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“I of Myself Am a Wicked Man”: Some Notes on Allusion and Textual Dependency in Omni 1:1-2

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**“I OF MYSELF AM A WICKED MAN”:
SOME NOTES ON ALLUSION
AND TEXTUAL DEPENDENCY IN OMNI 1:1-2**

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *Omni greatly revered his ancestors and their personal accounts on the small plates of Nephi. A close examination of Omni’s brief autobiography (Omni 1:1–3) evidences borrowing from all four of his predecessors’ writings. Moreover, his self-description, “I of myself am a wicked man,” constitutes far more than a confession of religious dereliction. That self-assessment alludes to Nephi’s autobiographical wordplay on his name in terms “good” and “having been born of goodly parents” and his grandfather Enos’s similarly self-referential wordplay in describing his own father Jacob as a “just man.” Omni’s name most likely represents a hypocoristic form of a longer theophoric name, *’omniyyāhû (from the root *’mn), meaning “Yahweh is [the object of] my faith” or “Yahweh is my guardian [or, nursing father],” but could also be heard or understood as a gentilic, “faithful one” or “trustworthy one.” These observations have implications for Omni’s stated defense of his people the Nephites (traditionally, the “good” or “fair ones”) against the Lamanites, those who had dwindled in “unbelief” (cf. Hebrew lō’-’ēmun). In the end, Omni’s description of himself as “a wicked man” should be viewed in the context of his reverence for “goodly” and “just” ancestors and brought into balance with those sacred trusts in which he did prove faithful: preserving his people, his genealogy, and the small plates themselves.*

Years ago, John S. Tanner offered the following fresh appraisal of the five authors of the Book of Omni and their (mostly) laconic autobiographical accounts:

Many of Jacob’s descendants (especially Omni and Abinadom) were refreshingly frank about their weaknesses. Perhaps we could learn from their humility and unblinking self-honesty

as well. Moreover, all Jacob’s descendants — even “wicked” Omni — treated the sacred record with respect. They appear to have felt the plates’ power. The very inadequacy they expressed implies that they had read the record and been moved, even intimidated, by its majesty. So it’s not entirely fair to dismiss these men as apostate. Perhaps we shouldn’t even assume the self-confessed are completely reprobate. All Jacob’s posterity manifested humility, honesty, reverence for the sacred, and a common commitment to duty. This suggests that Jacob’s legacy of righteousness was not utterly lost in his posterity. His righteous blood still flowed in their veins; his sensitivity still circulated in their souls.¹

A careful reading of the Book of Omni suggests that the authors of that book revered the writings of their predecessors down to the word level. Omni and his descendants wrote their brief autobiographies often using the language, phraseology, and syntax of earlier writers on the small plates of Nephi.² Omni not only held the writings of his predecessors in reverence but also relied upon and borrowed from the words of each to create a brief account of his own life.

In this article, I focus on the writings of Omni himself as the first of the five writers of the book that bears his name. I try to show how Omni’s respect for his predecessors is evident in his use of and allusions to their writings. Recognizing Omni’s borrowings helps us to better appreciate the quality and meaning of what he wrote. In particular, I endeavor to show that Omni’s confession, “I of myself am a wicked man” (Omni 1:2),³ has in view Nephi’s and Enos’s autobiographical introductions: “I Nephi having been born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1) and “I Enos knowing my father that he was a just man” (Enos 1:1). To fully appreciate what Omni does in his self-effacing confession, one must observe how scrupulously Omni uses the language of his predecessors. Probable meanings of Omni’s name — “Yahweh is [the object of] my faith,” “Yahweh is my guardian,” or even “faithful one” — emerge as relevant not only with respect to Omni’s “confession” but also with respect to the context of declining Nephite faith and faithfulness in the epoch in which Omni and his sons lived.

“I Omni”: Omni’s Opening Syntax and the Meaning of the Name Omni

Regarding Omni’s opening statement, Brant Gardner writes, “Almost certainly, he copied this opening phrase from his father’s [Jarom’s] record.

It should therefore be considered formulaic rather than descriptive.”⁴ Omni begins in similar fashion to his father:

| Jarom 1:1 | Omni 1:1 |
|--|--|
| Now behold, I Jarom write a few words according to the commandment of my father... | Behold it came to pass that I Omni being commanded by my father... |

Jarom, in turn, models his self-introduction on the self-introduction of his grandfather, Jacob (Jacob 1:1–2, see below).

While Gardner is certainly correct as to Omni’s imitation of his father Jarom’s emphasis on keeping a genealogy, a close inspection reveals additional textual dependency. The syntax of Omni’s opening statement appears to closely follow that of his grandfather, Enos:

| Enos 1:1 | Omni 1:1 |
|---|--|
| Behold it came to pass that I Enos knowing my father... | Behold it came to pass that I Omni being commanded by my father... |

Both begin with a particle rendered “behold” (cf. Hebrew *hinnê* or Egyptian *m=k > mk*). This is followed by a verb rendered “it came to pass” (Hebrew *hāyâ*; Egyptian *hpr.n*). There follows in both instances first-person statements of authorial responsibility: “I Enos” and “I Omni” as following the precedent established by Nephi at the outset of the small plates (see 1 Nephi 1:1).

As Robert F. Smith has noted,⁵ the name Omni may derive from the Hebrew root *’mn*. Omni is best explained as a hypocoristic form⁶ of **’omniyyāhû* (following the same pattern as the names Omri and Zimri).⁷ He further recommends the meaning “‘Yahweh/the Lord is my trust,’ or the substantive *’omen* with a first common singular pronominal suffix, thus *’omnī*, ‘my faithfulness/trust,’ (the object of) my faithfulness/trust,’ or as a gentilic ‘Faithful, Trustworthy.’”⁸ In other words, Omni translates easily as “Yahweh/the Lord is [the object of] my faith” or “faithful one.”

Another possibility runs along similar lines: if the *’mn-* element in Omni is the Hebrew substantive *’omēn*, “attendant” or “guardian”⁹ of children, the name would mean “Yahweh is my attendant” or “Yahweh is my guardian” — i.e., “Yahweh is the one who brought me up” or “Yahweh is my nursing father.” In the Hebrew Bible we see this

word used in several relevant instances. Moses complains to the Lord that the latter is expecting him to function as Israel's *'ōmēn*: "Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father [*hā'ōmēn*] beareth the sucking child ...?" (Numbers 11:12). Isaiah prophesies that gentile kings will be Israel's "nursing fathers" (*'ōmēnayik*, Isaiah 49:23; 1 Nephi 21:23; 2 Nephi 6:7; 10:9), as the masculine counterpart to the wet-nurse (*mēnîqōtayik* = "thy nursing mothers," Isaiah 49:23, et al.). Mordecai served as Esther's (or Hadassah's) *'ōmēn*: "he [Mordecai] *brought up* [*'ōmēn*] Hadassah, that is, Esther" (Esther 2:7). Esther uses the cognate noun in nearly an identical sense: "Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up [*'omnâ*] with him [perhaps, in trust with him]" (Esther 2:20). The Deuteronomistic Historian twice mentions *hā'ōmēnîm* — the "guardians" or "bringers up" of Ahab's children in 2 Kings 10:1, 5 (i.e., those whom he had entrusted to bring them up). Mormon preserves a possible wordplay on Ammon that might reflect a similar idea: "Now we see that *Ammon* could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to *thy faith* — therefore, Mosiah *trusted* him unto the Lord" (Alma 19:23).

In either case one can clearly hear the Hebrew root **'mn* and thus the latent idea of "faith," "faithfulness," and "trust" in the name *Omni*. The Lord — Yahweh — is the one in whom the one named *Omni* "has faith" or "trusts" or Yahweh is the one who is "entrusted" with the one so named. But perhaps *Omni* also functioned as a kind of gentilic noun, "faithful one" or "trustworthy one."¹⁰ The name *Lamoni* as a *nisbe* (or *nisba*) adjectival form of *Laman* (i.e., "Lamanite" or one of/descendant of *Laman*) appears to have functioned precisely in this way.¹¹ I have argued elsewhere that the gentilic terms *Nephite* ("good[ly] one" < Egyptian *nfr*),¹² *Lamanite* (pejoratively treated as "unfaithful" or "unbelieving one"),¹³ *Zoramite* (pejoratively "one who is lifted up" or "high one"),¹⁴ just as the term "Jew"/"Judahite" ("one who is to be praised" or "one who is to be thanked" < *ydy/ydh*, "praise" or "thank")¹⁵ functioned similarly.

It is further possible that *Jarom* had something like the following in mind when he named his son *Omni*: "And it came to pass that they came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were *mighty men in the faith* [*'ēmûnat*] *of the Lord* [*yhwh*]; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood *the Lamanites* and swept them away out of our lands, and began to fortify our cities, or whatsoever place of our inheritance" (Jarom 1:7). As we will

see, the *mn* connection has implications for Omni’s defense of his people against the Lamanites and his confession to having been a “wicked man.”

“Commanded ... to Preserve Our Genealogy”

Beyond his imitation of the opening syntax of Enos’s autobiography, Omni aligns the content of his subsequent phraseology to the opening statements of Jacob and Jarom. Both Jacob and Jarom emphasize the “commandment” concerning future content on the small plates that their immediate predecessors — Nephi and Enos, respectively — gave:

| Jacob 1:1–2 and Jarom 1:1 | Omni 1:1 |
|---|--|
| <p>For behold, it came to pass that fifty and five years had passed away from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem; wherefore Nephi <i>gave me</i> Jacob <i>a commandment concerning these small plates upon which these things are engraven</i>. And <i>he gave me</i> Jacob <i>a commandment</i> that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious. (Jacob 1:1–2)</p> <p>Now behold, <i>I Jarom write a few words according to the commandment of my father</i> Enos, that our genealogy may be kept. (Jarom 1:1)</p> | <p>Behold, it came to pass that <i>I Omni being commanded by my father</i> Jarom that I should <i>write somewhat</i> upon these plates <i>to preserve our genealogy...</i></p> |

When Nephi records the Lord’s direct commandment to make the small plates, he reports that the Lord commanded him: “Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven *many things* upon them *which are good in my sight* for the profit of thy people” (2 Nephi 5:30). “Good” here appears to be an allusion to Nephi’s own name (Egyptian *nfr* = “good”).¹⁶ Even prior to this, however, near the outset of the small plates record, Nephi had stated his intent to “write the things of God” upon these plates (1 Nephi 6:3). Then he further declared: “Wherefore the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto them which are not of the world. Wherefore *I shall give commandment unto my seed* that they shall not occupy these plates with *things which are*

not of worth unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 6:5–6). Sometime after his making of the small plates and the foregoing statements of intent, Nephi changed his plan to pass on this record to his “seed” and instead decided to entrust the small plates to Jacob, his brother, with a “commandment” to “write upon these plates a few of the things which I [Jacob] considered *to be most precious*” (Jacob 1:2).

Jacob states that he passed the small plates on to his son Enos, and “told him the things which my brother Nephi had commanded me, and he promised obedience unto the commands” (Jacob 7:27). For his part, Enos never mentions the small plates upon which he made his record except implicitly as a part of the larger body of Nephite records (Enos 1:13–16), nor does he ever mention his son Jarom. Jarom, however, explains that he was, first, “writ[ing] a few words according to the commandment of my father, Enos, that our genealogy may be kept” and, second, that “these things [i.e., the small plates] are written for the intent of the benefit of our brethren the Lamanites” (Jarom 1:2).

Jarom demurs on writing much in terms of recording prophesy or revelation: “For what could I write more than my fathers have written ...?” (Jarom 1:2) and he closes his short record with the statement “And I deliver these plates into the hands of my son Omni, that they may be kept according to the commandments of my fathers” (Jarom 1:15). Terrence Szink suggests that Jarom “seems to have not understood the nature or purpose of the record to be kept upon the plates” and believes “that Jarom made a mistake in not writing his prophecies and revelations.”¹⁷ However, Jarom’s statement that the small plates’ contents “were written for the intent of the benefit of the Lamanites” suggests that he did understand the overarching purpose. Szink acknowledges Jarom’s recognition that the latter’s predecessors had already “revealed the plan of salvation” (Jarom 1:2).¹⁸ However, Jarom did not need to replicate Nephi’s treatise on the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 31–32), especially if he had limited space to write. Nephi’s statement in 1 Nephi 6:6 (“they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men”) implies that the small plates had limited space from the outset (hence their being described as “small”). Amaleki’s assertion at the end of the small plates, “these plates are full” (Omni 1:30), strongly suggests that space considerations increasingly became a concern for Jarom and his successors. It may have been a contributing factor to the autobiographies before Amaleki becoming increasingly laconic. Amaleki’s decision to write a longer autobiography and account than his immediate predecessors seems to reflect an *a priori* decision to end

the record and hand it over to King Benjamin, since he himself had “no seed” (Omni 1:25). In other words, Amaleki knew that he no longer needed to conserve space for future generations since he was the last in his line, so he filled up what remained.

Beginning with their transfer from Enos to Jarom, the small plates increasingly took on a genealogical function¹⁹ — the family story of one line of Jacob’s descendants. Omni’s autobiography accelerated that trend.

**“I Fought Much with the Sword to Preserve My People”:
Omni as Protector or “Preserve[r]” Against the Lamanites**

Omni partly takes his cue for describing his days (“wherefore in my days ...”) from Nephi’s circumstantial clauses in 1 Nephi 1:1: “having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days.” But Omni also has two other statements from earlier in the small plates in mind in the description of his days that follows:

| 2 Nephi 6:2 and Jacob 1:10 | Omni 1:2 |
|---|--|
| <p>Behold, my beloved brethren, that <i>I Jacob</i> having been called of God and ordained after the manner of his holy order and having been consecrated by <i>my brother Nephi</i>, unto whom ye look <i>as a king or a protector and on whom ye depend for safety</i>, behold, ye know that I have spoken unto you exceeding many things. (2 Nephi 6:2)</p> <p>...<i>The people</i> having loved <i>Nephi</i> exceedingly, <i>he</i> having been a great <i>protector</i> for them, having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare... (Jacob 1:10)</p> | <p>Wherefore <i>in my days</i> I would that ye should know <i>that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people the Nephites</i> from falling into the hands of their enemies the Lamanites.</p> |

Trading Jacob’s two descriptions of his brother Nephi in 2 Nephi 6:2 and Jacob 1:10 as a “protector” (Jacob [*ya’āqōb*] = “may [God] protect”),²⁰ Omni emphasizes that he, like Nephi his predecessor, “preserved” his people by means of the sword. Conceivably, the sword that Omni used to “preserve” his people was one of many made after the pattern of the sword of Laban as mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:14: “And I Nephi did take the sword of Laban and

after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us. For I knew their hatred towards me and my children and they who were called my people.” The generational wars in which Omni fought had, of course, had already begun during Nephi’s time (see 2 Nephi 5:34).

As has been noted elsewhere,²¹ the Nephites very early on began to treat the name *Laman* and its gentilic derivative *Lamanites* in terms of “unbelief” or “no faith” (cf. especially Hebrew *lō’-’ēmun*, Deuteronomy 32:20). The outcome shown to Nephi in vision regarding the posterity of Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael had long since come to fulfillment: “these shall dwindle in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22). The Lamanites’ “dwindl[ing] in unbelief” became the stock-in-trade of the Nephites’ pejorative view of them (see e.g., Mosiah 1:5–6; Alma 56:3–4; Mormon 5:15). Jarom’s statement in Jarom 1:7 is meant at least partly to contrast the “faith” and “faithfulness” of the Nephite leaders with the unbelieving or unfaithful Lamanites (and perhaps implicitly some of the “stiffnecked”²² Nephites themselves): “And it came to pass that [the Lamanites] came many times against us, the Nephites, to battle. But our kings and our leaders were *mighty men in the faith* [Hebrew *’ēmūnat*] *of the Lord*; and they taught the people the ways of the Lord; wherefore, we withstood *the Lamanites* [cf. *lō’-’ēmun*] and swept them away out of our lands.” (Jarom 1:7).

It is not impossible that when Jarom wrote the foregoing, Omni was already one of the Nephite “leaders” and was, on some level, one of the “mighty men in the faith of the Lord” — i.e., “mighty men in the faith of Yahweh.” Whatever his personal failings, Omni had not fully “dwindle[d] in unbelief” like Laman and Lemuel and their posterity, and Yahweh was still the object of his faith, as implied by his name (Omni = “Yahweh [is the object of] my faith”). Omni still had faith in “the Lord” (Yahweh), whom he mentions at the end of Omni 1:2. Omni had been faithful to the sacred trust of “preserving [Jacob’s descendants’] genealogy.” He also proved true and faithful to a second trust: “preserv[ing] [his] people.” Thus the reader should bring into balance Omni’s subsequent self-confession with his keeping of these two trusts.

“But Behold, I of Myself Am a Wicked Man”

Although he links himself to Jacob, Enos, and Jarom in terms of his faithful “preservation” of the family genealogy, and to Nephi in terms of faithfully wielding the sword to “preserve” his people, Omni puts tremendous distance between himself and his predecessors in terms of his personal righteousness. A comparison between the autobiographical

introductions of Nephi, Enos, and Omni speaks to Omni's acute consciousness on this point:

| 1 Nephi 1:1 and Enos 1:1 | Omni 1:1-2 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>I Nephi</i> [<i>nfr</i> = good] having been born of <i>goodly</i> parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father And having seen many afflictions <i>in the course of my days</i>, nevertheless having been highly favored of the Lord <i>in all my days</i>, yea, having had a great knowledge of <i>the goodness</i> and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings <i>in my days</i>. (1 Nephi 1:1)</p> <p>Behold, it came to pass that <i>I Enos</i> [<i>’ēnôš</i>], knowing my father that he was a <i>just man</i> [Hebrew <i>’iš/’ēnôš</i>], for he taught me in his language and also in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Enos 1:1)</p> | <p>Behold, it came to pass that <i>I Omni</i> [= “faithful one,” “Y. is my faith”] being commanded by my father ... wherefore, <i>in my days</i>, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, <i>the Nephites</i> [cf. good/fair ones], from falling into the hands of their enemies, the <i>Lamanites</i> [cf. the “unfaithful ones”] But behold, <i>I of myself am a wicked man</i>, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.</p> |

Thus, Omni's description of himself as a “wicked man” has at least a double reference. His “confession” recalls Enos's description of his father, Jacob, as “just man,” including the play on the meaning of Enos's name, “man.”²³ Both Omni's self-evaluation as “a wicked man” and Enos's description of his father as a “just man” recall Nephi's description of Lehi, the patriarch of both Nephites and Lamanites, as a “goodly parent” (cf. his later description of Lehi as a “tender parent,” 1 Nephi 8:37).

The qualifying phrase “of myself” in Omni's confession (“I of myself am a wicked man”) inverts the force of the autobiographical wordplays of Nephi (“I Nephi having been born of goodly parents”) and Enos (“I Enos knowing my father that he was a just man”). By means of wordplay, Nephi and later Enos (imitating Nephi) had attributed the appropriateness of their names to qualities or attributes possessed by their parents. Omni uses an antonymic adjective rendered “wicked” as a deliberate and self-effacing means of distinguishing himself from his “good” forefathers Lehi and Nephi and the “just men” Jacob and Enos who were his ancestors. In particular, Omni's use of the self-description

“wicked man” echoes Enos’s description of Jacob as a “just man” as the very obverse of the latter description.

“I Have Not Kept the Statutes and the Commandments of the Lord as I Ought to Have Done”

Omni explains what he means by the self-confession: “I of myself am a wicked man,” with the admission, “I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.” Here, too, we find a possible intertextual precedent in the small plates. Nephi affirms his people’s fidelity to the law of Moses with his use of the stereotyped formula “keep the judgments and the statutes and the commandments of the Lord” (2 Nephi 5:10). Nephi derives this formula from the Book of Deuteronomy, which attests the formula “the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments” (and slight variations thereon) in abundance.²⁴ Omni seems to have borrowed Nephi’s language from 2 Nephi 5:10; the precise wording “the statutes and the commandments of the Lord” appears only there and in Omni 1:2:

| 2 Nephi 5:10 and 1 Nephi 17:22 | Omni 1:2 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>And we did observe to keep the judgments and the statutes and the commandments of the Lord, in all things according to the law of Moses. (2 Nephi 5:10)</i></p> <p>Compare Laman and Lemuel’s reported speech: “And we know that <i>the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were <u>a righteous people</u>, for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord and all his commandments according to the law of Moses; wherefore we know that they are <u>a righteous people</u>.” (1 Nephi 17:22)</i></p> | <p><i>But behold, I of myself am <u>a wicked man</u>, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.</i></p> |

Thus, Omni’s partial use of the Deuteronomic “commandments”-formula amounts to a confession of failure to fully keep the Law of Moses. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet write, “It need not be supposed from such an admission that he [Omni] was guilty of any gross immorality, but rather that he was not zealous in honoring the law of Moses and in

keeping other religious obligations.”²⁵ Szink rightly suggests that “we should not be too quick to condemn Omni. We might ask ourselves, Who among us has kept the statutes and commandments of the Lord as he or she ought to have done? The fact that Omni admits that he was a wicked man is at least evidence of humility. Wicked people do not normally acknowledge the fact that they are wicked.”²⁶ Perhaps Omni felt that he had not adequately lived up to his father’s description of those “leaders [who] were mighty men in the faith of the Lord” (Jarom 1:7) and wished to distance himself from that description.

“He Would Not Suffer that the Words Should Not Be Verified”

Whatever “other religious obligations” Omni failed to keep, he had been true to the “preservation” of his people — i.e., his community — and the “preservation” of his genealogy. He had at least taught his sons Amaron and Chemish enough of “the ways of the Lord” (Jarom 1:7) that they were able to faithfully and conscientiously preserve the small plates. Amaron, for his part, recognized the activation of the Lord’s judgments during his own time and reported the “verification” of the Lord’s words thus:

For the Lord would not suffer after he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and kept and preserved them from falling into the hands of their enemies, yea, *he would not suffer that the words should not be verified* which he spake unto our fathers, saying that inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments, ye shall not prosper in the land. Wherefore the Lord did visit them in great judgment. Nevertheless he did spare the righteous that they should not perish, but did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. (Omni 1:6–7)

Two passages from the Hebrew Bible use idioms that describe the “verification” of previously spoken “words” (human and divine). They offer intimations of how the Nephites would have expressed this idea, including the authors on the small plates — i.e., with causative forms of the verb *ʾmn*. In the Joseph cycle, Joseph — still unknown to his brothers — uses the hiphil form of *ʾmn*: “But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words *be verified* [*wěyē’āmēnû*] and ye shall not die” (Genesis 42:20). Solomon uses a similar form of *ʾmn* in his temple dedicatory prayer: “And now, O God of Israel, *let* thy word, I pray thee, *be verified* [*yē’āmen*], which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father” (1 Kings 8:26).

These passages shed further light on both Amaron’s words in Omni 1:6–7 but also on his grandfather Jarom’s description of the

verification of the Lord’s words generations earlier — words which Amaron directly borrows. We recall Jarom’s mention of the Nephite leaders Jarom 1:7: “mighty men in the faith [*’ēmûnat*] of the Lord,” leaders which may have even included Omni (despite his self-confession, “I of myself am a wicked man”). Jarom then reports,

And thus being prepared to meet *the Lamanites* [cf. *lō’-’ēmūn*, “no faith,” “unbelief”], they did not prosper against us. But the word of *the Lord was verified* which he spake unto our fathers, saying that inasmuch as ye will keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. (Jarom 1:9)

Amaron reworks Jarom’s earlier statement, inverting it into a double-negative: “*he would not suffer that the words should not be verified* which he spake unto our fathers, saying that inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall not prosper in the land.” In the context of the books of Jarom and Omni, Amaron’s apparent use of the verb *’mn* (or its equivalent) becomes a wordplay on the name of his father, Omni, and on “Lamanites.” Similar wordplay on *’mn* and Lamanites recurs in the Book of Alma at Alma 9:14; 25:12, 17; 50:19, 21.²⁷

Conclusion

When we examine Omni’s declaration “I am of myself a wicked man” (Omni 1:2) in the context of and as an allusion to the earlier autobiographical introductions of Nephi (“I Nephi having been born of goodly parents,” 1 Nephi 1:1) and Enos (“I Enos knowing my father that he was a just man,” Enos 1:1) on the small plates, it appears less a self-confession and more self-effacement.²⁸ Where Nephi and Enos used wordplay that attributed the appropriateness of their names to righteous parentage (“goodly parents” and a “just man”), Omni wished to distance his personal failings — small or great — from Jarom, his father and his predecessors. He revered them.

Jarom’s description of Nephite leaders who were “mighty men in *the faith* [*’ēmûnat*] of the Lord [*yhwh*” (Jarom 1:7), if not a description meant to include his son Omni, at least reflects the sentiment and hope embodied in the naming of Omni (“Faithful one” or “Yahweh is [the object of my] faith”). Whatever Omni’s personal failings, we should never look past the fact that his preservation of his people and genealogy meant the preservation of Nephi’s small plates themselves and all that they contain. Omni reared and taught two sons (Amaron and Chemish), who, whatever their own personal failings, faithfully kept and preserved the small plates.

Amaron recognized the activation or “verification” (cf. *wěyē`āmēnû*) of the Lord’s words regarding the Nephites during Omni’s and his own time (Omni 1:6; cf. Jarom 1:9). In proving faithful to this trust, Omni and his descendants are to be praised and thanked for their faithfulness no less than those who preserved the ancient biblical texts (cf. 2 Nephi 29:4).

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Endnotes

- 1 John S. Tanner, “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights That You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 57–58.
- 2 A wider study of intertextuality in the Book of Omni will, at some point, be forthcoming. One major example of this is the precedent that Nephi sets as he winds down his first book with the statement “And now I Nephi make an end” (1 Nephi 22:29; he uses a less abrupt variation of this in 1 Nephi 14:30; 2 Nephi 30:18; and 2 Nephi 31:1). Jacob follows this precedent when he makes a substantive break in writing (Jacob 3:14) and does so again when he concludes his book for the final time (Jacob 7:27). Omni resumes the practice of using the abbreviated form that Nephi uses at the end of 1 Nephi, “And I make an end” (Omni 1:3); Chemish, the son of Omni and the brother of Amaron, follows suit (“And I make an end,” Omni 1:9), as does Abinadom, the son of Chemish (Omni 1:11). Lastly on

the small plates, Amaleki closes the Book of Omni and the small plates record with the longer variation, “and I make an end of my speaking” (Omni 1:30).

- 3 Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 4 Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 3:38.
- 5 *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Omni,” last modified November 21, 2015, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/OMNI>.
- 6 Hypocoristic names abound in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East. For example, the name *Moses* constitutes a hypocorism of an originally longer Egyptian name and means “(the deity is) Begotten.” 1 Samuel 25:44 attests the name *Phalti*, a hypocoristic form of *Phaltiel* (“El [God is my deliverance]”), the latter, fuller form being attested in 2 Samuel 3:15. As noted in Brill’s *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, the shortening of hypocoristic names in spelling and pronunciation “is usually one of convenience, though it may also be motivated by the desire to express endearment or for other purposes.” Richard S. Hess, “Hypocoristic Names,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2013), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics/hypocoristic-names-EHLL_COM_00000227?s.num=1. I am so far unaware of any evidence that the use of such hypocorisms was considered irreverent as it sometimes is today in some modern English contexts.
- 7 *Onomasticon*, “Omni.”
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 64.
- 10 *Onomasticon*, “Omni.”
- 11 John A. Tvedtnes, “One Small Step,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: 15, no. 1 (January 2003): 185. Tvedtnes further cites the names Moroni (“Moronite” or one from the

land of Moron) and Muloki (“Mulochite” [or “Mulekite”], i.e., descendant of Muloch/Mulek]), which likely constitute examples of this same phenomenon. On the name *Lamoni*” see also *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Lamoni,” last modified November 11, 2017, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/LAMONI>.

- 12 Matthew L. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3. On the name Nephi as a derivation from Egyptian *nfr*, see John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 1992): 189–91; John Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.
- 13 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*, eds. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and RSC, 2011), 240–63; Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 15, no. 2 (2016): 64–89. See further Bowen, “Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors” (Provo, UT: FairMormon Conference, August 2019), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2019/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words>.
- 14 Matthew L. Bowen “See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up’: The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016):109–43, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/see-that-ye-are-not-lifted-up-the-name-zoram-and-its-paronomastic-pejoration/>.
- 15 Matthew L. Bowen, “What Thank They the Jews’? (2 Nephi 29:4): A Note on the Name “Judah” and Antisemitism,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2014): 111–25, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/what-thank-they-the-jews-2-nephi-294-a-note-on-the-name-judah-and-antisemitism/>.
- 16 Matthew L. Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181–82, 194, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-good-inclusio/>.

- 17 Terrence L. Szink, “Writing the Things of God,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 129. Szink continues, “The information he gave is, for the most part, forgettable. It does not have the impact Jacob’s preaching or Enos’s prayer have, and it does nothing to help bring us to Christ. In fact, Jarom does not so much as mention the name of Jesus Christ in his book. Jarom may have gone against Nephi’s commandment that his seed “not occupy these plates which things are not of worth unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 6:6).” In my view, Szink understates the value of Jarom’s writings. He critiques Jarom for not mentioning the name “Jesus Christ” in his book, this in spite of the fact that Jarom mentions the Messiah by title in Jarom 1:11 (“persuading them [the Nephites] to look forward unto the Messiah, and believe in him to come as though he already was” cf. 2 Nephi 25:24–27) and mentioning the Lord five other times. It is hard to imagine dismissing the entire Hebrew Bible for not mentioning the name Jesus Christ or the Book of Esther for not mentioning God.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Genealogy was one important function of the brass plates (see, e.g., 1 Nephi 3:3, 12, 19–20; 1 Nephi 5:14, 16. Thus, the genealogical use of the small plates among Jarom and his descendants did constitute a misuse of the plates, per se.
- 20 Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (BWANT 3, no. 10; Stuttgart, DEU: W. Kolhammer, 1928), 177–78, 197. Matthew L. Bowen, “Jacob’s Protector” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 229–56, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/jacobs-protector/>
- 21 See Bowen, “Not Partaking,” 243; Bowen, “Faithfulness of Ammon,” 73–75.
- 22 Jarom 1:4; see also 2 Nephi 25:28 (quoting Exodus 33:3, 5; Deuteronomy 9:6; cf. Exodus 32:9; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:13; 10:16); Jacob 6:4; Enos 1:22.
- 23 For more on Enos’s use of wordplay on his own name and on that of his father, Jacob, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Wordplay on

the Name 'Enos,'" *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 26, no. 3 (2006): 2; Bowen, "And There Wrestled a Man with Him' (Genesis 32:24): Enos's Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151–60, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-there-wrestled-a-man-with-him-genesis-3224-enoss-adaptations-of-the-onomastic-wordplay-of-genesis/>.

- 24 See, e.g., Deuteronomy 5:31 [MT]; 6:1; 7:11; 8:11; 11:1; 26:17; 30:16. Variations on the formula "the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments" also occurs in the "Deuteronomistic History" (see, e.g., 1 Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58. This combination of terms occurs first in Leviticus 26:15, but not as a stereotyped formula until Deuteronomy. See also Nehemiah 1:7; 9:3; 10:29.
- 25 Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2, *Jacob Through Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 113.
- 26 Szink, "Writing Things of God," 130.
- 27 Alma 9:14: "Now I would that ye should remember that inasmuch as the Lamanites have not kept the commandments of God, they have been cut off from the presence of the Lord. Now we see that the word of the Lord *hath been verified* in this thing, and the *Lamanites* have been cut off from his presence from the beginning of their transgressions in the land"; Alma 25:12: "And he said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain, even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts. And now behold, these words *were verified*, for they were driven by the *Lamanites*, and they were hunted and they were smitten"; Alma 25:17; "And now behold, Ammon, and Aaron and Omner and Himni and their brethren did rejoice exceedingly for the success which they had had among the *Lamanites*, seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers and that *he had also verified* his word unto them in every particular"; Alma 50:19–22: "And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men. Yea, we can behold that his words *are verified*, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying: Blessed art thou and thy children. And they shall be blessed! And inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments, they shall

prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And we see that these promises *have been verified* to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings and their plunderings, their idolatry and their whoredoms and their abominations which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions. And those who *were faithful* in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage or to perish by the sword or to dwindle in *unbelief* and mingle with the *Lamanites*.”

- 28 This is consistent with the conclusions Clifford Jones obtained through thoughtful textual analysis; Clifford P. Jones, “The Prophets Who Wrote the Book of Omni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 221–44; <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-prophets-who-wrote-the-book-of-omni/>.