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AN ANALYSIS OF MORMON'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED ON THE ZENIFFITE NARRATIVE AND THEIR EFFECT ON LIMHI

Nathan J. Arp

Abstract: *The prophet Mormon's editorial skill brings the narrative of the Zeniffites alive with a complex tumble of viewpoints, commentary, and timelines. Mormon seems to apply similar narrative strategies as those used in the Bible in his approach to abridging the history of his people. A comparative reading of the various accounts in the Zeniffite story provides the close reader with a deep picture of Limhi, the tragic grandson of the founding king, Zeniff, and the son of the iniquitous King Noah. Noah's wicked rule brought his people into bondage. His conflicted son Limhi's efforts to free the people, although well meaning, often imperiled his people. Fortunately, Limhi's proclivity for making poor judgments did not extend to his acceptance of the gospel. In fact, coexistent with the repeated errors Limhi makes in the narrative lies one of his greatest strengths, his willingness to accept correction. This is a vital characteristic necessary for the repentance required by the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what redeemed Limhi from his comedy of errors. It is this quality that can also redeem us all. Limhi's love for his father, in the end, did not doom him to make the same mistakes Noah did. When the messengers from God came, Limhi listened and accepted their message. Mormon's characterization strategies described here are a credit to his art and support the hypothesis that he is an inheritor of the poetics of biblical narrative. His narrative strategies not only characterize the cast in his narrative, but also characterize him. The care Mormon took in crafting his abridgment reveal his observational prowess. He saw God's hand in his people's history, and he went to great lengths to teach his readers how to see it too. His characterization of Limhi is a personal message about how wickedness and tyranny affect individuals.*

Many of us come to the Book of Mormon unprepared to appreciate its unique literary merits. This is understandable, seeing how the Book of Mormon's literary heritage comes from the Hebrew Bible, which also has been under-appreciated by many of its readers. This is not completely our fault as modern readers because the Hebrew Bible's literary conventions are apparently unique amongst the world's literary traditions.¹ It has only been since the mid-20th century that scholars have begun to elucidate these conventions in the Hebrew Bible.² Furthermore, it has only been since the 21st century that these same literary approaches have been applied to the Book of Mormon.³

1. In reference to the Hebrew Bible's art, Meir Sternberg has noted that "as regards cultural value, temporal scope, and persuasive strategy, this art of narrative has no parallel in ancient times." Sternberg has also observed that "no more tenable is the claim of similarity between biblical and Near Eastern literature. ... Hard as one looks at those texts ... one discovers little in common beyond occasional phrases and formations. ... On the contrary, the surface similarities only heighten the wonder and conviction of strategic novelty: the Bible's poetics appears to have sprung full-blown." Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 31, 232. Robert Alter has noted the contrast of the "innovative nature of the Bible's literary enterprise" against its Near Eastern narrative counterparts through the "Hebrew literary rejection of myth." For example, Alter has observed that "the Near Eastern mythological verse narratives would appear to be mainly paratactic, while biblical narrative prose exhibits a good deal of variation from parataxis to hypotaxis." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 29. Joshua Berman has cautioned scholars against taking this uniqueness too seriously: "We have fine studies that survey the poetics of narrative in biblical literature. To date, however, no comparable work has been written for any of the cognate narrative corpuses of the ancient Near East." Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 276.

2. Both Meir Sternberg and Robert Alter reference the publication of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1957) as a starting point to a more accurate literary approach to the Bible. Alter noted, that "Auerbach must be credited with showing more clearly than anyone before him how the cryptic conciseness of biblical narrative is a reflection of profound art, not primitiveness." Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 18. Sternberg praised Auerbach's approach as "what remains the most penetrating account of the Bible's approach to character." Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 348. Alter and Sternberg, themselves pioneers, began publishing their ideas in the 1960's and 1970's, as referenced in *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1-24.

3. In 2010, Oxford Press published Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*, which heralded in a "turning point in the field" of Book of Mormon scholarship. Kimberly Matheson, "Emboldened and Embarrassed: The

Applying biblical literary approaches to the Book of Mormon not only helps us better appreciate and understand the Book of Mormon, but also may indirectly support the Book of Mormon's own claims for an ancient authorship. For example, when Joseph Smith Jr. published the Book of Mormon in 1830, it would have been extremely unlikely for him to have written it with literary conventions not fully understood by scholars until the 1960s or 1970s. It is not the purpose of this present paper to prove that the Book of Mormon's usage of biblical literary conventions evinces its ancient authenticity, especially since this paper's application of these biblical literary approaches is speculative in nature; however, this paper still suggests that the Book of Mormon is what it says it is.

This current study applies biblical literary approaches, often called *narrative strategies*, to Mormon's own approach to organizing the Zeniffite narrative. Specifically, this paper attempts to scrutinize Mormon's use of repetitive structures in the sequence of narratives spanning Mosiah 7–25. This study will focus primarily on the structure of repetition encapsulated in the sermon of Limhi (Mosiah 7), who summarizes the history of his people, and the much larger history of the people as abridged by Mormon (Mosiah 9–25). These two histories not only represent a repetition of the Zeniffite history but also represent two distinct viewpoints: Limhi's and Mormon's.⁴ It is important to note that these viewpoints are different in various ways. In agreement with biblical narrative strategies, this paper presents the narrator's point of view, Mormon's, as the correct viewpoint. Of added import, Limhi's viewpoint, although comparatively wrong on various issues, is nonetheless intended by Mormon for inclusion. I argue that Mormon

Tenor of Contemporary Book of Mormon Studies and the Role of Grant Hardy,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 31 (2022): 75–99. Previous to this tome, a major emphasis of Book of Mormon scholarship was directed at proving links between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world in support of the Book's own claims or proving connections between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's language or culture to argue for a nineteenth-century American authorship. Amy Easton-Flake views Hardy's work as a “jumping-off point” from the previous focus to “a narrative-critical approach to the Book of Mormon.” Amy Easton-Flake, “Beyond Understanding: Narrative Theory as Expansion in Book of Mormon Exegesis,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 25, no. 1, (2016): 116.

4. “The Bible's structure of repetition, however, not only allows for but also dramatizes the workings of human perception: it exploits the differences between percepts as well as perceivers to fashion one of the most complex-sensitive arts of perspective in literary history.” Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 409.

intended for the reader to compare these two viewpoints knowing that it would flesh out the characters of Zeniff, Noah, and especially Limhi.⁵ I have included Table 1 to aid the visualization of the two main viewpoints as well as provide the organizing framework for the overall paper.

Table 1. Comparison of Limhi’s and Mormon’s Viewpoints

Topic	Limhi’s View	Mormon’s View
Who is to blame for the Zeniffite bondage?	The people and Zeniff, who brought the people to the land of Nephi	Noah
Reason’s for Abinadi’s death	Abinadi blasphemed God by his teachings about Christ	Noah’s pride and selfishness
Reading records	Even with access to his people’s records, he is still unable to see his father’s faults	Mormon includes Ammon’s reading of the records which contrasts with Limhi’s biased point of view
Deliverance	Limhi believes that his people can deliver themselves	Mormon narrates Alma ₁ ’s experience to show that only God delivers

In its attempt to analyze the Zeniffite narrative, this paper also highlights Mormon’s ingenious narrative strategies, which not only characterize Limhi in uniquely personal ways, but also characterizes Mormon through how he handles this narrative. We see a good but deeply traumatized Limhi err again and again because of his father, but, in the end, he still finds salvation through the gospel. The way Mormon’s narrative treats Limhi is often unflattering, but creates a character that is extremely relatable to a reader continually trying to do what is right, but stumbling nonetheless. Limhi’s story for these readers can bring hope. Identifying Mormon’s narrative strategies in the narrative account helps the reader understand what Ammaron noted in the 10-year-old future writer, “a sober [person] ... quick to observe” (Mormon 1:2). Mormon’s narrative techniques, especially his treatment of Limhi, show a sensitive soul’s response to the tragedy that was Noah’s reign and its continuing effect on the Nephites. It is a message to us about tyranny

5. Alter has observed that “when repetitions with significant variations occur in biblical narrative, the changes introduced can point to an intensification, climactic development, acceleration, of the actions and attitudes initially represented, or, on the other hand, to some unexpected, perhaps unsettling, new revelation of character or plot.” Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 123. I argue in this paper that this is precisely what occurs from Mormon’s structures of repetitions, that revelations of character result.

and redemption. Hopefully, we can be just as sober and quick to observe as Mormon.

Limhi: Zeniff Is to Blame, a Comparison of Zeniff and Limhi

Mosiah 7 offers a summarized history of the Zeniffites through a proclamation given by Limhi, the Nephite colony's third king. It is important to know that Mormon specifically chose to record this portion of this talk out of the "many things" Limhi spoke to the people (Mosiah 8:1). Mormon doesn't always interrupt the flow of his narrative to speak directly to the reader, but he does so here employing the first person pronoun "I."⁶ It may be that Mormon includes this speech to call our attention to Limhi and his sermon, likely because it will differ from Mormon's presentation of this same history comprising Mosiah 9–21. In chapter 21, Mormon's flashback returns to the time narrated in Mosiah 7. Limhi's sermon in chapter 7 helps characterize Limhi and the other characters in ways that simple description could not.

Additionally, including Limhi's and Zeniff's points of view, as well as an abridged account that includes multiple viewpoints, layers Mormon's narrative with meaning. In this combination of accounts, Mormon leaves the reader with leeway to form opinions and entertain multiple hypotheses. In a way, he puts us in his position, the position of a later reader who has multiple viewpoints and records to weigh and wrestle in order to come up with God's message for us today.

According to some scholars, this is precisely how Hebrew narrative was written in the Bible. Instead of providing a single thoroughly argued answer like the Greco-Roman tradition, the Hebrew authors merely suggest and indicate making use of ambiguities and multiple viewpoints to guide the reader to the possibility of multiple hypotheses.⁷ These

6. Grant Hardy noted that "Other comments connect the narrator to his readers more directly with phrases such as 'I will show unto you...' or 'I would that ye should see...'. There are more than a hundred such interruptions, distributed evenly throughout Mormon's history." Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97.

7. "That is what makes the fundamental difference between the Greek world and the Jewish world, between Graeco-Roman rhetoric and biblical and Semitic rhetoric. This difference can be summed up in one sentence: 'the Greek demonstrates, the Jew indicates'. The Greek intends to convince his hearers, to lead them along a straight line, by means of logical reasoning, following a demonstration based on a whole series of proofs, to a conclusion which ought to compel them to agree. The Jew, on the contrary, is content to show the way which the one wishing to understand may take." Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, trans. Leo

strategies were especially beneficial for nuancing and fleshing out the Bible's characters. It is from this standpoint in narrative strategy that this paper analyzes this segment of narratives and how its unique composition characterizes its cast of people.

After Limhi addresses his people in Mosiah 7, Mormon takes the reader back two generations before Limhi to recount the beginning of the Zeniffite colony through the first-person account by Zeniff himself. In doing this, some of Limhi's statements in his sermon are seemingly supported. For example, Limhi's opinion of his grandfather Zeniff:

And ye all are witnesses this day, that Zeniff, who was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers, therefore being deceived by the cunning and craftiness of king Laman, who having entered into a treaty with king Zeniff, and having yielded up into his hands the possessions of a part of the land, or even the city of Lehi-Nephi, and the city of Shilom; and the land round about — And all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people into subjection or into bondage. (Mosiah 7:21–22)

Zeniff's record almost certainly informed Limhi's opinion. In his record, Zeniff, with nearly the exact same wording Limhi used, confessed to "being overly zealous to inherit the land of [their] fathers" (Mosiah 9:3). Limhi's statement about the cunning and craftiness of Laman is likely lifted directly from Zeniff's account also, where Zeniff reported: "Now it was the cunning and the craftiness of king Laman, to bring my people into bondage, that he yielded up the land that we might possess it." (Mosiah 9:10). However, the difference is that Zeniff's account discusses the Lamanite king's failed intent to put the Zeniffites in bondage (Mosiah 9–11), wherein Limhi's perspective is that the present bondage his people were experiencing was a result of Zeniff's over-zealousness, naivety, and the people's "iniquity" (Mosiah 7:24).

Ironically, Mormon's account shows that Limhi suffers from the same faults Limhi accused his grandfather of over-zealousness and naivety. Mormon presents Limhi continuously struggling to make the right decisions despite his well-meaning intentions. From his first appearance on the stage⁸ in the Zeniffite narrative (Mosiah 7), Limhi is overzealously

Arnold, with biblical texts trans. Rubianto Solichin and Llane B. Briese (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2012), 20.

8. Limhi's first appearance in the Book of Mormon does not represent his first acts chronologically. Mormon has displaced time in Mosiah 7 and then starting in

leaping to extreme conclusions. For example, the very expedition sent by King Mosiah to find the Zeniffites, and which would later help deliver them, ironically is mistaken to be the enemy by Limhi, who intends to execute them. Fortunately, Limhi gives them a moment to speak and he learns that he almost killed a vital ally. After this discovery, Limhi then leaps from his role as interrogator to slave as he offers the lives of all his people into Ammon's hands. Not only does Limhi immediately see them as the saviors of his people, but he also is eager to change slave masters. After so many struggles and so much death in the pursuit to free themselves from bondage (see Mosiah 21), Limhi, on first meeting Ammon and learning that other Nephites exist (he has never personally met the Nephite king nor has seen the way Nephite governance works) is suddenly excited to enslave himself and his people to the Nephites.

After the former priests of Noah, who had been living in the wilderness, abduct some Lamanite women, another crisis emerges. The Lamanites assume the Zeniffites took their women and make preparations for war. In a surprising turn of events, Limhi, who has seen their preparations, likewise prepares and surprisingly routs the much larger army. The Lamanite king is found on the battlefield and is brought before Limhi for questioning. The Lamanite king reveals the reason for their attack to Limhi — the abduction of the Lamanite women. Mormon sets this scene up so that the reader has privileged information over the cast, meaning the reader knows what Limhi and his people do not know yet.⁹ He has already narrated the abduction for the reader, so we can observe Limhi assess the situation incorrectly and almost endangers his own people. Sadly, this is not a singular example of Limhi endangering his own people. Fortunately, Gideon, who represents our “better”¹⁰

Mosiah 9 gives a chronological account of the Zeniffites' history.

9. Sternberg refers to this situation as a reader-elevated position, “Within the reader-elevating configuration, the discrepancies in awareness are so manipulated in our favor, at the expense of the characters, that we observe them and their doings from a vantage point practically omniscient. The narrator's disclosures put us in a position to fathom their secret thoughts and designs, to trace or even foreknow their acts, to jeer or grieve at their misguided attempts at concealment, plotting, interpretation.” Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 164.

10. In the overall Zeniffite account, Mormon contrasts a good, better, best example of following the Lord's servants by showcasing the lives of Limhi (good), Gideon (better), and Alma₁ (best), which he does through parallel narratives about deliverance. Although each of these individuals are worthy of study, this paper will focus on how Mormon's organization of the Zeniffite narrative characterizes Limhi. This distinction is an allusion to Elder Dallin H. Oaks' talk “Good,

representative, is there to correct Limhi and guide him to make a better choice on this and other occasions.

Upon hearing the false report from the Lamanite king, Limhi immediately trusts him and declares “I will search among my people; and whosoever has done this thing shall perish” (Mosiah 20:16). The ensuing search Limhi commissions is not intended to find out if someone has abducted the Lamanite women, but who among his people has done it. Without any corroborating evidence, Limhi trusts the same enemy who currently has them in bonds and who has just attacked them for a suspected crime of which he has no evidence. This is a complete reversal from Limhi’s assessment of Ammon’s group, when he mistook friends for foes. He is now mistaking the enemy for a friend.

Fortunately, Gideon steps in to remind the king of the presence of his father’s wicked priests and to recommend a less time-consuming course of action. The Lamanites were already preparing a follow-on attack, so they needed to convince the king that the perpetrators were the priests, and the Lamanite king needed to pacify his people. Gideon’s plan works and the assured destruction of the Zeniffites by the Lamanites’s “numerous hosts” (Mosiah 20:20) is averted.

It is easy to see the hypocrisy in this situation, where Limhi will later¹¹ condemn his grandfather for naively trusting a Lamanite king who offered them Lamanite lands to live in (see Mosiah 7:21–22) and his own gullibility shown in this episode. Limhi neither questioned the Lamanite king’s accusation nor has any words in response to Gideon’s poised but forceful redirection. Limhi appears to be flip-flopping between extreme opposite courses of action. Although Limhi can see Zeniff’s faults clearly, he may not realize that he is committing similar mistakes.

Interestingly, Zeniff’s role in the bondage is much more nuanced than Limhi’s representation. For example, Mormon uses Zeniff as a foil against the iniquity of his son, Noah. In fact, the most important element of Limhi’s sermon is not what he says, but what he does not say or who he does not mention. Noah is conspicuously absent from Limhi’s brief rehearsal of the people’s suffering. This is strange, because according to Mormon’s abridgment of this account, it is without question Noah

Better, Best,” *Ensign* (October 2007), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2007/10/good-better-best>.

11. The events of the Lamanite abduction and this battle happened chronologically before Limhi made his speech, which included his criticisms of his grandfather Zeniff. The reader, however, encounters the speech first in Mosiah 7 before reading the abduction and ensuing battle in Mosiah 20.

who leads the people to iniquity and therefore almost single-handedly causes their unhappy state of bondage to the Lamanites. This difference is pivotal to the characterization of both Zeniff and Limhi.

To Limhi, Zeniff is complicit in the cause for the people's bondage, but this may not be completely accurate. In agreement with Limhi, some scholars reference some of the content within Abinadi's speeches to suggest that Zeniff is in fact disobeying God by moving his people back to the land of inheritance.¹² And this may be true.¹³ However, Mormon's design for this narrative suggest that this possible error was not as grievous as the iniquity brought on by Noah's wicked reign.¹⁴ Mormon holds up Zeniff as an example of a good king, against which the reader is meant to contrast the blunders and iniquities of Noah. Mormon's organization of the Zeniffite narrative seems to suggest that while Zeniff led the people within reach of the enemy, the people were protected by the Lord under Zeniff's rule. Instead, it was Noah that led his people into the Lamanites's hands.

12. Joseph M. Spencer presents Abinadi's interpretation of Isaiah as an accusation against the Zeniffites for believing that Isaiah's prophecies had been fulfilled in their lives in *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2016), 144–45. Daniel Belnap makes a similar suggestion that blames Zeniff for the problem: "Thus, both in terms of their dissent with Benjamin and their attempt to return, Zeniff's group went against the commands of God and may accurately be viewed as being in rebellion against him, exactly the indictment that Abinadi proclaims." Daniel L. Belnap, "The Abinadi Narrative, Redemption, and the Struggle of Nephite Identity," in *Abinadi: He Came among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 48. Both of these studies suggest an error or iniquity in Zeniff for leading his people back to the land of Nephi; however, but Mormon's handling of this account does not emphasize Zeniff's wickedness but Noah's. After all, God's prophet came to Noah and not Zeniff, as far as we know, to deliver a message of repentance.

13. I especially find Val Larsen's view of Abinadi censuring a Deuteronomist community convincing. See Val Larsen, "Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 217–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/>.

14. Unfortunately, we do not have Mormon's abridgment of this part of Nephite history, due to the loss of the original manuscript pages. What we have now in the current Book of Mormon is Amalikhiah's and Zeniff's records that discuss the return of a group of Nephites back to the land of Nephi. See Omni 1:27–30 and Mosiah 9–10.

Mormon: Noah Is to Blame

This section provides a fairly comprehensive analysis of the methods Mormon used to convince the reader that Noah is the cause of the people's suffering in bondage. This analysis provides evidence to support this theory, but, perhaps more importantly, it endeavors to highlight what problems could arise by empathizing with Noah. So when Limhi is unable to criticize his father in his summation of the people's situation in Mosiah 7, it factors into the return-reader's calculus that points to Limhi's dangerous reign. By "dangerous" I am referring to the multiple occasions where Limhi imperils his people. Additionally, a critical look at the methods Mormon employs to highlight Noah's wickedness also sheds light on Mormon's personality. In other words, Mormon's characterization of Noah also characterizes him.

With the change in kingship from Zeniff to Noah, the narrative, in the style of the Bible, shows how Noah veers away from the path of his father to become the root cause of the people's iniquities.¹⁵ As Matthew Bowen points out,

the statement that Noah "did not walk in the ways of his father" levies an immediate and distinctly negative evaluation of him as a king and of his kingship. In fact, the rest of Mormon's King Noah narrative and every mention of him thereafter can be seen, more or less, as a fleshing out of this statement.¹⁶

The implication for Zeniff is that he was a righteous example against whom Mormon compares Noah. According to Mormon, Zeniff "kept the commandments of the Lord" (Mosiah 11:2). Generally, the narrative clearly shows Noah to be the root cause of the people's wickedness.

- "[Noah] had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable

15. Ludlow points out an important difference in the text between the people, who were merely blinded to Abinadi's message from their leaders and King Noah, who hardened his heart and directly rejected Abinadi as an indicator that King Noah was more culpable than the people. Jared W. Ludlow, "A Messenger of Good and Evil Tidings: A Narrative Study of Abinadi," in *Abinadi: He Came among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 8.

16. Matthew L. Bowen, "Putting Down the Priests: A Note on Royal Evaluations, (wə)hišbīt, and Priestly Purges in 2 Kings 23:5 and Mosiah 11:5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 109, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/putting-down-the-priests-a-note-on-royal-evaluations-wehisbit-and-priestly-purges-in-2-kings-235-and-mosiah-115/>.

in the sight of the Lord; yea, and [the people] did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.” (Mosiah 11:2)

- Noah creates a tax to support himself and his newly consecrated priests, “and thus they were supported in their laziness and in their idolatry and in their whoredoms by the taxes which king Noah had put upon his people. Thus did the people labor exceedingly to support iniquity ... and [the people] also became idolatrous because [the people] were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests” (Mosiah 11: 6–7).
- “[Noah] became a winebibber, and also his people” (Mosiah 11:15).

The narrative presents the people mirroring the actions of their king, who is completely going against the actions of the previous king, another important point to the narrator.

- “And [Noah] did not walk in the ways of his father; for behold, [Noah] did not keep the commandments of God” (Mosiah 11:1–2);
- “Thus [Noah] had changed the affairs of the kingdom” (Mosiah 11:4) by laying down taxes;
- “[Noah] put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father and consecrated new ones in their stead such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts” (Mosiah 11:5); and
- Against some Lamanite incursions, “Noah sent his armies” instead of leading them personally like his father, who did so, “in the strength of the Lord” (compare Mosiah 11:16–19 with Mosiah 9:14–19 and 10:6–20).

Noah chose to walk in the same iniquitous paths as his biblical predecessors Solomon and Rehoboam, who burdened the people with heavy taxes. Biblical scholar Amos Frisch, for example, noted specific language in 1 Kings that has clear parallels with the term “harsh labor” used to describe Israelite toil under Solomon’s taxation and building projects to the bondage they experienced in Egypt.¹⁷ Frisch comments that “Solomon ... is in his twilight years compared to Pharaoh.”¹⁸ Noah like Solomon made his people “labor exceedingly” through his taxation

17. Amos Frisch, “The Portrait of Solomon in the Book of Kings,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Book of Kings*, ed. Keith Bodner and Benjamin J. M. Johnson (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 57.

18. *Ibid.*

and building projects (Mosiah 11:6) and is himself compared to Pharaoh. When Noah hears of Abinadi's words to the people, he asks, "who is the Lord?" (Mosiah 11:27) just like Pharaoh does when confronted by Moses in Exodus 5:2. In a similar way to Noah, who got rid of the old councilors to Zeniff in favor of younger more wicked ones,¹⁹ Rehoboam also refused to listen to the Elders and the people, who were in favor of lessening the burdens on the people.

In response to the iniquities of Solomon and Rehoboam, God split the people of Israel into two kingdoms: Israel in the North and Judah in the South. For Noah, these actions are all part of a build up to the Zeniffites's enslavement to the Lamanites, a tragedy which, in opposition to Limhi's speech, was caused almost entirely by Noah and had almost nothing to do with Zeniff. Because of Noah, the people were wicked; because of Noah, there were wicked priests.²⁰

Noah and his priest's wicked examples lead the people beyond the wickedness listed above and towards violence. Up to the battle described briefly in Mosiah 11:18–19, the people are shown copying the king, yet the narration describing the bloodthirsty nature of the people begins to deviate from the previous mimicking model. After a small victory, Mormon narrates that the people "did boast and did delight in blood and the shedding of the blood of their brethren — this because of the wickedness of their king and priests" (Mosiah 11:19).

It is not as clear how the ambiguous wickedness of the king and priests directly led to the people's thirst for blood. So far, Noah has shown no predilection for violent behavior. He did not even lead his army to battle (see Mosiah 11:16–19). The people are not copying Noah here per se, but the narrator continues guiding the reader to see that the people's behavior is still caused by Noah. This is likely because the people are about to respond violently to Abinadi and the narrator is leading the reader to blame Noah for their behavior.

Abinadi calls the people to repent and to turn back to God, or else they will be brought under bondage. Without authorization from the king or any outside encouragement, the people try to kill Abinadi (see

19. Matthew Bowen notes a contrast between Noah putting down his father's counselors and the righteous King Josiah putting down the idolatrous priests of his fathers. Bowen, "Putting Down the Priests," 105–14.

20. Both Alma₁ and Mosiah₂ are the likely sources for the narrative's focus against Noah (see Mosiah 23:6–13, 29:16–24). Mosiah demonstrated a special focus on Noah by not mentioning the priests in his criticism of how Noah's wickedness influenced his people.

Mosiah 11:26). They are unsuccessful, but the desire and willingness to act were there. Afterwards, King Noah hears of Abinadi's preaching, is wroth, and, like the people, wants Abinadi dead. He commands the people to bring Abinadi to him so that he can slay the prophet. The narrator interjects again to convince the reader that Noah is leading the people as the narrative marches on to what appears now to be Abinadi's assured death. This insertion by Mormon is important, because what is about to happen looks contrary to what Mormon has so carefully constructed for the reader, that is, everything is Noah's fault. As we will see later, this contradiction provides us greater access to Mormon's character as well.

Now the eyes of the people were blinded; therefore they hardened their hearts against the words of Abinadi, and they sought from that time forward to take him. And king Noah hardened his heart against the word of the Lord, and he did not repent of his evil doings. (Mosiah 11:29)²¹

The people are now primed and ready to take Abinadi, so when the Lord calls on Abinadi next to preach, the people apprehend him and bring him to the king. This is the turning point in the narrative where the people's and the priests' wickedness start to overtake Noah's. This growing wickedness is very much like a flame, a fitting image in this narrative full of deaths by fire. Noah's wickedness was the spark that stoked the people's and the priests' violent behavior into a blaze that burns out of Noah's control. At some key moments, both the people's and the priests' lust for blood outstrips the king's. Eventually, the people and priests pressure the king to execute Abinadi by fire, and then with burning resentment Noah's own people feed him to the flames as well.

When the people bring Abinadi to the king, the narrative shows them manipulating Noah through a structure of repetition, where Abinadi's message of doom gets repeated by the people in their report to the king. According to the narrative, Abinadi includes one prophecy of doom aimed specifically at Noah, but the people report three (bulleted below). Mormon's artful repetition of the people's report of Abinadi's preaching reveals the people's intention. Mormon is allowing the reader to indirectly perceive the state of the Zeniffite people by disclosing their strategies to manipulate the king. They are reporting Abinadi's preaching,

21. It is interesting to point out that also like Pharaoh, Noah is hardening his heart.

but maximizing the threats against Noah in order to enrage him, while simultaneously minimizing Abinadi's words against the people.

Abinadi's narrated prophecy against Noah:

And it shall come to pass that the life of king Noah shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace, for he shall know that I am the Lord. (Mosiah 12:3)

The people's report of three prophecies against Noah:

- "And he also prophesieth evil concerning thy life and saith that thy life shall be as a garment in a furnace of fire." (Mosiah 12:10)
- "And again, he saith that thou shall be as a stalk, even as a dry stalk of the field, which is ran over by the beasts and trodden under foot." (Mosiah 12:11)
- "And again, he saith thou shalt be as the blossoms of a thistle, which when it is fully ripe, if the wind bloweth, it is driven forth upon the face of the land. And he pretendeth the Lord hath spoken it. And he saith all this shall come upon thee except thou repent — and this because of thine iniquities." (Mosiah 12:12)

In Abinadi's reported words in Mosiah 12:1–8, most of the threats made by Abinadi are actually against the people. The narrative is showing the people manipulating the king trying to get him angry so that he will execute him. Mormon's once ironclad case against Noah seems to progressively become more ambiguous. Ultimately, the people's subtle artifice is completed by their merely suggestive tone in "Behold, here is the man. We deliver him into thy hands. Thou mayest do with him as seemeth thee good" (Mosiah 12:16). The implication is clear; the people are handing Abinadi over to the king for execution. Ultimately, they are leveling two charges against Abinadi. According to John W. Welch,²² the two charges are lying concerning the king and false prophesying (see Mosiah 12:14).

This structure of repetition reveals the cunning artifice of a people who are bloodthirsty enough to want a prophet dead and a king to do it for them. Mormon's account stresses Noah's accountability for the iniquity of the people. As much as Limhi may have wanted to see the people as the real reason behind Abinadi's death, in the end, Noah ordered his death.

22. John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2008), 158.

Welch observed, “Noah alone entered the judgment against Abinadi and turned him over for execution.”²³ Noah didn’t need the people to help him hate Abinadi any more than the people required Noah’s help for the same purpose. Despite all the chances he had to change his mind, Noah did not. Abinadi miraculously manifested God’s power in front of Noah, Abinadi theologically pounded the priests in front of him, in response to Abinadi’s preaching Alma₁ pled for Noah to spare Abinadi, and even after Noah himself began to question the decision to execute Abinadi, he ultimately caved in to the priests and ordered Abinadi’s death.

However, this ambiguity in the buildup to Abinadi’s death manifests an important characteristic of Mormon highlighted by Grant Hardy. “Mormon ... sees himself as a historian, with a responsibility to tell the story of his civilization comprehensively and accurately.”²⁴ Hardy continues, “[Mormon] believes that history, fairly and objectively written, will provide an adequate demonstration of God’s providence and design.”²⁵ Although Mormon seems to go to great lengths to present Noah as the root cause of the people’s wickedness and for the death of Abinadi, his ideological purposes are not enough for him to change the account to more narrowly focus the reader on Noah. Instead, he tells a more complete story with ambiguity relying on strong commentary against Noah to help the reader to clearly grasp his ideological message. Even so, Mormon’s stringent adherence to history can more fully convince the reader to trust him as the editor. We can see the care he takes to relay his message with artistry and accuracy. Relatedly, Mormon’s sincerity is one of the characteristics that personally touched me and opened me up to the possibility that Mormon’s message about Christ was sincere and could be accurate, too.

23. Ibid, 201.

24. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 91.

25. Ibid. Mormon’s treatment of the past, even though akin to a modern sensibility, is still a premodern approach. Mormon is writing about the past to teach moral lessons, not necessarily to represent an objective portrayal of past events. Joshua Berman reminds modern readers of ancient texts that “In modern times we read works of history. In premodern times, however, it would be more correct to say that when people read accounts of the past, they were reading ‘exhortation.’” Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah*, 27–28).

Limhi and Mormon: Perspectives on Abinadi's Murder; Limhi and Noah

Limhi's account stresses the unique doctrine about Christ as the reason he was executed, but Mormon's account stresses that the people and the king did not actually care about Abinadi's specific doctrine about Christ. In fact, Abinadi's first teachings, as presented by Mormon, do not even include the name of Christ, much less any doctrine about him (Mosiah 11:20–25). Even so, the people and the king want to kill Abinadi, because they felt he had “judged” them (Mosiah 11:27). In Abinadi's second attempt at prophesying to the people and calling on them to repent, Mormon does not record any teachings about Christ and like the first attempt, he does not even mention Christ's name (Mosiah 12:1–8). Again, this does not matter to the people, they bind him and bring him to the king anyway. It is only after he is brought to the king that Abinadi teaches about Christ and the priests and king find something “wherewith to accuse him” (Mosiah 12:19). Limhi's perspective that Abinadi was killed for teaching specific doctrine about Christ is different from Mormon's, who shows that the people and the king wanted to kill Abinadi solely because they did not like being judged; they did not want to repent.

The difference of perspective stems from Noah. Limhi's perspective is colored by the official record Noah left, meaning the false pretenses Noah and his priests used to justify murdering Abinadi. Although Limhi has access to other information, he chooses to continue to circulate his father's viewpoint. This is Limhi's speech:

And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth — And now, because he said this, they did put him to death. (Mosiah 7:27–28)

And this is the final official accusation,²⁶ although a pretense, submitted by Noah and his priests:

26. Welch notes that Noah and his priests attempted to level multiple accusations against Abinadi in *Legal Cases*, 139–209.

Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death. For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death. (Mosiah 17:7–8)

Mormon guides the reader to see that this accusation is merely a pretense, because right after Noah makes this accusation, he offers what John Welch refers to as “a curious plea bargain.”²⁷ Noah puts it this way: “thou shalt be put to death unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people” (Mosiah 17:8). Noah is not asking him to retract the statements about God that Noah’s “official” accusation highlights, but rather desires that Abinadi retract his condemnation of Noah and the people’s wickedness. This plea bargain shows that Abinadi was killed because he spoke out against the king and the people’s wickedness and not because Abinadi preached about Christ, as suggested by Limhi. Welch further defines Noah’s plea bargain thus:

Noah’s conduct here is despicable and wholly self-interested. His willingness to forget the charge that Abinadi had blasphemously offended God if Abinadi would simply withdraw his words is blatantly driven by selfish, unrepentant concerns.²⁸

Reviewing Noah’s iniquities in detail is important, because it shows how much Limhi had to overlook when he did not mention his father as the reason for his people’s bondage in his public speech in Mosiah 7. Additionally, when Limhi later recounts Abinadi’s death to his people in Mosiah 7, he states his father’s trumped-up charges as the reason for Abinadi’s execution. Limhi’s agreement with these charges manifests a weakness in Limhi.

Limhi knew his father was wicked, but preferred, it seems, to continue in a certain state of denial. Mormon states that Limhi was “not ignorant of the iniquities of his father,” but he was still unwilling to blame him for the bondage forced upon his people and he was unwilling to acknowledge his father’s pride and selfishness as the real force behind Abinadi’s killing. Limhi most likely had access to a lot of the records Mormon used to make up his account. He could have accepted and expressed the faults of his father, but he chose not to. It is due to this very

27. Ibid, 195.

28. Ibid, 196.

bias for his father that Limhi makes a grave mistake as a new vassal king to the Lamanites.

After the Lamanites capture the Zeniffites, they give the Zeniffites two conditions: one, give half of all their possessions to the Lamanites annually, and two, deliver up Noah to the Lamanites (see Mosiah 19:15). Failure to meet these conditions would result in their death. Even after all Noah had done, Limhi struggled with surrendering his father. According to Mormon, “And now Limhi was desirous that his father should not be destroyed” (Mosiah 19:17). It seems Limhi either hesitated to make this decision or was planning to disobey this condition, because Gideon is obliged to send men out “secretly” to look for Noah (see Mosiah 19:18). This possibility that Limhi may have been willing to imperil his people, because of a lingering loyalty to the very person who caused this horrific scenario in the first place, is a telling, but life-threatening mistake. It seems a selfish, or at least a self-centered, act to imperil the very same people who had just made him king to protect his villainous and cowardly father.

Accordingly, Gideon’s “secret” envoy is most likely only hidden from Limhi, which is supported by the fact that the Lamanites already knew that Noah had fled. Therefore, Gideon would have no need to hide his search efforts from the Lamanites. This preposition that this secret envoy was only hidden from Limhi is also supported by the chain of reporting that ensues. Noah’s death is reported to Gideon’s men and then to Gideon, but never reported in the narrative to Limhi. The fact that Gideon felt that he had to hide his search party from Limhi reveals just how serious Limhi was about protecting his father at the possible expense of his people. The direct result of the report of Noah’s death sets up the oath between the Lamanite king and Limhi (see Mosiah 19:24–27). This is the first of three times that Gideon acts to save the people despite Limhi’s unwitting efforts to compromise their safety.

It is important to note that a report about his father’s last days as king were likely provided to Limhi. During the siege from the Lamanites, Noah not only used his concern for his people as a pretense to stay Gideon’s sword (Mosiah 19:6–8), but exploits the women and children of his own people to escape (Mosiah 19:9–11). Limhi comes to power as a result of the Lamanite take-over and his father’s cowardly flight. Limhi’s reaction to the news of his father’s revoltingly selfish acts in Noah’s final days as king; unfortunately, are not included in the record. Even after all this, Limhi neither condemns nor even mentions his father in Limhi’s accounting of his people’s history in Mosiah 7. This speech although

encountered first by the reader, actually occurred many years after these events, but even so, Limhi seems unable to speak evil of his father.

An additional method Mormon employs to innovatively and indirectly convince the reader of Noah's iniquity, and therefore indirectly criticize Limhi's lingering issues, is to have the modern reader read Mormon's abridged account along with characters in the narrative. To further guide the reader's own perception of this account, Mormon includes the reactions from Ammon's group to the history of the Zeniffites in Mosiah 21:28–31. When we read the account of the events from most of the same records available to Limhi, but with a different perspective than Limhi's, we can get a deeper understanding of how affected Limhi was by his wicked father. This method of supplying the same information to the reader and a group of characters in the narrative is called an evenhanded approach,²⁹ which is detailed in the next section.

Mormon and Limhi: Reading Records

Noted by James Faulconer, the book of Mosiah, which houses the Zeniffite story, is “underscored by its unconventional narrative, which forces us to read it in chunks that are out of chronological order.”³⁰ Evinced by editorial comments, this anachronistic narrative structure seems intentional and is an important tool for the reader to reconstruct the meaning and intent of these narratives. This unconventional structure also forces the reader into an evenhanded position, where we experience the drama of reading records with the characters; we find and read records together. Mormon can facilitate our reading experience through variously introducing and interpreting various records that the reader encounters with the characters.³¹ Of particular interest to this paper

29. Sternberg describes narrative positions, like the evenhanded position referenced here, in *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 163–72.

30. James E. Faulconer, *Mosiah: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2020), 13.

31. The book of Mosiah's narrative includes the reader in multiple occurrences when the people receive, read, and react to records. In addition to the reader reading records with Ammon and his group, the reader also learns about the escape of Alma's sub-group of Zeniffites in the records Limhi has Ammon and us read together. Then, we read what happens to Alma's followers with the combined group of Nephites, Mulekites, and the main body of Zeniffites as King Mosiah reads these records to them. Mormon again guides the reader's experience with this text by narrating this group's reaction to the experience of the Zeniffites and Alma's travail and miraculous deliverance from bondage (Mosiah 25:4–14). Mormon

is the simultaneous reading experienced by the reader and Ammon's group.

This happens with the Zeniffite record comprising Mosiah chapters 9–21:21, where we read it at the same time as Ammon and his group (Mosiah 7–21). Ammon and the reader learn about the Zeniffite history at the same time through Limhi's speech (Mosiah 7:21–28). After Limhi's synopsis of his people's history, he presents Ammon with the records of his people from the time they left the Nephites up until Limhi's reign for him to read (Mosiah 7: 4–5). Mormon delays informing the reader about Ammon's response to the records until after he allows us to read Mormon's edited account of Zeniffite history as well (Mosiah 9–21:21). It is only after the reader is caught up that Mormon provides Ammon and his company's response to Zeniffite history (Mosiah 21:28–31). This anachronistic strategy allows Mormon to guide the reader's own reaction to Zeniffite history by providing Ammon's reaction to the same history Ammon and the reader just read. These reactions lead the reader to be saddened by the loss of life depicted in Zeniffite history, to blame Noah and his priests for the iniquity of the people, and to mourn the death of Abinadi and the departure of Alma₁.

Ammon and his brethren were filled with sorrow because so many of their brethren had been slain; And also that king Noah and his priests had caused the people to commit so many sins and iniquities against God; and they also did mourn for the death of Abinadi; and also for the departure of Alma and the people that went with him, who had formed a church of God through the strength and power of God, and faith on the words which had been spoken by Abinadi. (Mosiah 21:29–30)

leads the reader to discover the mysterious records found by Limhi's search party with Ammon in Mosiah 8. The people's anxiety to know what happened to these people becomes our own as the reader has to wait until Mosiah 28 to get a summary of a fuller story told to Mosiah's people. Once again, we are told the response of the Nephites as they hear about this fallen people (Mosiah 28:17–18). Ultimately, these three records are unified as they are read by Mosiah to his people, who become unified as well through their reading. The children of Amulon take upon themselves the name of Nephi, the people of Zarahemla are numbered among the Nephites, and they are all unified by a single church that Alma₁ organizes (Mosiah 25). They become further unified by their own individual voices when they elect a system of judges over a kingdom (Mosiah 28–29). From an ideological aspect, this structure allows Mormon the luxury of guiding the reader to his theological points indirectly, yet powerfully.

What this party's response also implies may be that Limhi, who had the same access to the records he provided Ammon's group, could also have had the same reaction as they did, but Limhi didn't. For all his interest and love of records (Mosiah 8:5–21), Limhi does not seem to know how to read them objectively. This creative strategy lets Mormon show us rather than tell us³² about the personal impact a wicked king can have, not only on his people, but especially on his son. Despite all the suffering Limhi endured because of his father's sins and mismanagement of his kingdom, Limhi was still unwilling to accept or even publicly acknowledge them. Mormon unequivocally shows and tells the reader that Noah was the true problem for the Zeniffites, but merely shows us through nuance how Limhi responded to Noah's iniquitous legacy. Fortunately, Limhi and the Zeniffites story does not end with the death of Abinadi.

Mormon and Limhi: God Delivers His People, Alma₁ Compared to Limhi

Mormon is quick to show the reader that Abinadi did not die in vain. Right after he narrates Abinadi's tragic ending, Mormon narrates the birth of the church through Abinadi's only apparent convert, Alma₁. Alma₁, along with Abinadi, is the undisputed hero of the Zeniffite account; he represents the "best"³³ in this account. Mormon expresses his commendation of Alma₁ through some of Mormon's most direct engagement with his overall work, the Book of Mormon, and certainly his most blatant engagement in the text of the Zeniffite narrative. Meir Sternberg has noted that the biblical "narrator's participation ensures the appearance of one member whose reliability is beyond doubt — an authorized reference-point to which we may safely appeal in order to sort out and motivate the versions originating in the other participants."³⁴ As Mormon narrates the watershed event of Alma₁ baptizing his secret converts, he authorizes Alma₁ and his point of view by participating in the text in a unique and powerfully personal way. Mormon is not just the name of the place where the baptism occurs, Mormon himself becomes the setting, the authorized witness condoning the event and its agent,

32. This phrasing of showing and telling comes from Heather Hardy's thought-provoking article, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ: Mormon's Poetics," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007), 16–27, 93–95.

33. Again, consider Oaks, "Good, Better, Best."

34. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 413.

Alma₁, through repetition. Mormon repeats his own name 12 times³⁵ in the chapter and 6 times in one verse:

And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon, yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon. How beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer! Yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever. (Mosiah 18:30)³⁶

This seems to be more than a simple description of the setting, this is Mormon deliberately signaling the reader to Mormon's own presence in the narrative. His approval of this scene is intentionally obvious, because he is framing Alma₁ as the authorized reference point of this narrative. "His version," Alma₁'s version, will figure "as the tale's objective truth."³⁷ This becomes important, because Mormon will use Alma₁ as the licensed point of view from which the reader can judge Mormon's next structure of repetition.

Mormon pens a parallel sequence of two stories about two separate peoples that seem intended to read as a single type of story told twice. Alma₁ and his people are the authorized party, and Limhi and his people are the foil. Mormon organizes the two stories to not only show that Alma₁'s party is favored, but also that Limhi's party is not the authorized group. Mormon does not villainize Limhi or his people like he villainizes Noah, but he appears purposeful about his handling of Limhi's worldview.

The portrayal that Limhi provides for himself in his speech in Mosiah 7 is that of a person who sees God's hand in the history and lives

35. For a hypothesis explaining the significance of the repeated number 12, please see Nathan J. Arp, "Count Your Many Mormons: Mormon's Personalized and Personal Messages in Mosiah 18 and 3 Nephi 5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 75–86, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/count-your-many-mormons-mormons-personalized-and-personal-messages-in-mosiah-18-and-3-nephi-5/>.

36. Matthew L. Bowen refers to Mosiah 18:30 as a hymn in his article "Most Desirable Above All Things: Onomastic Play on Mary and Mormon in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 48–49, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/most-desirable-above-all-things-onomastic-play-on-mary-and-mormon-in-the-book-of-mormon/>. Grant Hardy notes that this passage's "mesmerizing, almost incantatory repetition" is "uncharacteristically effusive" for Mormon in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 96.

37. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 413.

of his people. Of major importance to the Zeniffites's narrative, Limhi saw God as about to deliver them, even speaking as a prophet:

But if ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart and put your trust in him and serve him with all diligence of mind — if ye do this, he will, according to his own will and pleasure, deliver you out of bondage. (Mosiah 7:33)

For example, Limhi also enthusiastically praises God in elevated language peppered with scripture in a dialogue with Ammon about records. Limhi seems to know the scriptures and sees God's presence in his life; however, in Mormon's narration of Limhi's story, God is basically absent. He is not a driving force in the people's lives. God's name only appears in one dialogue, when Gideon refers to Abinadi's prophecies to Limhi (see Mosiah 20:21). Apart from his first speech in Mosiah 7 and his dialogues with Ammon, in Mormon's narration of Limhi's life, Limhi never speaks of God. Mormon narrates that Limhi entered into a covenant with God, that he wanted to be baptized, but Limhi has no speeches where he mentions God, not even at times when it is most expected.

Limhi's original speech in Mosiah 7 sets the people up to expect God to deliver them, but when deliverance occurs, Limhi is not given any words to confirm his prophetic statement in Mosiah 7:33. We might also expect some words either from Limhi or from the narrator in regards to the miraculously victorious battle between Limhi's forces and the Lamanites in Mosiah 20, but Mormon keeps the narrative squarely in the realm of nature. Instead of the wording used in Zeniff's narrative about going "up in the strength of the Lord" (Mosiah 10:10 and 9:17), Limhi's forces "fought like lions for their prey" and "like dragons did they fight" (Mosiah 20:10 and 11).³⁸ The Lord is absent. Due to his first speech and subsequent dialogue, one can imagine that Limhi saw the events of his people in a divine context with God as a driving force, but that is not what the reader sees. I argue that Mormon is designing the reader's experience to first experience a world without God, so that we can appreciate a world with God in the parallel account Mormon provides the reader of the deliverance of the people of Alma₁.

38. It is instructive to note that the utilization of the metaphor of fighting like dragons is only ever used one other time in the Book of Mormon and that is to describe the Lamanites, who are contrasted with the divinely protected Nephites (see Alma 43:44). Meaning the Nephites in this particular account did not need to fight like dragons, they had God on their side.

Moreover, Mormon's handling of the events of Limhi's people creates dissonance with Abinadi's prophecies and his own foreshadowing.³⁹ This appears to be an indirection, a rhetorical tool that can better aid Mormon in leading the reader to discover the truth by first presenting the seeming dissonance between prophecy and fulfillment. The motive for this treatment only becomes clearly visible upon a comparison between the parallel deliverance accounts, one of the people of Limhi and the other of the people of Alma₁.

Mormon highlights Abinadi's prophecy in context with the Zeniffites's struggles. Originally, Abinadi prophesied that the Zeniffites would "be brought into bondage; and none shall deliver them except it be the Lord the Almighty God" (Mosiah 11:23). Later, Mormon reemphasizes this complete dependence on God as he comments on the futility in the Zeniffites's attempts (Limhi's people) to free themselves from bondage, "the afflictions of the [Zeniffites] was great. And there was no way that they could deliver themselves out of [the Lamanites'] hands" (Mosiah 21:5). The reader plays witting witness to the abysmal failure that ensues as the people try to deliver themselves with the force of arms. Finally, when King Limhi holds his counsel to work out the means "to deliver themselves ... from bondage" (Mosiah 21:36), Mormon prepares the reader for disappointment, except Gideon's plan works, and it appears like Limhi's people do deliver themselves without God.

Mormon maintains this dissonance in order to show with piercing clarity how the subset of Zeniffites with Alma₁ is delivered by the hand of God. Mormon is intentionally confusing the reader through indirection or misdirection, not because he is trying to mislead us or misinform us, but he is employing a classic biblical literary art to lead us, as readers, to work out the truth for ourselves. Similar to the way Mormon prefaced the Zeniffites's delivery under Limhi's reign with prophecy, Mormon ties the deliverance of Alma₁'s people to Abinadi's prophecy through an obvious allusion that foreshadows their deliverance. Note Mormon's full interruption of the narrative to talk to the reader directly, we are the "you" and he is the "I" in his words:

I will shew unto you that they were brought into bondage,
and none could deliver them but the Lord their God. (Mosiah
23:23)⁴⁰

39. Heather Hardy also expressed a very similar understanding of Mormon's narrative strategy to these parallel accounts in "Mormon's Poetics," 21–23.

40. Compare this with Abinadi's prophecy in Mosiah 11:23

This is Mormon establishing his sanctioned point of view. God works overtly in the account of Alma₁ and his people's deliverance from bondage to Amulon and the remaining wicked priests of Noah. This difference between Abinadi's prophecy and its fulfillment in the stories of the two peoples is confusing until Alma₁, Mormon's mouthpiece, enlightens the people and the reader, which is the capstone to this brilliant display of Mormon's narrative art. The answer is that the Lord did deliver Limhi's people; the Zeniffites just missed God's hand in the process. When Alma₁ speaks to the combined congregation of the main Nephite population and the reunited Zeniffites (Limhi and Alma₁'s people), he specifically addresses Limhi's people to remind them "that it was the Lord that did deliver them" (Mosiah 25:16). This subtly rebukes the people and Gideon, who boldly stated to Limhi, "I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage" (Mosiah 22:4).

The parallel accounts of very similar deliverances from bondage allows the reader to experience the same deliverance twice; once from a world without revelation (Limhi's people) and once again with our eyes open to God's actions (Alma₁'s people). Mormon can exploit the contrasting levels of spiritual sight between these two groups to teach us, the reader, about our own lives. Perhaps we are blind to God's saving arm in our lives at times, but that does not mean God is absent. We just are not looking for him or we do not know how to spot his presence within the growing noise of the world around us.

These parallel accounts can theologially reward the reader with a subtle sermon on the importance of faith and revelation, but they also inadvertently continue the criticism leveled against Limhi for his sympathetic views of his wicked father. When Mormon included Limhi's perspective regarding King Noah, it worked to emphasize Mormon's villainization of Noah, but it also inadvertently caught Limhi in the crossfire. Similarly, Mormon's possible removal of God from the narrative in Limhi's experience emphasizes Alma₁'s spiritual standing in contrast to Limhi's. This is a striking example of how a repetitive structure can characterize a narrative's cast.

Throughout the Zeniffite account, Mormon highlights how Limhi continues to make poor judgments as a possible result of his lack of revelation and spiritual sight (see Table 2). His multitude of errors and the exuberance by which he commits them may leave his life open to a humorous interpretation by a modern reader, but was almost certainly not part of Mormon's original intent.

Table 2. Limhi's Mistakes in Chronological Order

Mistakes	Context	Revelations about Limhi
Seems to have had difficulty with the idea of delivering up his father to the Lamanites, which could have imperiled the people's lives.	Lamanites gave two conditions: deliver up King Noah and give half of all their possessions. Because Limhi either hesitated or was unwilling to give up his father, Gideon sent men, likely without the knowledge of Limhi, to search for Noah. After finding that Noah had been executed by his own people, the Lamanites swear an oath to not destroy the Zeniffites (see Mosiah 19:15–27). This is the first time Gideon acts to save the people from a mistake from Limhi.	Limhi was willing to imperil his own people because of a personal, misguided loyalty to his wicked father. Limhi likely knew that the reason for their precarious position was because of his father (Mosiah 19:17), but may have still wished to protect him. This may reveal a self-centered side to Limhi as he seems to put his own concerns over his people's lives, not a just decision from someone who just had "the kingdom conferred upon him by the people" (Mosiah 19:26).
Limhi trusts the Lamanite king more than his own people, which could have led to his and his people's destruction.	Multiple Lamanite women were abducted by the priests of Noah. The Lamanites assume it is Limhi's people who have abducted them and prepare for war. Limhi ambushes the Lamanite forces in a miraculous defeat. Limhi questions the Lamanite king and believes his accusation against Limhi's own people. Before Limhi can conduct an investigation to find out who abducted the women, Gideon steps in to redirect Limhi to have the Lamanite king stop a second Lamanite force from destroying his people (Mosiah 20). This is the second time Gideon saves the people from Limhi's misjudgment.	Limhi is trusting his enemy, an enemy that has just attempted to destroy him, more than his own people. This episode reveals Limhi's naivety and an impulsivity that allowed a present minor concern overshadow the actual threat looming over him and his people. Limhi's inability to judge this situation is ironic considering his condemnation of Zeniff who also naively trusted a previous Lamanite king.
Limhi almost executes a vital ally	After the previous crisis is averted, Lamanite persecution increases against the Zeniffites. Limhi becomes increasingly concerned about his own safety (see Mosiah 7:6–11, 21:19) and more interested in apprehending the former wicked priests (Mosiah 21:23–24). A Nephite search party finally finds the Zeniffite kingdom, but upon nearing the king and his entourage, Limhi has them bound and thrown into a dungeon. Fortunately, he pauses to question the search party before executing them, only to find that they are Nephites, the very people he had been hoping would help him (see Mosiah 7:1–17).	This shows Limhi's short-sightedness and a certain level of impulsivity, which lead him to mistake a friend for a foe. This is the opposite of his previous misjudgment where he mistook a foe for a friend. This may reveal a certain level of self-centeredness, where Limhi believed his own safety or the apprehension of the wicked priests was more important than the welfare of his people.

Mistakes	Context	Revelations about Limhi
Limhi seems convinced that violence is the only way to escape bondage	Limhi allows his people to attempt to free themselves through the force of arms with tragic results. Even after all the death and suffering from these failed attempts to free themselves from the Lamanites's clutches, when Limhi discovers that the Nephites sent a search party for them, he immediately thinks that they should try violence again to deliver themselves. Fortunately, Gideon convinces the king and the people to try an escape plan instead, which works (see Mosiah 21–22 and Mosiah 7:18).	It is uncertain exactly why Limhi and his people were stuck in this paradigm of violence, but in every circumstance when the Zeniffites try to free themselves, they resort to battle. Perhaps this is a legacy-attitude developed during Noah's reign, where Mormon comments that the people "did delight in blood, and the shedding of the blood of their brethren, and this because of the wickedness of their king and priests" (Mosiah 11:19).

Highlighting Limhi's Weaknesses: A Possible Comedy of Errors

Without the full guidance of the spirit and suffering under a likely bias from and for his father, Mormon presents Limhi continuously struggling to make the right decisions despite his well-meaning intentions. On many occasions Limhi jumps from extremes based on surface-level data; however, on at least two incorrect positions he is quite fixed. He maintains a bias for his father, and he believes that combat is the way to deliverance for his people. Limhi's trust in the force of arms is first seen upon his meeting with Ammon's group.

Coincident with the arrival of Ammon's party, Limhi boldly declares to his people that deliverance "is at hand — or is not far distant," but also confesses "I trust there remaineth an effectual struggle to be made" (Mosiah 7:18). Limhi almost certainly uses the word "struggle" here to refer to combat, seeing that he includes the three failed battles with the Lamanites as part of "[their] many strugglings which have been in vain" (Mosiah 7:18). After Mormon's chronological displacement forming Mosiah chapters 9 to 21 returns back to the encounter with Ammon, everyone is trying to identify a way to "deliver themselves ... from bondage" (Mosiah 21:36). After deliberating, they finally realize that the sword will not work. Gideon presents a plan that involves inebriating the Lamanite guards to escape without sustaining or inflicting a single casualty.

Limhi's flair for dramatics peeks out of the narrative in his execution of Gideon's plan. Gideon's plan called for a "tribute of wine" to be given to the Lamanite guards (Mosiah 22:7) so that they would become drunk.

When Limhi sends the tribute “he also sent more wine” (Mosiah 22:10), which might have been a critical part of the plan,⁴¹ but it also could be Limhi’s over-enthusiastic personality reaching out of the page. Limhi’s exuberance also could turn his negotiation of talking points for his and Ammon’s speeches into a comical moment. Limhi has only just met Ammon and learned of Zarahemla, and yet he is the one who is telling his people “all the things concerning their brethren which were in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 8:1) instead of Ammon, who was certainly much more qualified to speak of “all the things” about the Nephites in Zarahemla.

Similarly, this same over-enthusiasm can be seen in Limhi’s dialogue with Ammon about records, where Limhi seems eager to teach Ammon about seers. After Ammon mentions that King Mosiah is a seer, Limhi declares, “a seer is greater than a prophet” (Mosiah 8:15). Limhi seems overly enthused to demonstrate his knowledge regardless of how superficial his knowledge might be. Unfortunately for Limhi, Ammon corrects him slightly, expounding to him that “a seer is a revelator and a prophet also” (Mosiah 8:16).

It’s significant to point out that Mormon did not need to add any of these dialogues into his abridgment. In fact, he omitted many important things, because he couldn’t even “write the hundredth part of the things of [his] people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Mormon may have had many reasons for including the information that he ultimately presented in his record; however, what he does pass on to us is often critical of Limhi.

Limhi is almost always wrong, inadvertently making poor choices. His litany of errors and the exuberance by which he commits them can make him seem like a cliché character in a cartoon who can never win. A modern reader may find this humorous or endearing, but humor was almost certainly not Mormon’s purpose. Mormon’s characterization accentuates some of Limhi’s worst moments, which might be why Mormon reminds the reader that Limhi is “a just man” (Mosiah 19:17), so that we don’t judge him too harshly. Fortunately, Mormon also includes some key events that showcase how Limhi channels his overzealous personality to his acceptance of the gospel.

Limhi’s Weaknesses Become Strong through the Gospel

Ammon’s arrival to the Zeniffites not only brings the hope of physical deliverance to the people, but also the hope of salvation as declared by

41. Alternatively, Limhi is the son of a “wine-bibber” and may have actually known how much liquor was needed to get people drunk (see Mosiah 11:15).

King Benjamin. When Ammon stands before the people he rehearses “the last words which king Benjamin had taught” and “explained them to the people of king Limhi” (Mosiah 8:3). The effect of these words is reflected in Mormon’s statement “And now since the coming of Ammon, King Limhi has also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments” (Mosiah 21:32). This covenant is most likely the covenant made by the Nephites after hearing King Benjamin’s watershed speech narrated in Mosiah 5:5–9 and 6:1–2. Additionally, Limhi leads his people in his desire to be baptized: “And it came to pass that King Limhi and many of his people was desirous to be baptized” (Mosiah 21:33). In both of these statements, Mormon places Limhi first and then his people, so that the word order itself suggests Limhi is leading his people to God. Finally, when the Zeniffites have their chance for baptism, Limhi leads the way again as all of his people are baptized and not just “many of his people”:

And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things and had made an end of speaking to them that *king Limhi was desirous that he might be baptized. And all his people were desirous that they might be baptized also.* (Mosiah 25:17)⁴²

Although most of the Zeniffite narrative highlights on Limhi’s weaknesses, Limhi’s conversion and enthusiasm for making covenants with God are results of the same unique personality. I argue that Mormon, who purposefully chose narratives that included Limhi’s weaknesses, did not highlight these for the reader to condemn Limhi. But rather, in Mormon’s artful rendering of these narratives, the reader can find a relatable example in Limhi. Despite his many errors, Limhi remained willing to accept correction. Limhi although plagued by his bias for his wicked father, did not have to follow his father’s example of pride and intransigent behavior before the messengers of the Lord. In fact, when the messengers from God came, Limhi chose to accept their message and lead his people to baptism. In the end, we can learn from Limhi’s willingness to repent; after all, repentance brings salvation.

The baptism of the Zeniffites marks the closing curtain for Limhi. He is never mentioned again.⁴³ Mormon’s handling of the Zeniffite

42. Compare the “all” here with the “many” in Mosiah 21:32–33

43. This may not be the end of Limhi or Noah. After the deliverance of the Zeniffites and their reunification with the Nephites, a land and a city called Gideon is established. Mormon tells the reader that the name derives from the

story presents Limhi as dynamic, dramatic, humorously endearing, and ultimately a Christian of conviction. He is an example of someone whose weaknesses become strong through the influence of humility and God's grace (see Ether 12:27).

Mormon's characterization strategies described here are a credit to his art and support the hypothesis that he is an inheritor of the poetics of biblical narrative. These narrative strategies also suggest that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient record. His narrative strategies not only characterize the people in his narrative, but also characterize him. The care Mormon took in crafting his abridgment reveals his observational prowess. He saw God's hand in his people's history, and he went to great lengths to teach his reader how to see it too. His characterization of Limhi is a personal message about how wickedness and tyranny affect individuals. When I read the Book of Mormon, I feel Mormon's love for Christ and his love for me, an individual trying to make sense of his carefully constructed history. The act of writing seems to have been an extremely personal endeavor for Mormon, and perhaps reading the book that bears his name should be a personal activity for us too.

Zeniffite Gideon (Alma 2:20, Alma 6:7), who was a hero and a martyr that deserved memorialization; however, Limhi, who also was a hero, is not credited with a land or city in his honor, that we know of.

Although there may not have been a city of Limhi, curiously, there is a city and land named Noah (see Alma 49:12–13 and 14–15). Mormon does not divulge an origin for this land and city, like he does for Gideon, but it may be worth considering that this could be Limhi's city. There are no other Nephite Noahs in the Book of Mormon and while the name could have come from the Hebrew patriarch or the Jaredite Noah (Ether 7:14–18), there is evidence that this would be something Limhi might do to preserve his father's name and perhaps attempt to redeem it as well. Limhi's fear that "his father should not be destroyed" (Mosiah 19:17). The use of the word "destroyed" itself, not commonly used for individuals, seems to suggest an uncommonly strong emotion behind it, or even a nuanced meaning. Perhaps, Limhi was not just worried about his father's death, but was also worried about the destruction of his father's memory or legacy. If this were the case, under the absence of any other information, this may make the strongest hypothesis for the origin of the land and city of Noah. It is certainly consistent with Mormon's characterization of Limhi.

Additionally, it may show a wider spectrum of Mormon's feelings for Limhi, and maybe even for Noah, because Mormon takes great pains to insert the rescue of the people in the borders of the land of Noah as an aside to a separate account in Alma 16 as well as the protection of the city of Noah in Alma 49. It is difficult to say any of this with any certainty, but there is information enough to suggest it as a possibility.

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