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Learning to Love the Book of Mormon - The Book of Omni

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Source: *Learning to Love the Book of Mormon*

Last Updated: August 2013 to February 2014

Abstract: This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book's intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book.

Learning to Love the Book of Mormon

Updated August 2013 to February 2014

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Introduction

In the Church, our study and understanding of the Book of Mormon has undergone a most interesting evolution since the book's translation in 1829. As late as the early twentieth century our understanding of the book was not far advanced. Almost no serious studies of the book and its contents had been published, and the book was not heavily used in worship service discourse or in gospel instruction. There was even some skepticism about the literal divine origins of the Book within the LDS community, particularly among the more educated. By the mid 1900s, beginning with an acknowledged assumption of the book's divine origins, Sidney B. Sperry, Hugh W. Nibley, John L. Sorenson, and a few others had launched serious scholarly inquiries into the book. In the mid-1970s the rate of publications on Book of Mormon topics began to increase.

The rate of publications on the Book of Mormon particularly soared after President Ezra Taft Benson, soon after his ordination as president and prophet, called the Church to repentance in November of 1985 and at the April General Conference of the Church in 1986. The Church worked the Book of Mormon into the regular cycle of the new correlated curriculum for adults, and church leaders began using the Book of Mormon more frequently and systematically in speeches and instructional situations. Since then, the book's authenticity as an ancient scriptural record has become more firmly and generally established. Those who remain vocal doubters of the book's literal divine origins are no longer identified with the committed LDS community.

In the October General Conference in 1986, President Benson said:

We must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of our study [because] it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us. . . .

If they [the Book of Mormon writers] saw our day then chose those things which would be of greatest worth to us, is not that how we should study the Book of Mormon? We should constantly ask ourselves, "Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?" (*Conference Report*, October 1986, 3-7).

President Benson would later write:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You

will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called the “words of life” (D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November, 1986, 16:7).

Further:

I would like to speak about one of the most significant gifts given to the world in modern times. The gift I am thinking of is more important than any of the inventions that have come out of the industrial and technological revolutions. This is a gift of greater value to mankind than even the many wonderful advances we have seen in modern medicine. It is of greater worth to mankind than the development of flight or space travel. I speak of the gift of the Book of Mormon (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft] 1988, 51).

President Benson often reiterated the prophet Joseph Smith’s statement when Joseph referred to the Book of Mormon as “the keystone of our religion” (*TPJS*, 194). A keystone, sometimes called the headstone, is the central stone in an arch. It holds all the other stones in place, and if it is removed, the arch crumbles.

Your author has developed the habit, as I read the Book of Mormon, of reading slowly and actually looking for words or phrases or concepts whose meanings are unclear. I search for ideas that are not completely compatible with the framework of knowledge I already possess. I have been surprised to learn that I seldom have to read more than two or three verses before coming upon some puzzlement, large or small. On each occasion, I am left with an unsettled perplexity, a sort of uncomfortable disequilibrium. “Why are there so many verses in this basic scriptural work,” I have wondered, “that cause me to struggle so?” Disquieting as these feelings are, I have come to recognize them as a first step in learning some valuable new insight.

Once I come upon a phrase or verse I don’t understand, I begin my search for the answer by reading and re-reading the “offending” passage, by checking cross references, by reading supplemental explanatory materials, by sometimes asking help of my learned friends, and often praying about the verse. Mercifully, I have found that my efforts are most always fruitful. I am able to re-establish my equilibrium with the verse, and, at the same time, find myself possessing a greater insight on some particular point. With some satisfaction, I then continue on in my reading, only to find the process beginning again a verse or two later. I heartily recommend this same approach to my readers, and I have attempted in this commentary to spare you some of the pain of finding your answers. I hope I have anticipated many of your perplexities as you study the Book of Mormon, yet I suspect that each of us will encounter and be obliged to overcome our own unique set of questions. There is certainly a magic in enduring in this process, for certainly as we do so, we are “treasur[ing] up . . . the words of life” (D&C 84:85).

Your author prefers to think of this work as an “enrichment commentary.” I believe it may be read and enjoyed by the casual student of the Book of Mormon who might, for example, find use for it as a reference source. The book’s intended purpose, however, is to assist the serious student who would like to begin a thorough, intensive, and searching tour through the book. Though it may be useful to the student who wishes to skip from one verse here to another verse there, it is intended to be read sequentially. Some concepts discussed in earlier verses in the book or even earlier verses in a particular chapter may receive more casual attention when encountered later in the text.

This work consists of a rather comprehensive commentary on the verses of the Book of Mormon. Some may have reservations about the basic concept of this book. I am aware of Peter’s warning: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). I have endeavored in this project not to add or detract from the scripture, but only clarify. Some will say that such a comprehensive commentary is not possible without placing a “private interpretation” on some verses. I have earnestly attempted to avoid assigning any purely individual or private interpretations to the scriptural verses. Your author is a student of the Book of Mormon and in no wise an expert. To create this volume I have prayerfully studied and utilized the thoughts and explanations of many authors and scholars whose explanations of the Book of Mormon verses might be generally considered to be “authoritative” and “scholarly.” I have collected materials from general authorities and from individuals with undeniable scholarly credentials who openly profess a spiritual witness of the book. When I have borrowed their ideas only, and have rephrased them for my purposes, no reference will be cited. When I have quoted another author’s wording, acknowledgment is provided. Indeed, I have begun and completed this project as a student who is simply trying to make it possible for myself and for others to understand the book’s sometimes difficult verses. I acknowledge the fact, however, that my private biases have not been completely eliminated.

I am also sensitive to the need to avoid proof-texting in a work such as this. That is, I have tried very hard to let the scriptures speak for themselves. An author guilty of proof-texting presupposes the doctrine and then seeks support from the scriptures. I have attempted to consider each verse in its historical and sequential context.

I have tried to include timely and necessary background information to make the book’s words, phrases, and verses really come alive. I have tried to avoid rhetoric and concentrate on the meat. It is not my purpose to preach about the principles contained in the book, rather my goal is to improve understanding. This work presupposes, in its reader, an “average” understanding of the Book of Mormon. I have tried to eliminate those commentary materials which would likely be redundant and unnecessary for my

so-called average reader. It is my intent to explain, clarify, and enrich your study and understanding of the book.

The work includes a variety of “supplemental articles” to which reference is made appropriately in the text. Among these supplemental articles is a purely historical telling of the Book of Mormon story entitled, *A Narrative Summary of the Book of Mormon*. From this “historical” summary, doctrinal materials have been omitted, but all characters, events, and places are included. It is hope that this historical account may be useful to the student who wishes to quickly “brush up” on the historical narrative.

A few “housekeeping” notes about this work are pertinent. The text of the Book of Mormon is included in bold with a blue color to clearly distinguish it from the commentary. All commentary is colored black. The paragraphs of commentary material are often preceded by a quoted phrase, also of blue color, without any punctuation except for quotation marks. These are phrases taken directly from the verse of text immediately above the commentary paragraph. The commentary then follows these quoted phrases. Sometimes the verse commentary for a group of verses will precede, rather than follow, the actual text rendering of the verses. This is done if it felt that a word of explanation before reading a passage would be helpful. Most block quotes appear in red print and are not double-indented. Finally, in this current updated version of this commentary (2014) page numbers have been eliminated, as they are considered unnecessary.

In reading the Book of Mormon, often we tend to regard some of the materials contained therein as non-essential. We wonder, “Why was the report of this battle or that incident included in the book?” As we study the book, we will assume that there is no “filler” material in the Book of Mormon. Every item in the book was placed there for a reason and purpose. In making his abridgment of the sacred records of the Book of Mormon people, Mormon wrote, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). Hence, we must assume that all items in the book have been included following thoughtful and inspired consideration.

There is a miracle in the scriptures. If a person reads the scriptures regularly, he or she will invariably have his or her life touched by them eventually. “Whosoever believeth on my words,” the Lord said in reference to the Book of Mormon, “them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). Isaiah prophesied that the Book of Mormon would bring a spiritually blind generation to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 27:35; Isaiah 29:24). It has been suggested by those experienced in gospel study that no individual who studies the scriptures daily will be remiss in keeping the commandments.

Our scriptures advise us of several other books of scripture yet to come forth. One day, “all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be” (2 Nephi 27:11). Perhaps, though, we will never be privileged to receive additional scriptures until we learn to appreciate fully those we already have.

Consider the following testimony of The Book of Mormon by President Ezra Taft Benson:

We invite all men everywhere to read the Book of Mormon, another testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible sits on the pulpit of hundreds of different religious sects. The Book of Mormon, the record of Joseph, verifies and clarifies the Bible. It removes stumbling blocks, it restores many plain and precious things. We testify that when used together, the Bible and the Book of Mormon confound false doctrines, lay down contentions, and establish peace (see 2 Nephi 3:12).

We do not have to prove that the Book of Mormon is true. The Book is its own proof. All we need to do is read it and declare it! The Book of Mormon is not on trial—the people of the world, including the members of the Church, are on trial as to what they will do with this second witness for Christ” (*Conference Report*, October 1984, 7; *Ensign* November 1984, 8).

I am deeply committed to the book as an authentic ancient scripture. The Spirit has born witness to my soul on numerous occasions as I have studied and pondered its verses. I know with all my heart that the book was written by ancient prophets who intended for their writings to come forth to the world and be translated in our day by Joseph Smith, Jr., through the “gift and power of God.”

Michael J. Preece

The Book of Omni

The custodians and authors of the small plates of Nephi during this period were Omni the son of Jarom, Omni's son Amaron, Amaron's brother Chemish, Abinadom the son of Chemish, and Amaleki the son of Abinadom.

Chapter Outline of Omni

A brief outline of the book of Mosiah, worth committing to memory, is as follows:

Omni 1 Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

Omni Chapter 1

Scripture Mastery

Omni 1 Mosiah leads the Nephites out of the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla.

1 Behold, it came to pass that I, Omni, being commanded by my father, Jarom, that I should write somewhat upon these plates, to preserve our genealogy—

verse 1 Omni was the son of Jarom. He was custodian of the small plates of Nephi for forty-four years from about 361 BC to 317 BC. He apparently regarded himself less a prophet and more a warrior. He spent most of his life defending the people of Nephi from the Lamanites.

It is interesting that Omni's motivation in writing upon the small plates of Nephi is the same as that of his father Jarom (see Jarom 1:1). He desired to continue the family journal or "book of remembrance."

2 Wherefore, in my days, I would that ye should know that I fought much with the sword to preserve my people, the Nephites, from falling into the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites. But behold, I of myself am a wicked man, and I have not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as I ought to have done.

verse 2 "I of myself am a wicked man" While it is not for us to judge the candor or modesty in Omni's confession, we can observe that he probably did not possess the Spirit of the Holy Ghost since his three-verse entry into the Book of Mormon contains nothing of a spiritual nature.

Perhaps if we learn a lesson from him, it would be because of his honest and unblinking self-honesty (see also Abinadom's candor in verses 10-11).

3 And it came to pass that two hundred and seventy and six years had passed away, and we had many seasons of peace; and we had many seasons of serious war and bloodshed. Yea, and in fine, two hundred and eighty and two years had

passed away, and I had kept these plates according to the commandments of my fathers; and I conferred them upon my son Amaron. And I make an end.

verse 3 This verse likely consists of two entries made six years apart.

The expression “in fine” may be interpreted as “finally” or “in conclusion” or “in summary.”

verses 4-5 We will learn that Amaron’s entire five-verse entry onto the plates was probably made on the day he delivered the plates to his brother Chemish. Amaron was custodian of the plates from 317 BC to 279 BC.

4 And now I, Amaron, write the things whatsoever I write, which are few, in the book of my father.

verses 5-7 We learn in these verses that the Lord’s promise in Jarom 1:9 (see the commentary for that verse) is two-edged. The positive “edge” or version is found in Jarom 1:9: If the people keep the commandments, they will prosper in the land. The negative version is found in these verses: If they do not keep the commandments, they will not only fail to prosper, but the Lord will also allow their destruction by their enemies.

5 Behold, it came to pass that three hundred and twenty years had passed away, and the more wicked part of the Nephites were destroyed.

6 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.

verse 6 We have previously discussed this covenant of the Lord with the Book of Mormon people: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land” (1 Nephi 2:20). This verse contains the corollary to that promise of the Lord: “Inasmuch as ye will *not* keep my commandments ye shall *not* prosper in the land” (italics added).

7 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.

8 And it came to pass that I did deliver the plates unto my brother Chemish.

9 Now I, Chemish, write what few things I write, in the same book with my brother; for behold, I saw the last which he wrote, that he wrote it with his own hand; and he wrote it in the day that he delivered them unto me. And after this manner we

keep the records, for it is according to the commandments of our fathers. And I make an end.

verse 9 Chemish has the distinction of having written only a single verse onto the small plates of Nephi. He wrote into the record less than any other of the Book of Mormon's authors.

Chemish and his son Abinadom will have possession of the plates for about sixty-nine years from 279 BC to about 210 BC.

For commentary on the Hebrew name of the name Chemish, see the supplemental article, *Names in the Book of Mormon*.

10 Behold, I, Abinadom, am the son of Chemish. Behold, it came to pass that I saw much war and contention between my people, the Nephites, and the Lamanites; and I, with my own sword, have taken the lives of many of the Lamanites in the defence of my brethren.

11 And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates which is had by the kings, according to the generations; and I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy; wherefore, that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end.

verse 11 “plates which is had by the kings” These are, of course, the large plates of Nephi. A plural verb are might be better here, though one might argue that the singular verb is refers to “the record of this people.”

“according to the generations” Each king in succession has written or had written in turn the history of his reign onto the large plates of Nephi.

Abinadom mentions that he knows of no “new” revelations or prophecies beyond those which have been recorded previously on the small plates of Nephi. It seems likely that Abinadom was not spiritually positioned so as to receive revelations from the Lord. He seems content with the idea that no new revelations are needed.

12 Behold, I am Amaleki, the son of Abinadom. Behold, I will speak unto you somewhat concerning Mosiah, who was made king over the land of Zarahemla; for behold, he being warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness—

verse 12 Perhaps the book of Omni should have been called the book of Amaleki, since this childless record keeper wrote over half of its thirty verses. Amaleki's contribution to the Book of Mormon is substantial. In nineteen verses he will introduce three entirely new groups of people in the book. These include the Mulekites, the Jaredites, and the Zeniffites. More about these later.

The Mosiah in this verse is often referred to as “Mosiah I” to distinguish him from his grandson, Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin. The latter Mosiah is similarly, but

infrequently, referred to as “Mosiah II.” Little is known of the elder Mosiah’s genealogy. We may be inclined to assume that he was a descendant of Nephi, but there is no good evidence to indicate that the Nephite kingship necessarily passed down from father to son among Nephi’s descendants. Amaleki, of course, is a descendant of Jacob.

Much of Amaleki’s writings are concerned with the dramatic and important historical events that occurred during his lifetime. At this point please read the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Omni*. It is likely that Amaleki took possession of the plates some time before 210 BC. He will eventually deliver them up to King Benjamin in about 130 BC. The date of Mosiah’s departure from the land of Nephi is not known but has been suggested to be about 210 BC.

“Mosiah [was] warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi” This excursion was not likely undertaken electively by Mosiah and his people. Apparently there was immediate danger, likely imposed by the Lamanites, which threatened them. The Nephites in the land of Nephi at this time were likely being “scourged” by the Lamanites because of the Nephites’ disobedience (see Jacob 3:3-4).

John W. Welch has done some interesting research on the Hebrew word *Mosia* (pronounced moe-shee-ah). This work is reported in the article, “What Was a ‘Mosiah’?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book Company and FARMS, 105-07). He suggests that *Mosia* is a Hebrew title which is found in the Hebrew versions of the Old Testament in several places (Deuteronomy 22:27; 28:29; Judges 12:3; Psalm 18:41; and Isaiah 5:29), but the word was never transliterated into the English by the King James translators. The word, therefore, does not appear in the English versions of the Old Testament and could not have been known to Joseph Smith. An examination of all occurrences of this term in the Hebrew Bible suggests an individual with the following traits: (1) The Mosia is a victorious hero appointed by God. (2) He liberates a chosen people from oppression, controversy, and injustice after they cry out for help. (3) Their deliverance is usually accomplished by means of a nonviolent escape or negotiation. (4) The immediate result of the coming of a mosia was an escape from injustice and a return to a state of justice where each man possesses his rightful property.

We will learn that King Mosiah I was a God-appointed hero, a savior and rescuer, who delivered the chosen people of Nephi from danger by leading them in an escape from the land of Nephi. It is unknown whether he was called Mosiah before he functioned as a mosia of his people or whether he gained this well-earned title afterward, perhaps as a royal title.

“and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him” It is likely that a significant number of Nephites, perhaps even a majority, chose not to travel with Mosiah, but rather remain behind in the city of Nephi.

The word “wilderness” is found three times in this verse and in the verse that follows. All three refer to the narrow strip of wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla. See the illustration *Hypothetical Map of the Book of Mormon Lands*. See also *Notes on the Hypothetical Map of Book of Mormon Lands*.

13 And it came to pass that he did according as the Lord had commanded him. And they departed out of the land into the wilderness, as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord; and they were led by many preachings and prophesyings. And they were admonished continually by the word of God; and they were led by the power of his arm, through the wilderness until they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla.

verse 13 “they were led by many preachings and prophesyings” This contingent of Nephites led by Mosiah were apparently a spiritually literate people who possessed a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught previously by Nephi.

“they were admonished continually by the word of God” One of the meanings of the word *admonish*, from *Webster’s 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* is, “to instruct or direct.” For alternate meanings of this same word, see the commentary for Mosiah 26:6.

“they came down into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla” The word “down” suggests that Zarahemla was at a lower elevation than the land of Nephi. We know that the direction from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla is roughly north.

The name *Zarahemla* likely derives from a Hebrew word meaning “seed of compassion” or “child of grace, pity, or compassion” (see John A. Tvedtnes, *Ensign* [October 1986], 65). Perhaps the Mulekite leader was given this name because his ancestor had been rescued when the other sons of King Zedekiah were slain during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

14 And they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla. Now, there was great rejoicing among the people of Zarahemla; and also Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah with the plates of brass which contained the record of the Jews.

verse 14 This is the first mention of the people of Zarahemla. We commonly, of course, refer to them as Mulekites. The terms *Mulekite* or *Mulekites* is not used even once in the Book of Mormon, however. We will not actually read the name Mulek, from whom many of them descended, until Mosiah 25:2. Mulek was a son of King Zedekiah of Judah. His name is clearly of Hebrew origin. Mulek means “little king” or simply “king” (see the commentary for Mosiah 25:2 for more information on the name Mulek).

Is Mulek ever mentioned in the Bible? For a review of Jerusalem at the time of King Zedekiah and for an exciting explanation of why there is good reason to believe

that Mulek might be, in fact, mentioned in the Bible, see the supplemental article, *Jerusalem at the Time of Lehi*.

The people of Zarahemla were a culturally and spiritually degenerate people. Their Hebrew language had been badly corrupted, and they had neither scriptures nor prophets to guide them. Thus, they formed quite a contrast with the people led by Mosiah.

“Zarahemla did rejoice exceedingly” Their leader was a man named Zarahemla. It is likely that the people of Zarahemla had relatively recently arrived in the area where Mosiah found them, as no ancestral name other than Zarahemla was applied to the land. Zarahemla could have had a father or grandfathers with the same name, however. The people of Zarahemla may have represented only a small segment of the descendants of Mulek and those who came with him. Nowhere is Zarahemla referred to as a king of his people. Perhaps he was something like a “chief” over this limited group of people.

15 Behold, it came to pass that Mosiah discovered that the people of Zarahemla came out from Jerusalem at the time that Zedekiah, king of Judah, was carried away captive into Babylon.

16 And they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them; and they had dwelt there from that time forth.

verse 16 “they journeyed in the wilderness, and were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters” Their journey in the wilderness may have taken them from Jerusalem to a sea port. A port in Egypt seems most likely since Egypt was an ally of Mulek’s father, and the ports of Israel and Phoenicia at the time were controlled by Babylon. The “hand of the Lord” might well have been the Phoenicians who were the premier sailors of that era and frequented Egyptian ports (John L. Sorenson, “The ‘Mulekites’,” *BYU Studies* volume 30, number 3, 1990, 8-9).

The Book of Mormon text does not suggest the route which the Mulekites took to the New World. However, it is likely they went west through the Mediterranean and then across the Atlantic Ocean. We may well wonder why any ancient Phoenician seaman would have dared to make this journey into the unknown. Likely a good sum of money was involved, and there is considerable evidence for other ancient ocean crossings. Also the prevailing winds and currents from the strait of Gibraltar would have taken them to the Caribbean (*Ibid.*, 9-10). It is likely that the sailing crew that brought them to the New World would not have been able to return since the return journey is not facilitated by the prevailing winds and currents. Thus the crew may well have settled with them and were numbered among the Mulekites.

The evidence for the Mulekites’ landing on the gulf coast of Mesoamerica is compelling: “First, the immigrant group’s discovery of the last Jaredite survivor could

only have been near the east sea (Ether 9:3 puts the position of the final battleground near that sea). Second, the city of Mulek was located only a few miles from the east sea (Alma 51:26), and we may suppose that this was where the newcomers settled first (compare Alma 8:7). Third, the River Sidon probably enters the east sea no great distance from this city of Mulek, suggesting a plausible route along which the ancestors of Zarahemla and his people ‘came . . . up into the south wilderness’ (Alma 22:31) to their city on the upper river where the Nephites later found them” (*Ibid.*, 10.) See the map *Book of Mormon Lands, a Proposed Setting*.

The Mulekites had probably landed in the New World by 575 BC.

In addition to the Jaredites, the Lehites, and the Mulekites, recent archaeological evidences have suggested that many others came as well, although how, when, and where they came from remains obscure. Since 1975 archeologists have reported ancient inscriptions in west European or North African writing systems from remote locations throughout much of the United States and Canada. These discoveries were initially received by the archaeological community with much skepticism, but in recent years their skepticism has begun to disintegrate. In 1996 John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish re-published an updated exhaustive *Bibliography, Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans*, (FARMS, Provo, Utah) initially published in 1990.

17 And at the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions, and had fallen by the sword from time to time; and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them.

verse 17 “they had become exceedingly numerous” Dr. John L. Sorenson has seen this expression as evidence that the Mulekites combined with “others” on their arrival in the New World. “From the thumbnail sketch of their history in Omni we cannot tell much, but their becoming ‘exceedingly numerous’ under such difficult pioneer circumstances sounds unlikely on the grounds of natural increase alone.” Speaking of the Mulekites’ journey to the New World, Dr. Sorenson said, “It is likely that there would not have been women aboard for most or all of the crew. For those men to reproduce, as is implied in the expression ‘exceedingly numerous,’ they would have had to find and take ‘native’ or ‘other’ women” (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 17).

“they had had many wars and serious contentions” One wonders whether the Mulekites had fought among themselves or whether they encountered hostile indigenous peoples in the area in which they settled.

“their language had become corrupted” While the Jews in Mulek’s party would have spoken mainly Hebrew, it is possible that there was a diversity of languages among the crew. This may have been a factor in the corruption of their language.

Another factor may well have been the Mulekites' intermarrying with and otherwise joining with the indigenous people that were here at the time of their coming ashore (see the commentary for verse 21 which suggests there may have been Jaredite survivors among others). Thus, their languages may have become blended.

18 But it came to pass that Mosiah caused that they should be taught in his language. And it came to pass that after they were taught in the language of Mosiah, Zarahemla gave a genealogy of his fathers, according to his memory; and they are written, but not in these plates.

verse 18 What language did the Nephites speak at the time of Mosiah? What was “the language of Mosiah”? In the first centuries after Lehi's landing, the Nephites and probably the Mulekites likely maintained their Hebrew speech. However, when Mosiah's group of refugees left the land of Nephi and came upon the land of Zarahemla, some 390 years had passed, and it was about 210 BC. Sufficient time had passed that their languages had diverged, and the two groups spoke distinct languages. They were unable to understand each other. It seems likely that “the language of Mosiah” was Hebrew or some derivation thereof. There are some intriguing questions for which we do not have the answers. For example, were all of the Mulekites taught Mosiah's form of Hebrew or only their leader Zarahemla? It does seem a bit unlikely that all of the Mulekites learned Hebrew. Perhaps there was sufficient intercourse among the more common peoples that some universal hybrid form of language—a so-called “lingua franca”—developed. It is interesting that Benjamin, a generation later, was able to speak to all his people so that they understood.

Once they were able to communicate, Zarahemla gave from memory a genealogy of his fathers to Mosiah. We learn in Mosiah 25:2 that Zarahemla descended from Zedekiah through Mulek (see also Helaman 8:21).

Zarahemla's genealogy was written down, but not on the small plates of Nephi. Where was it written down? Probably on the large plates of Nephi. We know that this group of Nephite migrants did have with them the large plates of Nephi as well as the small plates of Nephi since both sets were later delivered to Mosiah's son, King Benjamin. We know that the prophet Amaleki took with him the small plates of Nephi, but how did they obtain the large plates of Nephi? They were held in the possession of the Nephite king in the land of Nephi. Presumably Mosiah obtained them. But how did he obtain them? Was he the secular king of the Nephites before the group left the land of Nephi? The text is not clear on this point. It does seem likely that Mosiah was senior descendant of Nephi and thus the king of the Nephites in the land of Nephi.

19 And it came to pass that the people of Zarahemla, and of Mosiah, did unite together; and Mosiah was appointed to be their king.

verse 19 Even though Zarahemla was leader of his people, it seems likely that either the Mulekites did not have a tradition of strong leadership or perhaps Zarahemla was not an especially strong leader. This might explain how easily Zarahemla and the Mulekites acquiesced to Mosiah's leadership.

It is certainly plausible that all of the people who descended from those who brought Mulek to the New World were not bonded together into a single ethnic group. They may have become quite scattered. Perhaps this is why there is no name such as "Mulekite" ever given to them in the Book of Mormon text. The group led by Zarahemla and discovered by Mosiah may have been just one of several factions.

The political amalgamation described in this verse did not actually result in a complete cultural integration of the two groups. We will find evidences in the remaining Book of Mormon text that the two groups were usually counted separately (see, for example, Mosiah 25:4; Helaman 8:21). By 4 Nephi 1:37-38, however, when the total of all Book of Mormon peoples are divided into seven tribes, there is no mention of the Zarahemlaites. Presumably by then they had become so fused with Nephite society, that they were not identifiable as a separate group.

The willingness of those Zarahemlaites in the land of Zarahemla to accept Mosiah as their king suggests that this was more than a political alliance. Their accepting Mosiah's rule suggests that they accept the religion of the Nephites as well.

20 And it came to pass in the days of Mosiah, there was a large stone brought unto him with engravings on it; and he did interpret the engravings by the gift and power of God.

verse 20 Who engraved this large stone? It would have been engraved by those Mulekites who discovered Coriantumr. It was probably engraved in the city of Mulek. This is the only mention of this stone. One wonders what happened to it.

Coriantumr, as we will learn later, was the leader of one of two great armies of Jaredites that had fought for years resulting in the annihilation of the warriors in both the Jaredite armies. He had eventually killed the leader of the other army, Shim. Though he was wounded in the process, he became the sole survivor of the Jaredite armies.

21 And they gave an account of one Coriantumr, and the slain of his people. And Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla; and he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons.

verse 21 "They" refers to "the engravings" in the previous verse. The discovery of Coriantumr by the Mulekites was prophesied earlier by the prophet Ether (Ether 11:20-21; 13:20-22).

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that Coriantumr was the last living Jaredite. "In Book of Mormon terms it is extremely unlikely that the entire Jaredite population without exception showed up to be exterminated at the hill Ramah, as Latter-

day Saints sometimes have inferred from the words of Ether [Ether 13:20-21]. All in the organized armies may have done so, but inevitably there would have been survivors in remote byways at least” (John L. Sorenson, “The ‘Mulekites’,” *BYU Studies* volume 30, number 3, 1990,, 12).

“he dwelt with them for the space of nine moons” This is the only use of the term “moon” for month on the small plates of Nephi. The words “month” and “months” will appear on Mormon’s abridgment—the plates of Mormon—some sixteen times. It is likely that the Nephites utilized the lunar calendar in which the year consisted of twelve months or moons and 354.367 days (Randall P. Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates,” a FARMS reprint).

We are never told when the great final battle of the Jaredites occurred; when Jaredite civilization ended, and when Coriantumr was discovered by the people of Zarahemla. We do know that this account was made by the prophet Amaleki prior to the time when he delivered the small plates of Nephi to Benjamin in 130 BC. The people of Zarahemla left Jerusalem at the time of its destruction in 586 BC (Omni 1:15-16; Helaman 8:21). Thus, we may conclude that Coriantumr killed Shiz between the time of the Mulekites arrival in the New World in about 586 BC and 130 BC. Brother John L. Sorenson, an LDS anthropologist specializing in Mesoamerica, proposes a date of about 580 BC which coincides with the dramatic fall of the Olmec civilization which he reckons to be at about that same time (“The Years of the Jaredites,” FARMS Preliminary Report, 1969). Another prominent LDS anthropologist, Bruce W. Warren, has also tried to correlate the fall of the Jaredites with the fall of the Olmecs. He has argued for a later date, about 301 BC (*New Evidences of Christ in Ancient America*, Provo, Utah: Stratford Books, 1999, 22-23).

22 It also spake a few words concerning his fathers. And his first parents came out from the tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people; and the severity of the Lord fell upon them according to his judgments, which are just; and their bones lay scattered in the land northward.

verse 22 “It” refers to the “large stone” in verse 20.

“his first parents came out from the tower” In Book of Mormon usage, the word *tower* relates to the “great tower” that was built, according to Genesis 11, in the land of Shinar, or Mesopotamia (see Ether 1:3, 5, 33) a few generations after the great Flood, and is commonly referred to as “the tower of Babel.” It was a giant platform with stepped, sloping sides, called in the Babylonian (Akkadian) language *ziqurratu* and commonly rendered as *ziggurat*. Although the symbolism of ziggurats is not completely understood, they focused attention heavenward and are thought to have represented, among other things a holy mountain, representing the connection between heaven and earth, as true temples are meant to do. These structures were thought of as artificial

mountains where deity could dwell and appear to mortals in sacred privacy. The attempt to build “a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Genesis 11:4; cf. Title Page; Helaman 6:28) indicates not that these people were foolishly attempting to climb to heaven but rather that they wanted to build a prominent tower that rose high into the sky. Unfortunately, there are no contemporary historical accounts of this episode, and the brevity of the biblical account leaves many questions unanswered. For example, the people involved are never named, nor can a precise date be given. The city in which the tower was being built is generally accepted as Babylon based on Genesis 11:9. Post-biblical Jewish traditions that Nimrod built the tower developed from the note in Genesis that Nimrod founded several cities in Mesopotamia, including Babylon (Genesis 10:9-10). One Babylonian tradition credits the god Marduk with founding and naming the city.

All six references to the tower of Babel in the Book of Mormon occur in relation to the Jaredites, whom the Lord directed to leave the area of the tower and to travel to the Americas (Ether 1:38-43). The tower is mentioned in a Jaredite inscription on the stone referred to in this verse and in Ether’s record of the Jaredite people (Mosiah 28:17). Moroni said that as he edited Ether’s record, he dispensed with the portion that dealt with the creation of the earth “even to the great tower” (Ether 1:3) but provided a partial account of what was available “from the tower down unto [the Jaredites] were destroyed” (Ether 1:5). Although the Book of Mormon references corroborate the basic account in the Bible, they do not provide any significant additional historical information, except that Helaman 6:28 contains the theological observation, not specified in the Bible, that Satan motivated the people to build this tower.

It may seem strange to modern readers that bulky earthen platforms could be termed “towers” by Book of Mormon scribes. Yet when the Spanish invaders saw the Mesoamerican temple platforms, they immediately called them *torres* (“towers”), so height, not shape, must have been the main criterion.

Among Book of Mormon peoples, these towers served different purposes. King Benjamin’s tower enabled many of the people to hear his farewell address (see Mosiah 2:7) and to more effectively participate in his son Mosiah’s coronation.

Towers built and controlled by families or kin groups were used as places of personal worship, as shown by Nephi’s (the son of Helaman) praying from the top of his own tower (see Helaman 7:10-11). The equivalence of such towers to mountains and the Old World ziggurats is clear: Nephi (Lehi’s son) and the brother of Jared ascended mountains to pray (see 1 Nephi 17:7; Alma 31:13; Ether 3:1; 4:1), anticipating the later practice among Book of Mormon peoples of worshipping in sanctuaries built for that purpose (see Alma 15:17; 31:12-18).

In addition to affording strategic views of potential enemy attack (see Mosiah 11:12-13), towers among both Nephites and Lamanites were marks of an influential community. They served as rallying points for local governments (see Alma 48:1), and

like European cathedrals, they asserted the renown and political power of the community. Accordingly, when Captain Moroni subdued the king-men, who had defied the authority of the Nephite government, the defeated survivors of the movement were “compelled to hoist the title [flag] of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities” as a sign of submission (see Alma 51:7-8, 13, 17, 20). Any settlement deserving to be labeled a city would have had a tower, and larger cities might have had many. The ability of a ruler to muster manpower and organize resources to construct a tower—the bigger the better—communicated his administrative ability, power, and glory (adapted from John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985], 171-74).

“severity of the Lord” This is an interesting phrase which, in all scripture, is unique to this verse. A related expression is “severity of God” which is found only in Romans 11:22. One might define the phrase as meaning something like “rigorous judgments of the Lord.”

We will read in the book of Ether of the battles of mass destruction that occurred among the Jaredite peoples (Ether 13-15).

23 Behold, I, Amaleki, was born in the days of Mosiah; and I have lived to see his death; and Benjamin, his son, reigneth in his stead.

verse 23 Amaleki notes that he “was born in the days of Mosiah,” but he does not say where he was born nor specify which “days of Mosiah” he meant—those in the land of Nephi or those in the land Zarahemla. If he was born in the land of Nephi, he was numbered among those who left the land with Mosiah and would have witnessed firsthand the events he wrote about.

From the time of Mosiah’s departure from the land of Nephi in about 210 BC to Amaleki’s delivering the plates to King Benjamin in about 130 BC was some eighty years. This observation does not prove anything, but if Amaleki was born in the land of Nephi, then he was quite young, probably not more than his twenties, when the Nephites departed the land of Nephi with Mosiah.

24 And behold, I have seen, in the days of king Benjamin, a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites. But behold, the Nephites did obtain much advantage over them; yea, insomuch that king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla.

verse 24 If you are not familiar with the story of Zeniff, who led a group of Nephites who departed Zarahemla about 200 BC to return to the land of Nephi and reclaim their “homeland,” then please take a few moments now to review that story in the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*. Pay particular attention to the summary of the record of Zeniff beginning in the fifth paragraph of that summary. The complete story of this people is reported in Mosiah 9-22. It is noteworthy that Zeniff’s

expeditions were not commanded by the Lord as was the expedition of Mosiah and his people who came out of the land of Nephi. Zeniff's resulted from the personal desires of men to return to the lands of their inheritance.

The Lamanites' attack on Zarahemla described in this verse likely occurred about 160-150 BC. King Laman's son led the attacks, and they probably came about the same time as the second attack on the Nephites in the city of Nephi during the reign of Zeniff or the two attacks during the reign of King Noah, since the Lamanites were otherwise peaceful toward the Zeniffites and Nephites during this period. The Lamanites' motivation for these attacks seemed to be their fear of growing Nephite strength. In addition, there existed the Lamanite tradition of hatred toward the Nephites which had its origins in the belief that Nephi had wronged his elder brothers. Also, the Lamanites may have also been angered by the fact that the Nephites had moved the records of the people from the land of Nephi.

King Benjamin's victory seems to have unified Zarahemla and established it as Nephite territory. The defeat of the Nephite king Noah established the land of Nephi as Lamanite territory. After these wars there remained only the two independent kings, the Nephite king Benjamin in Zarahemla and the Lamanite king, the son of Laman, in the land of Nephi.

verses 25-26 These verses establish the fact that Amaleki was a man of great faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a faithful preacher of the gospel.

25 And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man before the Lord, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, exhorting all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in prophesying, and in revelations, and in the ministering of angels, and in the gift of speaking with tongues, and in the gift of interpreting languages, and in all things which are good; for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord; and that which is evil cometh from the devil.

verse 25 The large plates of Nephi were handed down from Nephi himself to each Nephite king in turn. Thus they would have automatically passed from Mosiah I to his son Benjamin. The small plates, on the other hand, were handed down through the family of Nephi's brother Jacob. After Amaleki finished the plates, having no son to whom he might deliver the plates, he decided to give them to King Benjamin. Undoubtedly they were highly prized by Benjamin who would have certainly read them eagerly and thrilled in their contents. When Benjamin took possession of both sets of plates it marked the first time both sets had been possessed by one man since the time of Nephi, an interval of over three hundred years.

“and believe in prophesying” Here is a profound principle that has been emphasized previously: All true religion is revealed religion. All influence which

prompts us toward fulfilling our eternal potential and cautions us against distracting worldly influence comes from the Lord through the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. Thus, “there is nothing good save it comes from the Lord.”

26 And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.

verse 26 “ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel” Amaleki spells out clearly for all to hear, particularly, perhaps, the Jews, that Jesus Christ is the “Holy One of Israel,” the God of the Old Testament.

“offer your whole souls as an offering unto him” This phrase connotes complete submission to the Savior and is worth contemplating.

“as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” Amaleki puts this promise in the form of a binding and sacred oath. To be “saved,” of course, means to be exalted.

verses 27-30 Here Amaleki mentions the journey of those Nephites who returned to the land of Nephi about 200 BC under the leadership of Zeniff to claim the “land of their inheritance.” You have just reviewed this story in the *Narrative Historical Summary of the book of Mosiah*. Zeniff, as you will recall, was a righteous man and not the “stiffnecked man” referred to in verse 28.

27 And now I would speak somewhat concerning a certain number who went up into the wilderness to return to the land of Nephi; for there was a large number who were desirous to possess the land of their inheritance.

28 Wherefore, they went up into the wilderness. And their leader being a strong and mighty man, and a stiffnecked man, wherefore he caused a contention among them; and they were all slain, save fifty, in the wilderness, and they returned again to the land of Zarahemla.

29 And it came to pass that they also took others to a considerable number, and took their journey again into the wilderness.

30 And I, Amaleki, had a brother, who also went with them; and I have not since known concerning them. And I am about to lie down in my grave; and these plates are full. And I make an end of my speaking.

verse 30 It is interesting to learn that a brother of Amaleki was one of those who went with Zeniff. We sense a note of sadness in Amaleki’s statement, “I have not since known concerning them.” Amaleki likely had a great affection for his brother.

“these plates are full” This observation was apparently intended to be taken literally. We know, however, that it was not literally true. There was just enough room

remaining for the prophet Mormon, in about AD 385, to enter onto the small plates an editorial comment which we now refer to as the Words of Mormon.

Why did not Jacob or his descendants add any new gold plates to those Nephi fashioned? Perhaps they lacked the resources or technology. More likely, however, the Jacobite authors regarded the plates as Nephi's record. They were a sacred legacy to which they were entitled to add only sparingly.

The writings of Amaleki make at least three contributions:

1. As a historical link, they are the source of all that is known about king Mosiah (Omni 12-23); they document the merger between Nephites and the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:19); and they tell of two attempts by Nephite groups to regain an inheritance in the land of Nephi—the first a failure, and the second a qualified success (Omni 1:27-30; cf. Mosiah 9:1-4).

2. Amaleki's recording of God's commandment for the righteous Nephites to depart out of the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12) verified the fulfillment of a prophecy uttered by Jacob more than three hundred years before (Jacob 3:4).

3. Amaleki's writing places a final and appropriate admonition near the end of the small plates of Nephi for the readers to come unto Christ (Omni 1:26). This is consistent with the commandment given by his ancestor Nephi that the small plates were to persuade readers to "come unto" Christ (Omni 1:25-26; cf. 1 Nephi 6:4, 6; Jacob 1:1-3; 7:27). Amaleki sealed his plea to come unto Christ and his testimony of how to accomplish it with a promise attested by a sacred oath: "As the Lord liveth ye will be saved" (Omni 1:26).