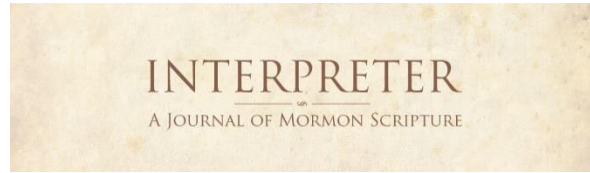




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“My People Are Willing”: The Mention of Aminadab in the Narrative Context of Helaman 5-6

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“MY PEOPLE ARE WILLING”: THE MENTION OF AMINADAB IN THE NARRATIVE CONTEXT OF HELAMAN 5-6

Matthew L. Bowen

*Abstract: Aminadab, a Nephite by birth who later dissented to the Lamanites, played a crucial role in the mass conversion of three hundred Lamanites (and eventually many others). At the end of the pericope in which these events are recorded, Mormon states: “And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and **willingness** to believe in his words” (Helaman 6:36), whereas he “began to withdraw” his Spirit from the Nephites “because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” (Helaman 6:35). The name Aminadab is a Semitic/Hebrew name meaning “my kinsman is willing” or “my people are willing.” As a dissenter, Aminadab was a man of two peoples. Mormon and (probably) his source were aware of the meaning of Aminadab’s name and the irony of that meaning in the context of the latter’s role in the Lamanite conversions and the spiritual history of the Nephites and Lamanites. The narrative’s mention of Aminadab’s name (Helaman 5:39, 41) and Mormon’s echoes of it in Helaman 6:36, 3 Nephi 6:14, and elsewhere have covenant and temple significance not only in their ancient scriptural setting, but for latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon today.*

Like the mention of a woman named “Abish” in Alma 19:6,¹ Mormon’s abrupt, threefold mention of a man named “Aminadab” in Helaman 5:39-41 draws attention to an individual whose life and legacy might otherwise have remained anonymous and thus forgotten. As noted elsewhere, the mention of Abish is remarkable since she is one of few women and servants in the Book of Mormon whose personal name is given.² While it is not evident from the text that the man Aminadab

1 See Matthew L. Bowen, “Father Is a Man: The Remarkable Mention of the Name Abish in Alma 19:16 and Its Narrative Context,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 77-93.

2 Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Textual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 4: Alma* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007),

was a servant, neither is it evident he was a leader — unless calling the attention of the multitude and answering their questions constitutes such evidence (Helaman 5:37-41). Mormon tells us he was merely “one among” those in that prison, though “a Nephite by birth.”

Nevertheless, Mormon emphasizes the fact he considers crucial — namely, that Aminadab was a “dissenter” (“they that were in the prison were Lamanites and Nephites who were **dissenters**,” Helaman 5:27; he had “belonged to the church of God but had **dissented** from them,” 5:35), hardly an auspicious characterization, given what Mormon has recorded up to this point in his history regarding notorious religio-political dissenters like Zerahemnah,³ Amalickiah,⁴ Ammoron,⁵ Coriantumr,⁶ and others.⁷ Mormon shows that Aminadab differs from those earlier dissenter predecessors in that his rebelliousness and unwillingness to believe became righteousness, faith, and willingness, and he facilitates the acquisition of these same qualities by many others, both Lamanites and Nephites.

Mormon introduces and incorporates Aminadab — his name, biography, and salient role in the conversion of three hundred Lamanites and Nephite dissenters (and subsequently many others) — into his narrative in such a way as to give the impression that he is drawing on Aminadab’s eyewitness knowledge of those events. For example, Mormon describes some of what was seen in the prison from Aminadab’s own perspective (Helaman 6:36), including details only Aminadab himself could have known. Aminadab’s words are preserved and properly attributed (6:41). He knew Aminadab’s backstory (6:35). Indeed, the fact that Aminadab’s name is known and remembered suggests that Mormon (and probably others) considered it important.

In other words, Mormon draws on an account of these of events recorded by Aminadab himself or accesses the record of someone who preserved Aminadab’s account. Aminadab, though only briefly

303; see also Bowen, “Father is a Man,” 77-78.

3 Alma 31:8; 43:4-6, 13, 20, 44.

4 See Alma 46:7, 11, 27-28; 47:35-36.

5 See Alma 31:8; 54:24.

6 Helaman 1:15-32.

7 Alma 43:14, Original manuscript: “Now those dissenters [dissenters] were as numerous nearly as were the Nephites.” See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Four: Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007), 2463-2464. Considerable “dissension” from the Nephites had been occurring almost from the beginning: “And it came to pass that two hundred and thirty and eight years had passed away — after the manner of wars, and contentions, and dissensions, for the space of much of the time” (Jarom 1:13).

mentioned in the text and only in this pericope, plays a pivotal role in Lamanite and Nephite spiritual history. Thus, while Mormon clearly considered Aminadab’s name and biography important, additional textual evidence throughout Helaman 5–6 suggests that all this is more than just historical reminiscence on the part of Mormon and his source(s).

In this article, I propose that Mormon’s mention of the name Aminadab in Helaman 5:39–41, like his mention of the name Abish in Alma 19:6, served an important narratological function. Mormon, like his source, appears to have been aware of the Hebrew meaning of Aminadab — “my kinsman is willing” or “my people is/are willing” — and the ironic importance of the meaning of this name in the context of the socio-religious shifts of that epoch: the Nephites, from whom Aminadab had dissented, becoming an increasingly wicked people (like Nephite dissenters had in previous generations)⁸ and the Lamanites and Nephite dissenters with them becoming more righteous. This narratological trajectory reaches its apex in Helaman 6:39, where Mormon says of the “people” of the Lamanites that the Lord poured out his blessings “because of their easiness and **willingness** to believe in his words.” Although this remark at 6:36 occurs at some remove in the text from the mention of Aminadab in 5:39–42, it constitutes a seemingly deliberate echo of his name. Aminadab was not only a fitting name for the figure who bore it — in view of his personal story of repentance and conversion — but also because of the role he played in the conversion of so many others — a “people” who became “willing.”

“My Kinsman Is Willing” / “My People Are Willing”

The name “Aminadab” is a Semitic/Hebrew name with a straightforward etymology. Aminadab, Amminadab,⁹ or Amminadib,¹⁰ taken as a

8 See especially Mormon’s comment in Alma 47:36: “Now these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites, yea, having been instructed in the same knowledge of the Lord, nevertheless, it is strange to relate, not long after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites — drinking in with the traditions of the Lamanites; giving way to indolence, and all manner of lasciviousness; yea, entirely forgetting the Lord their God.”

9 In transliteration the “m” in Aminadab or Amminadab is traditionally doubled, although in ancient (pre-Masoretic) Hebrew writing, the doubling of consonants was not indicated. In any case, it would not have been doubled as spelled out on the plates. See <https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/onoma/index.php/AMINADAB> note 1.

10 Amminadib: this form of the name is attested in Song of Solomon 6:12.

theophoric¹¹ name — as names in the Ancient Near East commonly were — denotes “My kinsman is willing”¹² — i.e., Yahweh as “my (divine) kinsman” [‘*ammî*] “is willing [nādāb].”¹³ However, Aminadab can also be taken as a non-theophoric name, meaning, “my (non-divine) kinsman is willing,” “my people are willing”/“noble,” or “my kin are willing”/“noble” (‘*ammî* “my people” + *nādāb* “willing”). This range of possible meanings is important to what shall be discussed below.

Aminadab is one of a handful of *nādāb* names born by Israelites in the scriptures, including Abinadab (“my father is willing/generous”),¹⁴ Nadab (“willing,” “generous,” “noble”),¹⁵ and its longer form Nedabiah (“Yahweh is willing,” “Yahweh is generous,”¹⁶ “Yahweh is noble”).

The onomastic elements of “Aminadab” or “Amminadab” occur together (“Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, **when the people willingly offered themselves** [bēhitnaddēb ‘*am*]” — Judges 5:2). They also occur together in Psalm 110:3, a temple hymn in which it is said of the Davidic king, “**Thy people shall be willing** [‘*ammēkā nēdābōt*] in the day of thy power.”¹⁷ The Persian-era Chronicler, perhaps having some reference to Psalm 110 in its temple context, emphasizes the “willingness” of David and the people in making offerings for the

11 Amminadab can be taken as belonging to a class of West Semitic theophoric names that include ‘*am(m)* as a divine name-bearing (theophoric) element. West Semitic Hammurapi (*ḥammurāpi* = ‘*ammurāpi* = “the [divine] kinsman is a healer”), for whom the famous law-code is named, is perhaps the most famous example of one of these names. Nevertheless, the morphology is ambiguous and there are additional, non-exclusive ways to understand the ‘*am(m)*-element.

12 See Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) 770 (hereafter *BDB*): “my kinsman is noble”; Martin Noth (*Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* [BWANT 3/10; Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1928], 192) suggests “my father’s brother has shown himself generous.” See further Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 844 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*).

13 Compare the names Ammiel (“EL [God] is my (divine) kinsman”; Numbers 13:12; 2 Samuel 9:4-5; 17:27; 1 Chronicles 3:5; 26:5); Ammishaddai (“Shadday [the Almighty] is my kinsman”; Numbers 1:12; 2:25; 7:66, 71; 10:25); and Ammizabad (“My [divine] kinsman has bestowed [him/her]”) 1 Chronicles 27:6).

14 Noth (*Personennamen*, 193) suggests that Abinadab means “Father has proven himself generous,” cf. Ugaritic, Abu-nadib (KAT 483); see *HALOT*, 5.

15 *BDB* (p. 621), Nadab (*nādāb*) = “generous, noble.”

16 Noth, *Personennamen*, 193; see *HALOT*, 672.

17 The New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation of Psalm 110:3 reads: “your people come forward willingly on your day of battle.”

building of the temple as preparations were made,¹⁸ a project later carried out and completed by his son Solomon. In 1 Chronicles 29 the verb **ndb* occurs seven times alone,¹⁹ repeatedly in juxtaposition with the noun *‘am*: “Then **the people** [*ha‘am*] rejoiced, **for that they offered willingly** [*‘al-hitnadēbam*], because with perfect heart **they offered willingly** [*hitnadēbû*] to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy” (1 Chronicles 29:9); “But who am I, and what is **my people** [*‘ammî*], that we should be able to **offer so willingly** [*lēhitnadēb*] after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. (1 Chronicles 29:14); “I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart **I have willingly offered** [*hitnadabtî*] all these things: and now have I seen with joy **thy people** [*‘ammēkâ*] which are present here, **to offer willingly** [*lēhitnadēb*] unto thee” (1 Chronicles 29:17).

In all this, the Chronicler insists, the people of Israel in David’s time met the Mosaic Law’s “willingness” requirements in their sacrifices and offerings. In Exodus 25:2, the Lord had commanded Moses: “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it **willingly** [*yiddēbenû*] with his heart ye shall take my offering.” Similarly, the Book of Ezra’s description restored cultic practices at the newly-rebuilt temple in Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile (the temple of Zerubbabel) specifically mentions the freewill offering, suggesting its importance: “And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that **willingly offered** [*mitnadēb*] a **freewill offering** [*nēdābâ*] unto the Lord” (Ezra 3:5). These biblical passages suggest a close connection — perhaps an ideal connection — between the identity of Yahweh’s “people” and their “willingness,” all this in the context of temple. In the end, what else would (or should) distinguish a “people of the Lord” from other people other than their “willingness” to bear his name, to keep covenant and his commandments, and to do his will?

Aminadab: Man of Two “Peoples”

As a Nephite dissenter, Aminadab was a man of two peoples: the Nephites, whose culture and religion had been his prior to his dissention, and the Lamanites, whose culture he had adopted. Mormon recognized

¹⁸ Although the Chronicler acknowledges the historical reality that Solomon built the temple, he makes every effort to show David’s hand in establishing Israelite cultic praxis in Jerusalem.

¹⁹ 1 Chronicles 29:5-6 (*bis*), 9 (*bis*), 14 (once), 17 (*bis*).

the fact that Aminadab, on this occasion, serendipitously bridged the two cultural/religious worlds, serving as an instrument in the Lord's hand in converting the Lamanites and other Nephite dissenters in the prison:

Now there was one among them who was **a Nephite by birth, who had once belonged to the church of God but had dissented from them.** And it came to pass that he turned him about, and behold, he saw through the cloud of darkness the faces of Nephi and Lehi; and behold, they did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels. And he beheld that they did lift their eyes to heaven; and they were in the attitude as if talking or lifting their voices to some being whom they beheld. And it came to pass that this man did cry unto the multitude, that they might turn and look. And behold, there was power given unto them that they did turn and look; and they did behold the faces of Nephi and Lehi. And they said unto the man: Behold, what do all these things mean, and who is it with whom these men do converse? Now the man's name was **Aminadab.** And **Aminadab** said unto them: They do converse with the angels of God. And it came to pass that the Lamanites said unto him: What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us? And **Aminadab** said unto them: You must repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was taught unto you by Alma, and Amulek and Zeezrom; and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you. And it came to pass that they all did begin to cry unto the voice of him who had shaken the earth; yea, they did cry even until the cloud of darkness was dispersed. (Helaman 5:35-42)

The phrase “now there was one among them” recalls Mormon's introduction of several other important figures into his narrative: Alma the Elder,²⁰ Zeezrom,²¹ and Abish.²² Alma, Zeezrom, and Abish had belonged to groups who were not living according to the Lord's commandments, and all three became converted to the Lord, undergoing full personal

20 Mosiah 17:2 (“But there was one among them whose name was Alma”); see Aaron P. Schade and Matthew L. Bowen, “To Whom Is the Arm of the Lord Revealed?” *Religious Educator* 16/2 (2015): 92-93.

21 Alma 10:31 (“**And there was one among them whose name was Zeezrom.** Now he was the foremost to accuse Amulek and Alma, **he being one of the most expert among them,** having much business to do among the people”).

22 Alma 19:10 (“... save it were **one of the Lamanitish** women, whose name was **Abish ...**”).

transformations. Moreover, all three became instruments in the Lord’s hand in bringing about the conversions of many others: Alma founded a church, Zeezrom helped reconvert many Zoramites, and Abish participated in the conversion of many other Lamanites. The language here suggests that Aminadab belongs to this class of persons and that his role was similarly important. Mormon also plays on the name Aminadab (see below), as he does the names of these three.²³

Mormon stresses that Aminadab was both “a Nephite by birth” and a “dissenter” from “the church of God.” In other words, he had evidently repudiated both his cultural and religious heritage. Mormon also describes what Aminadab saw on this occasion in great detail — even from the latter’s own perspective in Helaman 6:36, so much so that we get the impression that Mormon drew directly on Aminadab’s own account or reminiscence of this event. Aminadab “saw through the cloud of darkness” (6:36). This “cloud of darkness”²⁴ evokes the theophanic cloud which was said to surround Yahweh and which Yahweh was said to reside (Psalm 97:2, 1 Kings 8:12/2 Chronicles 6:1) ... as well as the “cloud” in the storm-god imagery sometimes used to describe Yahweh’s presence in the Hebrew Bible (see Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1; Jeremiah 4:13; Ezekiel 38:9). The cloud that initially veiled the Lord from the brother of Jared (Ether 2:4-15; 14) and through which the Lord “stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger” as “the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared” (Ether 3:6; cf. 3:19-20) functioned similarly.

Aminadab himself does not behold a theophany, per se, but he is a key witness to the theophany that Nephi and Lehi themselves “beheld” (i.e., “some being whom they beheld”). While perhaps he does not see through the veil²⁵ in precisely the same way that the brother of Jared does on Mount Shelem in Ether 3, nevertheless Aminadab sees enough (and has enough spiritual insight) to recognize the sacred nature of what was transpiring

23 On the wordplay on Alma evident in Mosiah 17:2 and following, see Matthew L. Bowen, “‘And He Was a Young Man’: The Literary Preservation of Alma’s Autobiographical Wordplay” *Insights* 30/4 (2010): 2-4; on the likely wordplay on ezrom/ezrum and “Zeezrom,” see Gordon C. Thomasson, “What’s in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming,” 15. Thomasson notes Benjamin Urrutia’s earlier correlation of Zeezrom and ezrom/ezrum. On the wordplay on Abish, see Bowen, “Father is a Man,” 77-93.

24 The “cloud of darkness” is mentioned eight times in Helaman 5:29, 31, 34, 36, 40-44.

25 Cf. Ether 3:6-20. On the brother of Jared’s experience atop Mount Shelem as a temple experience, see M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 388-98.

and has enough wherewithal to draw the attention of the Lamanites and Nephite dissenters to Nephi and Lehi and the theophany that the latter were experiencing. The fact that Aminadab quickly recognized what was happening suggests that his knowledge of the gospel (as taught among the Nephites) and of spiritual things had been great and that not all had been forgotten.

“Who Is It with Whom These Men Do Converse?”

The Divine Kinsman of Helaman 5

In the ancient Zeniffite prison²⁶ in the land of Nephite about three hundred Lamanites and Nephite dissenters — Aminadab among them — heard the voice of God declare: “Repent ye, repent ye, and seek no more to destroy my servants, which I have sent unto you to declare good tidings” (Helaman 5:29). Mormon then describes the divine voice as “not a voice of thunder, neither ... a voice of great tumultuous noise, but ... a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper” (5:30; cf. “a pleasant voice, as if it were a whisper, v. 46), language (that evokes or depends upon 1 Kings 19:12 and 1 Nephi 17:4 (i.e., “a still small voice,” Heb. *qôl dēmāmâ daqqâ*, literally: “voice of a thin whisper”) and language that foreshadows his description of the voice of the Father in 3 Nephi 11 (see Helaman 5:30–31; cf. 5:46).²⁷ The voice then comes again, declaring “Repent ye, repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand; and seek no more to destroy my servants” (Helaman 5:32). Mormon states that the voice came a third time “and did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man” (5:33). The Lamanites and Nephite dissenters are immobilized by the “the cloud of darkness” and the “fear” that it produced (5:34).

Thereupon, Aminadab counsels the men in the prison: “you must repent and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ.” Aminadab, as a Nephite dissenter and lapsed member of the church that had originally been (re)established²⁸ by Alma the Elder, understood the meaning of the voice’s reiterated command, “repent.” He also apparently understood the importance of repentance in the context of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31–32)²⁹ as evident in his counsel that they “cry unto

26 See Helaman 5:21.

27 Study forthcoming.

28 See, e.g., 3 Nephi 5:12.

29 The content of the small plates of Nephi was known to Alma the Younger (compare Alma 36:22 with 1 Nephi 1:8ff). The “very points of [Christ’s] doctrine” mentioned by Nephi in 1 Nephi 15:14 are presumably the “points of doctrine” that Alma the Younger taught the church as his father’s spiritual successor and “the points of doctrine” against which his son Corianton “risked to commit sin” (Alma 41:9).

the voice, even until ye shall have **faith** in Christ.” Aminadab knew that crying unto the voice would instill faith in the one whom he had formerly understood to have the power to dispel darkness (see, e.g., Lamoni’s experience in Alma 19:6 and Alma’s experience as recounted in Alma 36:17-20; cf. 26:3, 15). Thus, Aminadab’s counsel has the added effect of centering their understanding of the phenomena — and thus the Lamanites’ and dissenters’ nascent faith — in Christ.

They heed Aminadab’s counsel with marvelous results: “the cloud of darkness [is] dispersed” and they are all “encircled about . . . by a pillar of fire” (Helaman 5:42-45; cf. Alma 26:15). They become — like Nephi and Lehi — partakers of and participants in the theophany.³⁰ It is important to note here that the one to whom the voice belonged — Christ — is also the source of the ensuing blessings: Christ dispersed the overshadowing cloud of darkness, Christ sent the encircling (i.e., embracing) theophanic “fire” (Helaman 5:43; cf. Alma 26:15) — the one in whom “there should come every good thing” (Moroni 7:19-22), the “redeemer” and “rock” in whom Nephi and Lehi believed (cf. Helaman 5:9-12).

Here we recall that Aminadab’s name means both “my kinsman is willing”/“generous”/ “noble” and “my people [kin] are noble.” There is ample evidence in the Israelite onomasticon for Yahweh’s being considered the “divine kinsman” of Israel. Yahweh was conceived as

They were, moreover, the “points of doctrine that Alma’s successors (Helaman₂, Helaman₃, Nephi and Lehi) taught which had been laid down by the prophets” on the small plates and afterward (Helaman 11:22; cf. Jarom 1:2) and the “true points of doctrine” concerning which “Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren . . . knew” (Helaman 11:23) and “the points of [Christ’s] doctrine” concerning which Jesus Christ himself later commanded “there shall be no disputations among you . . . as there have hither to been” (3 Nephi 11:28).

30 To be clear, I am using *theophany* (Greek *theos* “god” + *phaneia* “appearance,” “manifestation”) in a very broad sense to include the appearance or manifestation of any being (God, god, angel, etc.) from the divine realm.

a divine father,³¹ a divine brother;³² in other words, a kinsman.³³ The concept may be tribal in origin.³⁴ Frank Moore Cross observes:

The Israelite league was ... a religious organization or society. Priestly families, linked by genealogy to create a priestly “tribe,” were set aside [i.e., “set apart”] to conduct rituals and sacrifices to preserve religious lore. The league was called ‘*am Yahweh*, which we generally translate the ‘people of Yahweh.’ However, ... ‘*am(m)* is a kinship term, and for our purposes here is perhaps better translated the ‘kindred’ of Yahweh. Yahweh is the god of Israel, the Divine Kinsman, the god of the covenant. ... The ‘*am Yahweh*, ‘kindred of Yahweh,’ in some contexts must be translated ‘the militia of Yahweh,’ and in some contexts the ‘am Yahweh is a community of worshipers, a cultic association.³⁵

The “kinship” relationship between Yahweh and Israel is presupposed in statements made throughout the Book of Mormon that the Lord (Yahweh) would “redeem his people.”³⁶ Such a statement occurs in Helaman 5:9-10, where Helaman identifies Jesus Christ as Yahweh the kinsman redeemer:

O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, **only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world.** And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he [Amulek] said unto him [Zeezrom] that

31 E.g., the name “Abijah” means “Yahweh is my father.” The name is attested in 1 Kings 14:1; Nehemiah 10:7; 12:4, 17; 1 Chronicles 24:10; 2 Chronicles 11:20, 22; 12:16; 13:1-4, 15-22; 14:1; 29:1.

32 The name “Ahijah” means “Yahweh is my brother.” This name is attested in 1 Kings 11:29-30; 12:15; 14:2-6, 18; 1 Kings 15:27, 29, 33; 21:22; 2 Kings 9:9; 1 Chronicles 2:25; 11:36; 26:20; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 10:15; and Nehemiah 10:26.

33 Christopher B. Hays, “‘Lest Ye Perish in the Way’: Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24–26,” *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): 39-54.

34 See, e.g., Amy Hill Fisher, “The Divine Kinsman: Yahweh and the Tribal Mechanism,” in *BYU Religious Education 2010 Student Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 141–151.

35 Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 2000), 12.

36 Mosiah 13:33; 15:1, 11; Alma 5:21, 27; 6:8; 11:40; 33:22; Helaman 5:9-10; cf. especially 1 Chronicles 17:21

the Lord [Yahweh] surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

Helaman's statement to his sons, Nephi and Lehi, constitutes an important backdrop against which the theophany and the miraculous conversions of Helaman 5 take place. The Hebrew divine epithet *gō'el* ("redeemer") or ("kinsman redeemer") implies kinship with the redeemed.³⁷ The mere presence of the name Aminadab in the text of this narrative and in the context of Helaman's declarations to Nephi and Lehi (Helaman 5:9-12) draws potential attention to Yahweh ("the rock of our redeemer who is Christ, the Son of God," 5:12) and his role as the divine *'am* (kinsman") in relationship to his *'am* ("people," "kin") and his showing himself "willing" or "generous" in that role (see Helaman 5:43-45).

The divine voice speaks again in Helaman 5:47: "Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my Well Beloved, which was from the foundation of the world." It is the divine kinsman — the divine "kinsman" for whom Aminadab conceivably had been named³⁸ — who speaks. The repetition "peace, peace" here corresponds to the twofold repetition of "repent, repent" in Helaman 5:29, 32.

The term "peace," in fact, indicates that repentance has taken place and that peace has been created between Yahweh and the Lamanites (and Nephite dissenters) in prison, just as "peace" is created between Gideon and Yahweh in Judges 6:23-24. The initially diffident Gideon who had sought a confirmatory sign that it was in fact Yahweh or his messenger that was speaking with him, was terrified at the theophanic fire and the sight of the divine messenger upon seeing them, since such theophanic manifestations were potentially fatal.³⁹ Yahweh himself voices the reassurance that Gideon needs: "And the Lord [Yahweh] said unto him, **Peace be unto thee** [*šālôm lēkā*]; fear not: thou shalt not die.

37 Cf. Numbers 5:8; Ruth 3:9, 12-13; 4:1, 3, 6, 8, and 14.

38 We know almost nothing regarding Aminadab's parents, but the fact that he had been given a good Hebrew/Israelite name during a time in which Jaredite and other non-Nephite/Israelite names are well-attested, is suggestive of the idea that Aminadab's parents were, like Samuel the Lamanite and his parents, well-connected to both the Nephite and the older Israelite traditions.

39 Contrast Exodus 19:21; 20:19; 33:20 and Leviticus 10:1-2 (Numbers 3:4) with, e.g., Genesis 32:20; Exodus 24:8-11; 33:11; Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 34:10; Judges 13:15-23; Isaiah 6:1-8; Moses 1:2, 11, 31; 7:4; Abraham 3:11; D&C 67:10-14. Cf. D&C 17:1.

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it **Jehovah-shalom** [*Yahweh-šālôm* = “He creates peace”⁴⁰]: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites” (Judges 6:23-24). Robert Boling suggests, on analogy with Frank Moore Cross’s etymology for *Yahweh-šēbā’ôt* (“He creates the [heavenly] hosts,”⁴¹ frequently rendered “Lord of Hosts” or “Lord of Sabaoth”)⁴² that the name Jehovah-Shalom means “He creates peace.”⁴³ Just as Yahweh — the Savior himself — created lifesaving peace between himself and Gideon (cf. the lifesaving “at-one-ment” [*tēkuppār*] of Isaiah’s “sin” during the theophany that attended his calling to be a prophet [Isaiah 6:7]),⁴⁴ he also created “peace” between himself and Aminadab and the three hundred in the prison (“peace, peace be unto you”) by virtue of their faith and the atonement (“because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world”).

With the “peace” or atonement necessary for surviving a theophany thus created, all three hundred men become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) or “partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3; Ether 12:8) as they participate in the divine council as it descends to *them*⁴⁵: “And now, when they heard this they cast up their eyes as if to behold from whence the voice came; and behold, they saw the heavens

40 Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 6A; New York: Doubleday, 1975), 129.

41 Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 65-71.

42 If *Yahweh-šēbā’ôt* — “Lord of Hosts” or “Lord of Sabaoth” — means “**He creates** the hosts,” compare the glossing of “Lord of Sabaoth” in D&C 95:7, “**the creator** of the first day, the beginning and the end.”

43 Boling, *Judges*, 134.

44 Theophanies presented the danger that those who beheld them might die if the divine glory irrupted upon them (Exodus 24:9-11; JST Exodus 33:20; Leviticus 10:1-3; Judges 6:13; 13:21-23; Isaiah 6:5).

45 On the divine council, see E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 24; Chico, CA: Scholar’s Press, 1980). On the relevance of “divine counsel” studies for Latter-day Saints and an LDS understanding of scripture, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Ye Are Gods’: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 471–594. David E. Bokovoy, “Ye Really Are Gods’: A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 267–313 (responding to: Michael S. Heiser, “You’ve Seen One Elohim, You’ve Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism’s Use of Psalm 82,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 [2007]: 221–66). See further Stephen O. Smoot, “Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book

open; and angels came down out of heaven and ministered unto them” (Helaman 5:48). The participation of these “men” in, and their instruction (their being “ministered unto”) by, the divine council constitutes a kind of endowment.⁴⁶ Like prophets Isaiah,⁴⁷ Lehi,⁴⁸ and Ezekiel⁴⁹ in the divine council, they become endowed with the knowledge of God and commissioned to go forth and bear an incontrovertible testimony of him. They become empowered to “minister unto the people” (Helaman 5:50) — they become “ministering angels” like the angels who ministered to them in the divine council.

The some three hundred witnesses subsequently all receive a kind of prophetic or angelic commission: they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt” (Helaman 5:49; cf. Isaiah 6:9: “go and tell this **people** [‘ām]). Their subsequent “go[ing] forth and minister[ing] unto **the people** [cf. Hebrew *ha’am*]” indicates their “willingness” in response to this commission. Like Isaiah, Abraham, and the Lord himself, they were commissioned in a divine council setting — in this instance, they do not *ascend* into heaven, but rather the divine council (or a portion thereof) *descends* to them, as it does to Isaiah (Isaiah 6). Their response to their commissioning compares well to the response “here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27; Isaiah 6:8) or “here am I” (Genesis 22:1, 11; 1 Samuel 3:4-21, see especially 3:4-6, 8, 16). They have become “angelicized” — that is, divinely-*sent* messengers from the divine “kinsman” to their own “people” — their kindred. They will emerge as “willing” messengers who instilled “willingness” in the kinsfolk who hear their message.

“They Did Go Forth and Did Minister unto the People” (Helaman 5:50): The Making of a Willing People

The Lamanites and Nephite dissenters in the prison — perhaps in no small part because many of them were Nephite dissenters — became a missionary juggernaut. Commissioned to “go forth” and minister, they taught and bore testimony effectively and gained converts quickly:

of Abraham,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 28-39.

46 On the endowment as participation in the divine council, see William J. Hamblin, “The Sod of YHWH and the Endowment,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 147-154.

47 See Isaiah 6 in its entirety.

48 See 1 Nephi 1:5-15, 18.

49 See Ezekiel 1-3; 10.

And there were about three hundred souls who saw and heard these things; and they were bidden to go forth and marvel not, neither should they doubt. And it came to pass that they **did go forth, and did minister unto the people** [cf. *ha'am*] declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen, insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received. And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers. And it came to pass that they did **yield up** unto the Nephites the lands of their possession. (Helaman 5:49-52)

The Lamanites readily recognized the “greatness of the evidences which they had received,” which suggests both teachability and willingness. The “greatness of the evidences” consisted in the greatness of the testimonies that these Lamanites and dissenters bore: they were testimonies of surpassing faith. Jesus himself specifically cites these Lamanites as examples of “faith” and offering the “broken heart and a contrite spirit” that became the required sacrifice when the Mosaic cultic requirements were “done away” (see 3 Nephi 9:20).⁵⁰ These Lamanites had been “willingly” offering the true sacrifice — the sacrifice of a “broken heart and a contrite spirit”⁵¹ — even before the coming of the Christ (cf. Psalm 51:16-17).⁵²

A Tale of Two Peoples: The Lamanites Become a Righteous People vis-à-vis the Nephites

Mormon’s focus in the material that follows the theophany and miracles of Helaman 5 is clearly the state of the “the people” (Hebrew *ha'am*). After the theophany and the concomitant conversion of so many

50 3 Nephi 9:20: “**And** ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart **and** a contrite spirit. **And** whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart **and** a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire **and** with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire **and** with the Holy Ghost, **and they knew it not.**”

51 See 2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:19-20; Ether 4:15; Moroni 6:2; D&C 59:8.

52 See Dana M. Pike, “3 Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: Neal A. Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2012), 35–56.

Lamanites and Nephite dissenters, the collective spiritual trajectory of the Lamanites trends upward for more than a generation:

AND it came to pass that when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges had ended, all these things had happened and the Lamanites had become, the more part of them, **a righteous people** [*‘am*, or “kin” **insomuch that their righteousness did exceed that of the Nephites**, because of their firmness and their steadiness in the faith. For behold, there were many of the Nephites who had become hardened and impenitent and grossly wicked, insomuch that they did reject the word of God and all the preaching and prophesying which did come among them. (Helaman 6:2)

The description “firmness and . . . steadiness in the faith” plays on and overturns the pejorative “unbelief” (cf. Hebrew *lō’ ʿemun*, Deuteronomy 32:20) frequently ascribed by the Nephites to the Lamanites.⁵³ The Lamanites had become the more righteous — the more willing — people. On the other hand, the adjectival descriptions of many of the Nephites as “hardened,” “impenitent,” and “grossly wicked” describe the diametric opposite of a “people” who are “willing.” This unwillingness is exemplified in their wholesale rejection of the word of God, preaching, and prophecy. To the joy of the unified “people of the church,” however, opposite conditions prevail among the Lamanites:

Nevertheless, **the people** [cf. Hebrew *‘am*] **of the church did have great joy because of the conversion of the Lamanites**, yea, because of the church of God, which had been established among them. And they did fellowship one with another, and did rejoice one with another, and did have great joy. And it came to pass that **many of the Lamanites did come down into the land of Zarahemla, and did declare unto the people of the Nephites the manner of their conversion** and did exhort them to faith and repentance. Yea, and **many did preach with exceedingly great power and authority**, unto the bringing down many of them into the depths of humility, to be the humble followers of God

53 See Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: The 40th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Salt Lake City/Provo, UT: RSC and Deseret Book, 2011), 240-263; idem, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator* 15/2 (2014), 64–89.

and the Lamb. And it came to pass that **many of the Lamanites did go into the land northward; and also Nephi and Lehi went into the land northward, to preach unto the people.** And thus ended the sixty and third year. (Helaman 6:3-6)

Mormon's use of the phrase "people of the church" illustrates that there was at this time, as had been developing for several generations, a sociology that transcended the traditional Nephite/Lamanite divisions. The "church" or "the people of the church" were comprised now of large numbers of ethnic Lamanites.⁵⁴ The Lamanite testimonies were difficult, if not impossible to dismiss. There were so many witnesses all testifying of the same thing, all of whom had gone from a state of radical "unbelief" to "preach[ing] with exceedingly great power and authority." This same total reversal was, in part, what made Alma and the sons of Mosiah such impressive and powerful missionaries in their generation.

Moreover, Mormon here stresses that the missionary activity undertaken in the sixty-third year of the reign of the judges in "the land northward" was a concerted effort: the Lamanites and Lehi and Nephi are all the subject of the verb "preach." Their united "preach[ing] unto the people [cf. *'am*]" made a more righteous "people" out of both ethnic groups. Unprecedented unity and prosperity followed.

In spite of — and evidently because of — the almost-utopic prosperity ("peace") of the Nephites and Lamanites described in Helaman 6:7-9 (cf. the benediction of "peace, peace" in Helaman 5:47),⁵⁵ wickedness sets in again rather quickly among the Nephites. That same Cezoram, the judge whom the increasingly wicked Nephites had chosen in place of Nephi the son of Helaman (Helaman 5:1-4, note the emphasis there on the people: "voice of the people," "a stiffnecked people"), is assassinated. However, instead of choosing a righteous judge, the people chose that man's son, who is also subsequently assassinated:

54 This transcendent sociology probably — at least in part — explains Mormon's comments on race/ethnicity in 3 Nephi 2:14-16 and later in 4 Nephi 1:10.

55 Helaman 6:7-9 "And behold, **there was peace in all the land**, insomuch that the Nephites did go into whatsoever part of the land they would, whether among the Nephites or the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the Lamanites did also go whithersoever they would, whether it were among the Lamanites or among the Nephites; and thus they did have free intercourse one with another, to buy and to sell, and to get gain, according to their desire. And it came to pass that they they became exceedingly rich, both the Lamanites and the Nephites; and **they did have an exceeding plenty** of gold, and of silver, and of all manner of precious metals, both in the land south and in the land north."

And it came to pass that in the sixty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, behold, Cezoram was murdered by an unknown hand as he sat upon the judgment-seat. And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been **appointed by the people** in his stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year. And in the commencement of the sixty and seventh year **the people** began to grow exceedingly wicked again (Helaman 6:15)

Two chief judges chosen and appointed by “the people,” whose wickedness had so greatly wearied Nephi that he resigned his office (cf. Helaman 5:1-4), are assassinated in rapid succession by wicked members of Kishkumen and Gadianton’s secret combination. The instability of the Nephite leadership situation reflects the moral instability of the people and their rapid oscillation between wickedness and righteousness. The Nephites’ “willingness” at this stage of their history is best evident in their proclivity toward collective wickedness — extreme wickedness.

Mormon, with the benefit of hindsight,⁵⁶ recognized that Cainitic secret combinations were lethal to a “people”: “Now behold, it is these secret oaths and covenants which Alma commanded his son should not go forth unto the world, lest they should be a means of bringing down **the people** unto destruction (Helaman 6:25). While making this record, Mormon himself had been a firsthand witness to the destruction of his own people, in no small part due to the Gadianton robbers (see Mormon 1:18-19), and the Nephites had long had the lessons of the destruction of the Jaredites available for their profit and learning. Mormon leaves no doubt here as to the “authorship” of these secret combinations:

And also it is that same being who **put it into the hearts of the people** to build a tower sufficiently high that they they might get to heaven. And it was that same being who **led on the people** who came from that tower into this land; who spread the works of darkness and abominations over all the face of the land, **until he dragged the people** down to an entire destruction, and to an everlasting hell. (Helaman 6:28)

Satan works hard on the heart (i.e., anciently, the seat of thoughts and emotions) since it is particularly susceptible to his corrupting influence

⁵⁶ In citing secret combinations as a major reason for the destruction of the Nephites, Mormon also had the benefit of Alma the Younger’s foresight, the latter having recorded a prophecy in which he foretold that very problem (see Alma 37:21-34).

(see, e.g., Deuteronomy 29:19). In fact, Mormon states that Satan “is the author of all sin” and that “he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths, and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation according **as he can get hold upon the hearts** of the children of men (Helaman 6:30). At the end of the Book of Helaman Mormon reports that “notwithstanding the signs and the wonders which were wrought among the people of the Lord, and the many miracles which they did, **Satan did get great hold upon the hearts of the people** upon all the face of the land.”⁵⁷

It should be noted here that Exodus 35 illustrates the connection between the “heart” and “willingness” (being *nādāb*). According to this text, the building of the wilderness tabernacle — Israel’s first temple — was enabled, or at least facilitated, by the “willingness” or “generosity” of the Israelites themselves to donate the required materials: “whosoever is of a willing heart [*nēdīb libbô*], let him bring ... an offering of the Lord; gold, and silver, and brass” (Exodus 35:5); “And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing [*nādēbâ*] ... both men and women, as many as were willing hearted [*nēdīb lēb*], and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered[,] offered an offering of gold unto the Lord” (35:21-22); “The children of Israel brought a willing offering [*nēdābâ*] unto the Lord, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the Lord had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses” (Exodus 35:29).

One people — the Lamanites — was willing, the other — the Nephites — was not. Willingness opens the path to increased faith and righteousness; unwillingness and hardheartedness ultimately result in destruction. For their part, the only “willingness” that many of the wicked Nephites demonstrated was in “build[ing] up unto themselves idols of their gold and their silver” (Helaman 6:31), the very opposite of the “willingness” described in Exodus 35.

57 Finally, when apostasy set in again among the Lehites several generations after the coming of Christ, Mormon describes the rise of the church that “professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel, insomuch that they did receive all manner of wickedness, and did administer that which was sacred unto him to whom it had been forbidden because of unworthiness” (4 Nephi 1:28). Moreover, he suggests that “... this church did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan who did get hold upon their hearts” (4 Nephi 1:28).

**“Because of Their Easiness and Willingness
to Believe” (Helaman 6:36)**

The Nephites’ ancestor Nephi, the son of Lehi, also connected the “heart” with “willingness.” In expounding the “doctrine of Christ” Nephi testified:

I know that if ye shall follow the Son, **with full purpose of heart**, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, **witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing** to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism ... then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 31:13; cf. v. 10)

Mormon records that the voice of Christ explicitly stated that “the Lamanites” in the prison had, “because of their faith in [Christ] at the time of their conversion, [been] baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not” (3 Nephi 9:20). In other words, the “baptism of fire” had “come” to these Lamanites (and Nephite dissenters) because of their “willingness” to have faith in Christ and take upon them his name. Thus they, like Nephi and Lehi, “sp[o]ke with the tongue of angels” (and with angels).

This point finds marvelous confirmation at the end of Mormon’s excursus on the primeval origins of secret combinations and their relationship to the problem of the Gadianton robbers, to whom the Nephites had lent much support. There, Mormon summarizes the trajectories of both the Nephites and the Lamanites, the latter emerging as the more righteous people, the more “willing” people, and the people who are legitimated as the Lord’s people by their reception of the Holy Ghost:

And it came to pass that all these iniquities did come unto them in the space of not many years, insomuch that a more part of it had come unto them in the sixty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And they did grow in their iniquities in the sixty and eighth year also, to the great sorrow and lamentation of the righteous. And thus we see that Nephites did begin to dwindle in unbelief, and grow in wickedness and abominations, while the Lamanites began to grow exceedingly in the knowledge of their God; yea, they did begin to keep his statutes and commandments, and to walk in truth and uprightness before him. **And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the**

hardness of their hearts. And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words. (Helaman 6:32-36)

Here Mormon affirms the key connection between the “heart” and “willingness” described above: the Nephites hardened their hearts, while the Lamanites (and their hearts) were “easy” and “willing” to believe. The Lamanites emerge as a people upon whom the Lord could pour out his Spirit as well as his blessings and favor “because of their easiness and willingness,” a description that recalls the name Aminadab and its meaning: “my people are willing.” Terminology rendered “willingness” occurs only here in Helaman 6:36 and in Mosiah 29:37-38,⁵⁸ suggesting that Mormon’s word choice here was deliberate. The Lamanites had become like the righteous and “willing” Nephites of Mosiah II’s time, while the Nephites of Aminadab’s time had become the very “people” that Mosiah had warned against (see Mosiah 29:26-27; Helaman 5:2-3).

We recall that Aminadab was a man of both the Nephite and Lamanite “peoples.” Ironically, it was his second people, the Lamanites who were “willing” while his first people, the Nephites — who had been favored by the Lord for centuries — by implication became *unwilling*. Mormon appears to have recognized that irony. Indeed, there is something marvelous about a Nephite dissenter whose name denotes “my kinsman is willing” or “my people are willing” giving spiritual direction to Lamanites and other Nephite dissenters who upon their conversion preached and testified to an increasingly hardhearted and unwilling Nephite nation, who saw themselves as the “good[ly]”⁵⁹ or “fair ones”⁶⁰ and believed the myth of inherent “chosen-ness.”

It is perhaps worth noting that the 1981 and 2013 LDS editions of the Book of Mormon provides a footnote for the word “willingness” in Helaman 6:36 that references Exodus 25:2. As noted above, the word translated “willingly” in Exodus 25:2 is a form of the word *nādāb* (*yiddēbenû*). The concept of a “people [who] are willing,” then, fittingly

58 Mosiah 29:37-38: “And now it came to pass, after king Mosiah had sent these things forth among the people they were convinced of the truth of his words. Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a **willingness** to answer for his own sins.”

59 Jacob 3:7; Mosiah 9:1.

60 See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi” *Insights* 23/6 (2003): 2.

punctuates an episode in which the key player ambiguously named "My kinsman is willing" or "My people are willing" (Aminadab) opens the way for Nephi and Lehi's theophany-attended miracles to exert their maximum effect. The narrative deliberately exploits the ambiguity of the 'ammî-element in Aminadab to emphasize not only the "willingness" or "generosity" of the Lord, the divine "kinsman" who poured out his spirit abundantly on the Lamanites and Nephite dissenters, but also to emphasize how "willing" they became and the subsequent "willingness" of those who converted because of their testimonies.

As if to further emphasize the point, Mormon then cites a concrete example of just how "willing" or "generous" the Lamanites had become vis-à-vis their Nephite counterparts. He juxtaposes the Lamanite solution with the Gadianton problem to the Nephite non-solution:

And it came to pass that **the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.** And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to **believe** in their works and **partake** of their spoils, and to **join** with them in their secret murders and combinations. And thus they did obtain the sole management of the government, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God. And thus we see that they were in **an awful state**, and ripening for an everlasting destruction. And it came to pass that thus ended the sixty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over **the people** of Nephi. (Helaman 5:37-41)

The Lamanites "hunted" the Gadianton robbers, not for the purpose of doing violence to them or exacting revenge, but in order to "preach the word of God," recalling Mormon's earlier description about the "virtue of the word" (Alma 31:5).⁶¹ The results are nothing short of miraculous:

⁶¹ Alma 31:5: "And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just — yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them — therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the

the Gadianton's are "utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites," making them an even more righteous and "willing" people. The Nephites not only "did build [the Gadianton robbers] up" but actively participated in or "join[ed]" their program of "seducing" the righteous. The result was an unjust and wholly corrupt government.

While the Lamanites preached the word of God "among the more wicked part of them [the Gadianton robbers]" the Nephites also began "at the more wicked part of them" but instead "buil[t] ... up" and "support[ed]" them until the entire nation was overspread with that evil society. The Lamanites and Nephites more or less hold in this pattern until the time of the coming of the Savior's ministry among "the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared" (3 Nephi 10:18) as evident by Mormon's comment in 3 Nephi 6:14, which I will now treat at length.

A People "Willing with All Diligence": Aminadab's Legacy

Amid the general apostasy that preceded the cataclysmic upheavals in the New World concomitant with the Savior's death at Jerusalem, which is described in 3 Nephi 8-10, Mormon states that there was only one people that remained true and faithful — and that group was *not* the Nephites. Notwithstanding the breaking up of governments (3 Nephi 7) and even the breaking up of the church that had enjoyed a continuous existence since the time of Alma the Elder, one group of converted Lamanites remained faithful:

And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up; yea, insomuch that in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it, for they were firm, and steadfast, and immovable, **willing** with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord. (3 Nephi 6:14)

Note here that Mormon describes them not only as "firm, and steadfast, and immovable" — a formula found elsewhere in connection

virtue of the word of God." Regarding this verse, President Boyd K. Packer stated: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. ... That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 20; or Ensign, Nov. 1986, 17). The Lamanite approach to the Gadianton problem in Helaman 5:37 is further evidence of this truth.

with Laman and Lemuel and their descendants⁶² — but also characterizes them as “willing with all diligence.” Mormon’s use of the term “willing” here harks back to his use of “willingness” at the close of Helaman 5–6. His use of “willing” further recalls the name Aminadab (“my people are willing”) and the chain of events that led to the Lamanites and the Nephite dissenters becoming a “willing” people over against the Nephites who became increasingly hard-hearted (i.e., unwilling) and wicked.

Just as Ammon left a legacy of faithfulness as an instrument in the Lord’s hands in the conversion of thousands of Lamanites, Aminadab too — albeit in a somewhat smaller capacity — left a legacy of having served as an indispensable instrument in the conversion of many souls and the improvement of many lives. Mormon and his sources were eager to recognize Aminadab in that role.

**Pragmatics and Conclusion: “Who Then Is Willing to
Consecrate His Service This Day unto
the LORD?” (1 Chronicles 29:5)**

This concept of “willingness” is fundamental to true covenant obedience. As documented by Moroni, the Lamanite-Nephite sacrament prayers included language in which the partakers “witness” or “testify” to the father of their “willingness”:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are **willing to take upon them the name of thy Son**, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Moroni 4:3)

In similar language, the Lord revealed to Alma the Elder regarding the members of the nascent church: “Yea, blessed is this people who are **willing to bear my name**; for in my name shall they be called; and they are mine” (Mosiah 26:18). This ideal was fully achieved generations later when the Savior established his church among the Nephites and Lamanites with the result that “were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, **nor any manner of -ites**; but they **were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God**” (4 Nephi 1:17).

62 See especially 1 Nephi 2:10. See also Helaman 15:8, 10.

The “willingness” of the Lehite people, for a time, achieved this ideal as they lived what Latter-day Saints often term the law of consecration as instituted by the Savior: “And they taught, and did **minister one to another**; and **they had all things common** among them, every man dealing justly, one with another” (3 Nephi 26:19); “And they had **all things common** among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3).⁶³ Today, as anciently, covenant obedience and “willingness” are most evident in the degree to which we keep (or do not keep) the law of consecration.

Finally, we recall David’s words as reported by the Chronicler: “Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?” (1 Chronicles 29:5). The answer to that question for the Lord’s people must collectively be “We!” and individually “Here am I.” Willingness to put everything on the altar, like Abraham (Genesis 22), is the great ideal to which the temple and its covenants leads us today, for we still “must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. For all those who **will not** [i.e., are not willing to] endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.” (D&C 101:4-5). If we are to be the Lord’s “people” — the kin of the divine kinsman, our Redeemer — we must be “willing” to serve him “at all hazards.”⁶⁴ Aminadab and the three hundred in the Zeniffite prison became a willing people and helped numerous others become likewise. Latter-day Saints today should be inspired by their example and strive to follow it.

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63 Cf. Acts 2:44; 4:32; Moses 7:18.

64 The Prophet Joseph Smith declared: “After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter, from the 12th to the 27th verses” (*History of the Church*, 3:379-381).

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