, e.g., the fact (discussed more fully below) that the Amalekites appear at the very point in the text where the Amlicites disappear.⁷ He also cites Royal Skousen's reasoning on the production and transmission of the Book of Mormon text, e.g., the well attested variance in Oliver Cowdery's spelling and the probability that the *c* in Amlicites is meant to convey the *k* sound which, combined with an accent on the first syllable of both words, makes the sound of Amlicite and Amalekite virtually identical.⁸

Understanding that the Amlicites are the Amalekites, we can better appreciate the unity and literary power of the Book of Alma. The book opens with a morally and politically normative thesis statement that encapsulates the point of view that will govern the narrative: “[Mosiah₂] had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made” (Alma 1:1). The main narrative thread of the book then focuses on the conflict between those who accept and those who reject this obligation.

Unstated but clearly implied is the antithesis of the book's thesis: when Mosiah₂ died without a royal successor, the right to rule reverted by virtue of the Davidic covenant to the

7. J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 14/1 (2005): 108–17. Cf. Gary L. Sturgess, “The Book of Mosiah: Thoughts about Its Structure, Purposes, Themes, and Authorship,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 4/2 (1995): 107–35. This idea seems to have first been suggested by 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 (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1990), 298–301.

8. Royal Skousen, “History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon,” in M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V.P. Coutts eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 15; Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 245; and Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 396–97, 514.

Mulekite royal line that had governed prior to the arrival of Mosiah₁.⁹ Mormon leaves this antithesis unstated probably because it is so plausible that stating it might leave readers ambivalent about the conflict between the judges and the revanchist Amlicite\Amalekite king-men.¹⁰ Mormon reveals what was surely a key political fact and the strongest argument of the Mulekites—that they descend from Mulek, a son of David—only after the land of Zarahemla has fallen into the hands of the Lamanites and thereby weakened any Mulekite claim to the throne (Helaman 6:10; 8:21). This conflict between incompatible Nephite and Mulekite ideologies is the unstated rationale for the civil war during the reign of King Benjamin (Words of Mormon 1:15–10), and it pervades the Book of Alma, from the appearance in chapter one, verse two of Nehor, the spiritual leader of the Amlicites (Alma 2: 1, 24: 28), to a final great battle in the last three verses of the book as the dissenters again stir up anger and send forth yet another army that must be repelled (Alma 63:14–17).

This very strong reading structurally corroborates and is corroborated by a close reading of the stories of Ammon₁ and Ammon₂. The story of these two Ammons is situated within this larger political narrative in which the reign of kings gives way to the governance of judges, which in turn evokes a Davidic rebellion and effort to reassert monarchical authority. The two Ammons play key and interlinked roles in the unfolding of this macro narrative. It is through the eyes and ears of

9. See Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon’s Missing Covenant,” *Meridian Magazine*, December 27, 2010, <http://www.ldsmag.com/1/article/7089>, which discusses the suppression of the Davidic covenant in the Book of Mormon.

10. The Mulekite’s claim of a right to rule grounded in the Davidic covenant is analogous to the New Testament claim that Christ is the legitimate king of Israel by virtue of his lineal descent from David (Matt 1:1–17). Mormon’s faith and political sympathies prevent him from sympathetically articulating the point of view of the Amlicites, but his integrity as a historian compels him to report sufficient information for us to reconstruct the motives of those whose views Mormon reprehends. See H. Hardy, “Mormon’s Poetics.”

Ammon₁ that readers first see and hear why monarchy needs to be abolished. Then, Ammon₂ plays his role in abolishing the monarchy by refusing to be king and by persuading thousands of Lamanites to embrace the ancient religion, the foundational myth, and the new civic culture of the Nephites.

Method Applied to Ammon₁ and Ammon₂

Ammon₁

The first Ammon we encounter in the Book of Mormon is a Mulekite who is a descendant—a grandson or great grandson—of the last Mulekite king, Zarahemla (Mosiah 7:3).

While he himself has some claim to the throne in the land of Zarahemla, he is a supporter and confidant of king Mosiah₂, the third in the line of Nephite kings who succeeded Zarahemla as rulers of the combined Nephite and Mulekite peoples. It is very apparent—and unsurprising—that the transition from Mulekite to Nephite rule was not entirely smooth. Direct descendants of king David, the Mulekites were the original inhabitants of the shared land and were more numerous than the Nephites (Mosiah 25:2). In any ordinary calculus, they had the more compelling claim to the throne when the two peoples combined. Nevertheless, Mosiah₁ was appointed king, presumably with the acquiescence of King Zarahemla (Omni 14–19).

Some Mulekites were apparently unhappy with this change to Nephite rule, so, as is often the case when the legitimacy of a government is in question, the moment of succession became especially perilous for the regime. When Mosiah₁'s son Benjamin succeeded his father, “he had somewhat of contentions among his own people” (Words of Mormon 1:12). Benjamin was clearly concerned that his son, Mosiah₂, would likewise face Mulekite resistance when he became king. During the assembly to crown Mosiah₂, Benjamin seeks to unify his two peoples by giving them a shared name that might sup-

plant the two names that divide them (Mosiah 1:11–12, 5:7–8).¹¹ Though spiritual themes predominate in the sermon he delivers on this occasion, the political subtext in Benjamin’s coronation speech is unmistakable. He condemns “open rebellion” (Mosiah 2:37; cf. Alma 3:18) and urges his people to submit to the rule of Mosiah₂ as they have submitted to his rule. He equates the commands of Mosiah₂ with the commands of God, making obedience to Mosiah₂ and the maintenance of peace a religious duty. He suggests that any who listen to Satan and contend against Mosiah₂, as some contended against Benjamin himself, will risk the damnation of their soul (Mosiah 2:31–33). Thus tensions that will produce conflict when the sons of Mosiah₂ refuse the kingship may be traced through each of the previous accessions of the Mosiah₁ dynasty.

But those tensions seem to diminish over time. Conjecture about details unstated by Mormon may help explain why. 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. And if this premise be granted, it follows that Ammon₁ is closely related to Mosiah₂ by marriage, most likely being a brother but at least a first or second cousin of Mosiah₂’s wife. In this instance, the conclusion reciprocally supports the premise, because we know that Ammon₁ was a trusted military aide of Mosiah₂, a circumstance that increases the likelihood that they were related since it was a common practice in ancient monarchies as in modern dictatorships to place close relatives in important military positions.¹²

11. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:107–8.

12. See Wayne T. Brough and Mwangi S. Kimenyi, “On the Inefficient Extraction of Rents by Dictators,” *Public Choice* 48 (1986): 37–48.

This may explain why Mosiah₂ asked Ammon₁, a “strong and mighty” Mulekite, to lead a team of “strong men” on a search for the long lost Nephite followers of Zeniff (Mosiah 7:2–3). Ammon₁ deeply respects Mosiah₂ and acknowledges his calling not just as king but as prophet and seer (Mosiah 8:13–18). This charge to find the Zeniffites is a token of Mosiah₂’s reciprocal respect for Ammon₁ as a skilled and dependable military leader. The Zeniffites were Nephites who, having followed Mosiah₁, then wrongly rejected his prophetic leadership and returned to the Land of Nephi, their 400-year-old ancestral homeland. By sending a Mulekite to find them, Mosiah₂ subtly signals that his people have become one. And by accepting the assignment, Ammon₁ indicates that he too sees the Nephites and Mulekites as one people.

Not knowing where Zeniff’s people were located, Ammon₁ and his companions undertake an arduous forty-day journey to find the Land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:4), suffering while on this journey “many things . . . hunger, thirst, fatigue” (Mosiah 7:16). Forty days is a symbolically pregnant time period in both the Old and New Testaments, so this constellation of details strongly hints that Ammon₁’s journey should be subjected to an allegorical as well as a historical reading. In Noah’s time, forty days of rain cleansed the earth and made a new beginning for humanity. Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai, like Ammon₁ without food or water, receiving the Law of Moses which he then delivered as a new covenant to the Israelites. Moses sent spies who explored Israel for forty days and then, when the Israelites refused to enter the land of milk and honey, they were compelled to spend forty years in the Sinai wilderness before passing on to the Promised Land. Christ fasted forty days before beginning his ministry, then following the resurrection, ministered to the disciples for forty days before finally ascending to heaven. These and other biblical parallels create a typology of deliverance following forty days of tribulation.

Here, Ammon₁ suddenly appears after a forty-day journey as the savior of a people who are trapped in sin and slavery and who have no hope of saving themselves. He sets up camp on the border of the land Shilom, perhaps an alternative spelling of the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning peace, safety, prosperity, wholeness, completeness. *Shalom* is literarily appropriate, for Ammon₁ will bring peace, safety, and prosperity to this wretched, impoverished people. He will restore wholeness by bringing the wanderers back into the Zarahemlan fold (Mosiah 7–8).¹³

Taking Hem¹⁴ and two other companions, Ammon₁ enters the land of Shilom. Like other divinely commissioned saviors, Ammon₁ is not well received at first. He is bound and cast into prison. But on the third day, he comes forth and explains who he is. The grandson of Zeniff, king Limhi, then joyfully receives him as the savior who will deliver Zeniff’s people from bondage. Limhi had earlier sought to find Zarahemla but his search party instead found “a land which had been peopled; yea, a land which was covered with dry bones; yea a land which had been peopled and which had been destroyed” (Mosiah 21:26; c.f. Mosiah 8:8). Remembering, we may plausibly speculate, tensions between the Nephites and Mulekites, Limhi concluded this destruction was the result of a civil war and “supposed it to be the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 22:26). (It was actually the

13. The word Shilom/Shalom may have a deeper, temple resonance. It is linked, D. John Butler shows, to the middle room, the Hekal, of the three room ancient temple. So the mention of Shilom/Shalom may frame the sojourn of the Zeniffites in the land of Nephi as part of a tripartite temple allegory, with Zeniff’s initial departure from Zarahemla corresponding to the Ulam, the porch of the temple, and the return to Zarahemla corresponding to passage into the Debir, the Holy of Holies, the land of Gideon being a kind of heaven on earth (see Alma 7); D. John Butler, *Plain and Precious Things* (Charleston, NC: CreateSpace, 2012).

14. Hem, in Egyptian, means *servant*, especially, servant or priest of Amon; see Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 23.

Jaredites.) Thus, when Ammon₁ arrives, Limhi and his people are sunk in despair with no hope of salvation.

But having suffered greatly and having repented of their sins, they are now rescued. Ammon₁ leads an exodus that takes them back to the land of Zarahemla where they are again subject to king Mosiah. Speaking to the people, now settled in the land of Gideon, the prophet Alma₁, who shared in their sins and suffering under king Noah, exhorts “the people of Limhi and his brethren, all those that had been delivered out of bondage, that they should remember that it was the Lord [not Ammon₁] that did deliver them” (Mosiah 25:16). At once history and allegory, this narrative thus pays tribute to and bears testimony of the saving power of Christ.

As history, Ammon₁'s rescue of the Zeniffites leads directly to a major change in Nephite political culture. The narrative of Zeniffite suffering under wicked king Noah and a translated record of the destroyed Jaredites help the people of Zarahemla learn what damage a wicked king can do, something they could not have learned from their own righteous kings. Thus Ammon₁'s mission and the words of Alma₁ convince Mosiah₂ and his sons that the monarchy should be abolished.¹⁵ This sets the stage for the story of Ammon₂.

Ammon₂

One generation younger than Ammon₁, Ammon₂ is a son of Mosiah₂. Like Ammon₁, he has not been as faithful to God as he should have been (Mosiah 22:33; Mosiah 27:8) but, nevertheless becomes the protagonist of a lengthy narrative. The two extended narratives share many parallels. Each narrative begins when subjects of Mosiah₂ come to him and unceasingly plead for him to authorize an important mission to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:1–2; Mosiah 28:1–8). The purpose of both

15. Sturgess, “Book of Mosiah.”

missions is to reincorporate into the Nephite religious and civil polity a related people that has wrongly separated itself. In the Ammon₁ narrative, it is the Zeniffites who left Zarahemla and established a new king in the Lamanite dominated Land of Nephi. In Ammon₂'s case, it is the Lamanites who, much earlier, rejected the legitimate leadership of Nephi₁.

Initially reluctant (Mosiah 7:1; Mosiah 28:5), Mosiah₂ eventually grants both requests and in each case sends forth a small group of well-armed men that is led by their respective Ammon (Mosiah 7:3; Alma 17:18).¹⁶ These groups, of roughly equal size, each face an arduous journey to the Land of Nephi during which they experience considerable hunger (Mosiah 7:16; Alma 17:9). Having arrived at the borders of Nephi, each Ammon leaves all or most of his companions behind and ventures forth to meet the people he has come to rescue (Mosiah 7:6; Alma 17:17–19). Each Ammon is taken and bound by the inhabitants of the land and is brought before the king to be tried for his life (Mosiah 7:7–8; Alma 17:20). Each defends himself with a speech that greatly pleases the king (Mosiah 7:12–14; Alma 17:23–24). And each is eventually permitted to preach the gospel to the king and his people, Ammon₁ doing this indirectly by recounting the great sermon of king Benjamin (Mosiah 8:3), Ammon₂ using his own words (Alma 18:24–39). In each case, the people respond favorably to the teaching and make a covenant with God (Mosiah 22:32–35; Alma 19:33–35).

But both covenant peoples are threatened by surrounding unbelievers (Mosiah 21:13–19; Alma 27:2). Each Ammon thus consults with the king and devises a plan to lead the believers back to the land of Zarahemla where they can be reincorporated into the legitimate polity (Mosiah 22:1–8; Alma 27:4–15).

16. Mosiah₂ is the politically and religiously legitimate figure who links the main narrative in the land of Zarahemla with both divergent narratives set in the land of Nephi. He also establishes the political norms against which the revanchist Mulekites wrongly rebel.

The rescued groups follow their Ammon back to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:11; Alma 27:11–14) and each now settles in a new land, Gideon or Jershon, that is allied with Zarahemla. Each comes to be known as the “people of God” (Mosiah 25:24; Alma 25:13). Unlike the other Nephite lands, Jershon and Gideon then reject the false teacher Korihor. In both lands the people bind him and carry him before their high priest to be judged (Alma 30:19–21). (The people of Gideon had earlier done the same with Nehor [Alma 1:7–10].) Both peoples are thereafter repeatedly celebrated for their notable faithfulness, with their righteousness being explicitly mentioned or otherwise indicated for the rest of their recorded history (e.g., Alma 7:17–19; Alma 27:26–27).

What are we to make of these many parallels? The thesis of this article is that they are not accidental. As noted above, Ammon₁ may have been Ammon₂'s uncle, and it is certain that they knew each other. No member of Mosiah₂'s court or family could have avoided hearing about the exploits of Ammon₁ during his successful mission to rescue lost souls in the Land of Nephi. And no close aide to the king could have failed to know about his sons, the princes of the kingdom. Given Ammon₁'s importance as a military aide to Mosiah₂ and his probable familial connection to Mosiah₂'s wife, it is even likely that Ammon₂ was named after Ammon₁, a circumstance that would have reinforced the mutual loyalties of Mosiah₂ and Ammon₁ and would have created a bond between the two Ammons who star in the parallel narratives. Also distinguished by military prowess (Alma 17:36–38), the younger Ammon may have sought to replicate the worthy achievement of his boyhood hero by undertaking his own rescue mission to the land of Nephi and may have emphasized parallels when recounting the experience. These parallels would have appealed to Mormon's literary sensibilities. Thus history is transcended into divine purpose revealed by repetition. Both Ammons become allegorical as well

as historical saviors,¹⁷ and a number of loose ends in the Book of Mormon may be tied up.

Why did Ammon₂ lead the expedition to the land of Nephi instead of his brother Aaron? In a culture that clearly respects primogeniture, it is puzzling that Ammon₂ led the mission to the land of Nephi rather than his older brother Aaron. Aaron's primacy is apparent in the people's request that Aaron be made king when Mosiah₂ raised the question of succession with them (Mosiah 29:1–3). Culture dictates that Aaron, the older brother, lead, yet Ammon₂ is the clear leader of the group. His leadership is explicitly noted (Alma 17:18), and when the names of the brothers are mentioned together, as they often are, it is always in a sequence that lists Ammon₂ first: Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni. If, as hypothesized above, Ammon₂ initiated the mission to fulfill a longstanding dream of following in his namesake's footsteps, Aaron might have given up his traditional leadership role in acknowledgement that this is Ammon's quest. Aaron does, however, briefly reclaim his role when he believes his younger brother, flush with success, is boasting inappropriately (Alma 26:10). It is also possible that Mormon emphasized the role of Ammon more than that of Aaron to strengthen narrative parallels.

17. The name Ammon may have cued Mormon's recognition of the allegorical potential of these narratives. Ammon was the great universal god of the Egyptians, the being in their theology most akin to Jehovah and the most popular name in the Egyptian empire in Zedekiah's time; see Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 27. Amon, a popular king of Judah during Lehi's youth, was named after this Egyptian god; see J. P. Lesley, "Notes on an Egyptian Element in the Names of Hebrew Kings, and Its Bearing on the History of the Exodus," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 19/109 (1881): 419–20; and seems to have worshipped his namesake (2 Kings 21:18–24). So the cult of Ammon was surely well known to the migrating Mulekites who may, therefore, have used Ammon as one of the names of God, a fact that would be known to Mormon if true. See also D&C 95:17, 78:20, and Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Part 2*, (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004), 342.

Why were Mulekites willing to accept the sons of Mosiah₂ as their rulers but not Alma₂? As noted above, when Mosiah₂ asked his people whom they wanted to replace him as king, they replied that they wanted Aaron, the rightful heir (Mosiah 29:1–2). As previously discussed, 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. Alma₂'s appointment restores the unstable status quo of Mosiah₁'s time, at least with respect to the ethnicity of the ruler. Amlici, who is presumably a descendant of Zarahemla, Mulek, and David, becomes the first king-man who lays claim to the throne that the dynasty of Mosiah₁ has just abandoned. It is clear that Amlici's claim is a strong one and has much popular support, for it is only the first in a series of similar credible claims that continue to be made and to spark conflict through the end of the Book of Alma. In the fifth year of the reign of the judges, Amlici raises an army and attempts to install himself as king by force. When he is defeated, his people flee to the Lamanite lands and become, *ex hypothesi*, the Amalekites.

Why was a city named Jerusalem constructed by dissenters from Zarahemla in Lamanite lands and why were Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah sent there to preach? In Alma 21:1–2, we learn that a great city named Jerusalem has been constructed by the Lamanites and two groups of Nephite dissenters, the Amalekites and the Ammulonites. The Ammulonites (descendants of the priests of Noah) we know well. But who are the Amalekites? They are introduced, like the Ammulonites, without any explanation of where they came from, as if, like the Ammulonites, we should already know who they are. The most likely explanation is that they are followers of Amlici. They appear in the narrative at the precise point where the

Amlicites disappear, and they share the same Nehorite religion as the Amlicites. Like Amlici, they are king-men who hate the Nephites and want to establish a monarchy in Zarahemla.

Establishing a city named Jerusalem is something we might expect Amlicites to do. Unlike the Nephites who will have, at best, ambivalent feelings toward the wicked city of Jerusalem whose leaders sought to kill Lehi and Nephi, the Mulekites (like the Lamanites [1 Nephi 17:21]) most likely see Jerusalem as a wonderful place tragically lost to them. Naming their city Jerusalem while explicitly noting that it is called “after the land of their fathers’ nativity” (Alma 21:1) may have the purpose of reminding the Nephites and Lamanites that the Amalekites are of royal lineage, that as Mulekites they have “the blood of nobility” (Alma 51:21) and are entitled by the Davidic covenant to rule in this new Jerusalem as their ancestor David ruled in the old.

That the Amalekites are Mulekite dissenters and that Mosiah₂’s son Aaron has Mulekite blood are mutually reinforcing speculations that are both supported by the same telling detail. When the sons of Mosiah₂ split up and go their separate ways, Aaron headed for Jerusalem and “first began to preach to the Amalekites” (Alma 21:4). We know Aaron to be the rightful king of the Mulekite homeland, Zarahemla. He was popular with the people who wanted the monarchy to continue, perhaps including some of these very dissenters. Who could be better placed to command the respect of and persuade the disgruntled Mulekite king-men than Aaron? So while the visit is not a success, it probably represents a strategic effort on the part of Mosiah₂’s sons to capitalize on the prestige of Aaron, the rightful Mulekite king, in order to save the lost souls of these Mulekite king-men.¹⁸

18. While this account of Aaron making his first missionary stop in the city of Jerusalem and there addressing the Amalekites fits with the supposition that the Amalekites are the dissident Mulekite king-men elsewhere called Amlicites,

Why did Aaron rather than Ammon₂ lead the mission to teach Lamoni's father in the land of Nephi when the king had requested Ammon₂'s presence? While as indicated above, Ammon₂ is clearly portrayed as the leader of the mission to the land of Nephi, Aaron also plays an outsized role in the mission—unlike Ammon₂'s other brothers, Omner and Himni. Indeed, at God's behest, Aaron supplants Ammon₂ in the very circumstance that would have most fulfilled Ammon₂'s youthful dream, if he dreamed of following in Ammon₁'s footsteps. Ammon₂ begins his mission in the land of Ishmael. Following his success there and his violent subduing of Lamoni's father, the overall king of the land, Ammon₂ is invited to come to the capital city which is located in the land of Nephi, to come perhaps to the very palace of Noah where Ammon₁ had been received by Limhi,¹⁹ and preach the gospel to the great king of the

it is also the only major piece of evidence that Amlicites and Amalekites may not be the same people. Amlici does not raise his army against Alma₂ until the fifth year of the reign of judges (Alma 2:1) while the sons of Mosiah₂ arrived in the land of Nephi in the first year of the reign of the judges (Alma 17:6). How then can Amlicites be builders of Jerusalem, a city that is already built when Aaron arrives? Words of Mormon 1:16 makes it clear that dissenters have been going over to the Lamanite side since the time of Benjamin. And the shared Nehorite religion of the Amlicites\Amalekites also necessarily entails the movement of people between Jerusalem and Zarahemla prior to the first year of the reign of judges when Alma₂ executed Nehor in Zarahemla. So dissenting Mulekites have been living in both locations before and after the inauguration of the reign of the judges. The fact that the uprising of the Amlicites in the land of Zarahemla was coordinated with an attack from the land of Nephi (Alma 2:24) also suggests that there is an ongoing relationship between dissidents in the two lands. Relatedly, it is possible that the leader Amlici takes his name from the people he leads and who preexist him rather than the other way around. The next leader of the kingmen insurgency, *Amalickiah*, has a remarkably similar name, again assuming an accent on the first syllable. *Amalickiah* may imply son of Amlici (Amliki) as Moronihah is the son of Moroni. We would thus see a similar pattern in the name changes of the successive overall leaders of both the Nephite and Amlicite/Amalekite/Amalickiahite armies. Finally, it is not entirely clear at what point in their 14-year mission Aaron undertook his mission to Jerusalem.

19. Helaman 5:21 makes it clear that the palace complex of Noah where Ammon₁ was imprisoned was still used by the Lamanites in the time of Ammon₂.

land (Alma 20:27). But God directs Ammon₂ another way and he humbly gives up what would probably have been the crowning and complete fulfillment of his dream of following in the footsteps of Ammon₁.

The spirit of the Lord leads Aaron to the palace of the king where he must explain to the disappointed king that Ammon₂ will not be coming (Alma 22:1–4). In bringing Aaron rather than Ammon₂ to the capital city, the Lord arranges for the rightful overall king of the Nephites to preach the gospel to and convert the overall king of the Lamanites. The symmetry of this encounter is probably not accidental. Perhaps Mormon, his most likely source, Ammon₂, and even God Himself take care to recognize and memorialize Aaron's status and role as rightful king of the Nephites.

Why did the Lamanites and Amalekites react so violently to the religious conversion of some of their fellow Lamanites? It is evident that the Amalekites and unconverted Lamanites regard the successful mission of Mosiah's sons as a very aggressive and threatening act. In response to the conversions, they slaughter more than a thousand of the unresisting Anti-Nephi-Lehies and then attack and utterly destroy the Mulekite city of Ammonihah.²⁰ Though morally reprehensible, their response is understandable in political terms. The Amlicite Amalekites want to seize power in Zarahemla but lack the military strength to do so on their own. Allied with the Lamanites, they may be able to achieve their political objective. So they have embraced the founding myth of the Lamanites (which is compatible with their own Mulekite founding myth) and have voluntarily tak-

20. That Ammonihah is a Mulekite city is indicated by its name, its religion (Nehorite) which links it with the Mulekite dissenters, and by the necessity Amulek feels to tell Alma₂ that he is a Nephite when he first meets him (Alma 8:20). If Ammonihah were a predominantly Nephite city, that declaration of lineage would have been unnecessary. See Tvedtnes, "Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation," 301.

en upon themselves the mark of the Lamanites (Alma 3:4–10, 13–18).

The sons of Mosiah₂, the very man who established the political order that Amlici and his Amalekites were struggling to overthrow, have now come among them and have persuaded many of their Lamanite allies, including the most powerful of all, the overall king, to switch sides in their long twilight struggle against the Nephite usurpers. Indeed, it was the putative overall Nephite king himself who persuaded the overall king of the Lamanites to switch sides. The Lamanite king has decided to give up coercive power over his people, which means a *de facto* end of the Lamanite monarchy and movement in the direction of the rule of judges. In short, the sons of Mosiah₂ have persuaded many Lamanites to adopt the political ideology and foundational myth of the Nephites (Alma 18:36–38), a change in belief which makes Nephites of these new converts (Alma 2:11). Nor are these changes an accident. From the beginning of their mission, the sons of Mosiah₂ sought to “convince [the Lamanites] of the iniquity of their fathers; and . . . cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites, that they might become friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land” (Mosiah 28:1–3). In other words, from the beginning, their mission had a political as well as a religious purpose. It is, therefore, no surprise that it has evoked a forceful political response from their enemies.

Ironically, the effort of the sons of Mosiah₂ to establish peace between the Nephites and Lamanites has the opposite effect from what they intended. It reduces the number of Lamanites who are willing to attack the land of Zarahemla. But it initiates a very long series of wars between the Nephites and their allied enemies, the Lamanites and Amalekites.²¹ And

21. In political terms, there is a clear parallel between the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites and Alma’s mission to the Zoramites. Both sets of missionaries hope to foster peace with actual or potential enemies by inducing

instead of strengthening the Nephites militarily, the pacifist Lamanite converts of the sons of Mosiah₂ initially add to the military burdens of the Nephites by compelling them to defend an allied people who will not defend themselves.

Ammon₂ at the Waters of Sebus

No episode in the Book of Mormon is more strange and, on its surface, incoherent than the account of Ammon₂'s fight at the waters of Sebus and its aftermath.²² The most surprising facts connected with the narrative are these: (a) the plundering of the king's flocks is routine and predictable, yet he doesn't send a force capable of protecting his property; (b) the servants of the king make no effort to fight the marauders in spite of the fact that they will be executed if they fail to protect the flocks; (c) when they predictably fail, the king kills his own servants and, thus, weakens his forces; (d) the king refers to the marauders as "my brethren"; and (e) the marauders and their families are unafraid to hang around the king's palace in the immediate aftermath of the fight. This is an improbable constellation of details. How are we to account for it? The answer must lie in the implicit dynamics of Lamanite politics in the land of Ishmael. In what follows, I draw heavily on Brant Gardner's interpretation,²³ adding however, what is probably the lynchpin of the whole affair—the role of Lamoni's father.

those enemies to embrace the gospel. In both cases, the missionaries have considerable success, and many of the people they preach adopt Nephite ideology and move to the Nephite land of Jershon. But in both cases, this success becomes the immediate cause of a bitter, destructive war as the remaining Lamanites and Zoramites view the conversions and departures as a major threat to their ideology and power.

22. See Hugh W. Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 539.

23. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:274–78.

In my reading, the back story at Sebus is a conflict between Lamoni, the titular king in the land of Ishmael,²⁴ and another group of nobles whom Lamoni calls “my brethren” (Alma 18:20), e.g., some mix of brothers, uncles, or cousins. The contest between the two groups is deadly earnest, but neither can do violence to the other because all are loved and protected by Lamoni’s father, the great king of the land, who has a short temper and who responds ferociously if anyone, including his own family, crosses him (Alma 20:8–16). Since they cannot directly attack each other without risking their lives by antagonizing their shared patron, Lamoni and his rivals seek to weaken their opponent by attacking their economic interests and by ruining their reputation in the eyes of the great king. It is in this context that Lamoni’s servants face doom at the waters of Sebus. The herdsman servants are ordinary citizens of the kingdom. Knowing the disposition of Lamoni’s father, they probably understand that they and their family will die a painful death if they do the slightest injury to any of the great king’s extended family. So if they are so unlucky as to be attacked at the waters of Sebus by the king’s noble relatives, they are doomed. They cannot raise a hand to prevent Lamoni’s flocks from being scattered and plundered by his noble rivals. And if they fail to prevent the scattering and loss of the flocks, Lamoni will put them to death.

But why will Lamoni execute them when they fail? Doesn’t he injure himself when he does that by reducing his political and military base in the land of Ishmael? In an ordinary political situation, that would be the case. No king could afford to get trapped in a process that causes him to regularly eliminate his own forces and thereby weaken his hand against his enemies. But in this case, Lamoni has only one relevant constituent—his father. As long as he has a mandate to govern from his father, he need not be concerned about what any person, ordinary or

24. Alma 20:26 makes it clear that Lamoni had no independent power until after Ammon₂ subdued his father.

noble, thinks of him, for no one dares challenge his father's authority. Importantly, Lamoni's father believes a king should use aggressive violence to enforce his will. Lamoni retains his kingdom only if his father is persuaded that he, too, is a man of violence who will impose the severest sanctions on those who fail him. Lamoni executes his servants not because he is angry with them but as an act of political theater to appease his father, a fact that, of course, holds no consolation for his doomed servants.

The sudden appearance of Ammon₂ in the land of Ishmael provides Lamoni with an opportunity to modify this unsatisfactory political equilibrium. Ammon₂ is the son of a powerful neighboring king and thus provides another potential base for Lamoni's political power. Having learned that Ammon₂ is a prince, Lamoni offers to let him "take one of his daughters to wife" (Alma 17:24), a marriage that could ally Mosiah₂ with Lamoni in his struggle against his brethren. When Ammon₂ declines and forecloses that option but offers to become a servant, Lamoni hatches another plan to injure his enemies. He sends Ammon₂ to Sebus where he knows his noble enemies will attack. When they attack, unlike the ordinary servants, this noble outsider will have no compunction about defending himself. There is a chance that Ammon₂ may kill some of Lamoni's enemies (which will be good for Lamoni) and a near certainty that Lamoni's enemies will kill the son of a powerful neighboring king who may seek retribution against them (which will also be good for Lamoni).

In fact, events at Sebus unfold in a way Lamoni could never have anticipated. When the noble enemies attack and scatter the flock, Ammon₂ kills six of the attackers with his sling. When the remaining attackers press close and try to kill him with clubs, he cuts off every arm that is raised against him and kills the leader of the attacking nobles. Having been saved by this godlike intervention, Ammon₂'s fellow servants are filled with a gratitude that primes them to be eternally saved—which

had been Ammon₂'s plan from the beginning (Alma 17:29). The servants, in turn, help prepare Lamoni and his wife to receive God's grace through the ministrations of Ammon₂, whom Lamoni now believes to be a god. And having heard the gospel preached in power, Lamoni and all his house are filled with and overcome by the spirit, as is Ammon₂ (Alma 19:14).

Crowds of commoners and nobles gather at the palace to view the apparent destruction of the king and his household. Among the nobles are some of the marauders who had been at Sebus, a nearly infallible proof that this is a case of intranoble political intrigue. Their sympathies being with their fellow peons, the common people speculate that this evil has fallen upon Lamoni and his household because he theatrically killed his servants for failing to protect his flocks (Alma 19:20). Though the commoners are disparaging the gathered nobles' enemy, Lamoni, the class solidarity of these nobles is stronger than their enmity for their noble rival. They rebuke the commoners for suggesting that a nobleman might be punished for exercising the privilege of taking a commoner's life but are enraged that Ammon₂, a putative servant, has killed nobles (Alma 19:21). Though Lamoni is incapacitated, his noble rivals dare not attack him (he is still his ferocious father's son). But the brother of the leader at Sebus, whom Ammon₂ killed, now vainly tries to kill Ammon₂. When he fails, the other nobles apparently scurry off to the land of Nephi to attend a previously scheduled feast with Lamoni's father and to kindle the great king's wrath against his son and his new Nephite servant. In full anger Lamoni's father comes to Ishmael, is defeated by Ammon₂, frees Lamoni and his people from his rule (thus granting Lamoni the preeminence in his kingdom he has been striving for), and expresses his willingness to have the gospel preached to him in his palace. Salvation for thousands, then a great war of retribution follows.

If we correctly interpret the political dynamics in the land of Ishmael, we can recognize in this narrative a profound allegory of the human condition and of the plan of salvation, including its key element, the Atonement. Lamoni's servants are caught on the horns of a horrible dilemma. They are bound by two incompatible laws that, taken together, seal their doom. They must not fail to keep the commandment of their lord to protect his flock and they must not raise a hand against any noble relative of the great king. When the nobles scatter the flock, hopeless and helpless despair is the only available response for the servants because their doom is sure.

For their predecessors, that was the end of the story. But for these fortunate servants the story is wonderfully changed. A godlike nobleman—the most powerful of all, one who can vanquish even the great king himself—has condescended to come among them and voluntarily share their servant status. When the crisis comes and they fall into despair, he rallies them. From him they draw the courage and ability to keep their lord's commandments. Placing their faith in him and doing as he commands (an essential element in their redemption), they gather the scattered flock and encircle them to prevent their flight.

He, the suffering servant, in turn, goes forth to bear the brunt of the violence meant for them which they were powerless to resist. Against all human odds, this godlike nobleman defeats forces arrayed against him and them. He reconciles the two laws, making it possible for his fellow servants to keep both. They have neither allowed the flock to be plundered nor lifted a hand against the great king's relatives. Led by their savior, the servants return to their lord without blemish, their lives preserved by the gracious intervention of the godlike figure who condescended to be one with them. Their faith in this noble savior redeems not just their bodies but their eternal souls, for he brings them back not just to their temporal lord, Lamoni, but to their eternal lord, the Lord God.

Mormon apparently recognized the symbolic potential of Ammon₂'s adventure at Sebus and featured it precisely because, read allegorically, it testifies so powerfully of Christ. While the general application of this allegory is probably apparent, its precise application is worthy of comment. Like Lamoni's servants, all humanity are caught on the horns of a horrible dilemma. We are required to keep two mutually incompatible laws. On the one hand, we must remain pure and innocent, completely unspotted by sin, which we can do only by remaining in the protective presence of God. On the other hand, we must acquire bodies, multiply and replenish the earth, and make profound moral choices between good and evil, which we can do only by leaving God's presence and living in a fallen world where we are tempted and inevitably sin. (As early Christians understood, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden allegorically illustrates this choice all face.)²⁵ The consequence of violating either of these laws is damnation. Keeping the first law and violating the second leads to the blessed damnation of remaining forever in the presence of God as sinless but undeveloped spirit children, never able to be ourselves or know ourselves because the full exercise of our agency is there not possible. The consequence of keeping the second but violating the first is the starker damnation of spiritual death, eternal separation from God, that we impure natural men impose upon ourselves because we cannot feel any tolerable ease in God's presence but must, from internal necessity, flee from it to the mental hell our sins have created for us (Alma 12:13–14). Caught in this dilemma, all humanity is as doomed in the eternities as Lamoni's servants were at the waters of Sebus.

But like Lamoni's servants, we are rescued by a savior, in this case *the* Savior, whose divine parentage and extraordinary character make it possible for him, alone, to keep both laws. He

25. See Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 94, 107.

alone is able to come to earth, face the full spectrum of temptations and moral choices and yet remain completely pure. He alone, after facing all life in this world has to offer, is able to be again in God's presence with joy rather than the wish for annihilation that all others feel because of their sins. However, He does not take the easy path back to God that is available to Him. Like Ammon₂ at Sebus—but on an infinitely grander scale—He condescends to join us ordinary human beings in suffering. In the hell our sins have created for Him and us, He bears the brunt of our eternal damnation. In doing so, like Ammon₂--but on an infinite scale—He opens a path for us to escape our eternal doom. Out of our despair, we may be born again as sanctified souls if we exercise faith in Him, then with broken heart and contrite spirit hear and obey His commands. Drawing discipline and courage from the enabling power of His Atonement, we may join Him in gathering the scattered of the flock, then in purity follow Him as he humbly leads us back into the presence of His and our Lord.²⁶

These stories have depth. Though each contains elements that mark it as a good adventure tale, neither Ammon narrative may be properly appreciated if attention is focused primarily on plot. These concrete accounts of human doom and deliverance testify of Christ. Pervasive parallels signify their transcendence of history, the primacy of their allegorical witness that Jesus is the Christ.

26. It is worth noting that just as Lamoni's servants are not culpable because the flock was once scattered if it is ultimately returned safely to the king, so we are not culpable for the sins we commit if we come back into God's presence as one who no longer has the "disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). By rallying with broken heart and contrite spirit to the Savior who has joined us in our suffering for sin, by drawing the strength from Him to humbly keep His commands, we are reborn as sinless sons and daughters of Christ who again feel nothing but joy in the presence of God. God will care—and we will care—about what we are, not about what we have been.

Conclusion

Apologetics and hermeneutics, defending and understanding, are the two great tasks the Book of Mormon poses for faithful scholars. Latter-day Saint scholars can more fully accomplish both tasks if they are attentive to the fact that the people who inhabit the Book of Mormon have lives that continue off stage. The necessary brevity of the Book of Mormon means that most details of most lives will be present in the text—if present at all—only by implication. If the Book of Mormon is an authentic historical text, apparently random details should prove to be interconnected when the text is read closely. In this article, I have attempted to show that such interconnections are ubiquitous.

The core message of the Book of Mormon—its powerful testimony of Jesus Christ—is unmistakable for any competent reader because of Nephi’s passion for plainness when bearing testimony and Mormon’s didactic commitment to sharing an unambiguous testimony of the Savior.²⁷ But neither Nephi nor Mormon are merely didactic authors. Like the authors of the Old Testament, they have a literary sensibility.²⁸ So even with respect to the Book of Mormon’s most consequential core message, we can discover important new dimensions of meaning if we pay attention to narrative structure and to the implied cultural and historical milieu of the testament that has been handed down to us. That which is implicit generally converges with, reinforces, and sometimes makes more profound the witness of Jesus Christ that is the dominant theme of the Book of Mormon.

27. H. Hardy, “Mormon’s Poetics.”

28. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

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