

# Works of Darkness: Secret Combinations and Covenant Displacement in the Book of Mormon

Kimberly M. Berkey

While the small plates' awareness of their own latter-day emergence—as a component part of the Book of Mormon—is fairly well recognized, it has not yet been systematically traced through the entire record. Less well known is the Book of Mormon's deep awareness of secret combinations and the risk they pose specifically to the covenant. By tracing the theology of the Lehitic covenant through the record and closely examining the editorial process surrounding Helaman 5, this paper will deal thematically with both concerns as a method of pointing out the Book of Mormon's main purposes from the point of view of its ancient authors/editors—namely, that the Book of Mormon is intended to warn the Gentiles about secret combinations in order to ensure the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant.

I should begin with a short discussion of terminology, particularly regarding what I mean by the “Lehitic covenant.” This covenant, as I understand it, encompasses all the prophecies concerning Lehi's posterity, and it includes four basic elements: (1) settlement in a promised land (2 Nephi 1:5); (2) the familiar assurance that “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” (Jarom 1:9); (3) a guarantee that Lehi's seed will never perish (2 Nephi 25:21); and (4) the promise that a record will come forth to bring the remnant of Lehi's seed to the knowledge of the covenant. It is this last element in particular that concerns us here. Thus with the term *covenant displacement* I refer to the idea that, at any given point, the complete fulfillment of these several elements of the covenant remains postponed—and in particular that the Lehitic covenant holds force past the end of the Book of Mormon and persists today, its fulfillment still to come.

The small plates of the Book of Mormon are keenly aware of their own emergence in the latter days and make frequent reference to this fourth element of the Lehitic covenant. The title page of the Book of Mormon points to this textual self-consciousness when it qualifies the Lamanites as “a remnant of the house of Israel” and addresses the record to them, “to show unto [them] what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever.” Second Nephi 30:3 makes a similar point: “After the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.” Later writers were also aware of this prophecy. Says Enos: “I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time” (Enos 1:16).

Second Nephi 26–27 encapsulates this focus, speaking at great length about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. In these chapters, Nephi reworks the text of Isaiah 29, weaving it with his own prophecy. Less well known is the fact that he also alludes to the sermon of his brother Jacob from 2 Nephi 6–10.<sup>1</sup> A number of identical phrases are found in both chapters.<sup>2</sup> What is more, Nephi elaborates on a theme introduced by Jacob: that the Gentiles are a means of God's judgment on Israel but will also be the means of Israel's ultimate salvation. Nephi thus ensures that each of the “three witnesses” of the small plates—Nephi, Jacob, and Isaiah—contributes to the message of these two chapters, particularly as they relate to the redemption of Israel through the emergence of the Book of Mormon. In addition to discussing the redemption of Israel, each of these three witnesses, in the chapters Nephi incorporates, makes mention of secret combinations. Importantly, the phrase *secret combinations* is

found only twice in all of the small plates—once in 2 Nephi 9:9 and again in 2 Nephi 26:22. Jacob makes it clear that the author of these covert organizations is none other than the devil: “[The] devil . . . stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness” (2 Nephi 9:9). Nephi, in nearly identical terms, writes, “There are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness” (2 Nephi 26:22). Not to be left out, Isaiah describes those who “seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? And who knoweth us?” (2 Nephi 27:27; cf. Isaiah 29:15).

Nephi has chosen his sources wisely. His Isaianic midrash is performed on a chapter that combines the theme of secret combinations with the coming forth of a sealed book, and his allusion to the words of his brother Jacob incorporates the only other location in the small plates where secret combinations as such are explicitly mentioned. Nephi’s encapsulation of the self-conscious meta-text of the small plates is inseparable from the question of secret combinations.

Such insights allow for an analysis of the broad structure of 2 Nephi 26–27. These chapters are organized around the histories of two groups of people: the Lehites and the Gentiles. Verses 1–18 of chapter 26 concern Lehi’s seed. Signs of Christ’s death and resurrection are given, followed by a brief interim of righteousness, succeeded by rapid moral decay and the complete destruction of the Nephites. It is in the midst of this turmoil, besieged by the Lord God, “brought low in the dust,” that a record is “written and sealed up in a book.” With this, Nephi turns to the question of the Gentiles in 2 Nephi 26:19–27:33. Secret combinations are mentioned first (26:22), after which there is a lengthy aside contrasting the works of darkness with the Lord’s pattern of inclusion and light (26:22–33). As with the Lehites, the text goes on (27:1–24) to describe a destruction that shares many of the same elements with the Nephites’ extermination (thunder, earthquakes, fire), and it culminates in the coming forth of the record—including the prophecy traditionally interpreted as a specific reference to Professor Charles Anthon.<sup>3</sup> The prophecy comes to its climax with a direct quotation from the Lord (27:25–35), who announces that he is “able to do [his] own work,” pronounces woe on secret combinations, and effects a series of reversals (the deaf shall hear, the blind see, the poor rejoice, and those who erred come to understanding).

Nephi structures history around two separate, but parallel, events, each involving a destruction and the record. For the Lehites it is a question of *writing* the record, while for the Gentiles it is the *coming forth* of that same record, but both events hinge on a question of destruction and how that destruction will affect the book in question. For the Nephites, it is destruction that necessitates the record’s creation; for the Gentiles, final destruction is averted by the record’s reemergence.

### Mormon and Moroni as Editors

Mormon and Moroni, the primary editors of the Book of Mormon, seem to have been profoundly influenced by 2 Nephi 26–27. This can be witnessed especially through a series of similarities between 2 Nephi 26–27 and Mormon 8, laid out in table 1 below.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1. Comparing Nephi and Moroni**

	<b>2 Nephi 26–27</b>	<b>Mormon 8</b>
<b>Isaiah</b>	(Midrash on Isaiah 29)	“Search the prophecies of Isaiah” (Mormon 8:23)
<b>Voices from Dust</b>	“For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust” (2 Nephi 26:16)	“Those saints who have gone before me . . . shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord” (Mormon 8:23)
<b>Speak from Dead</b>	“. . . and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit” (2 Nephi 26:16)	“And it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead” (Mormon 8:26)
<b>Blood from Ground</b>	“The cry of the blood of the saints shall ascend up to God from the ground against them” (2 Nephi 26:3)	“The blood of the saints shall cry unto the Lord” (Mormon 8:27) “The blood of their fathers and their husbands . . . cry unto the Lord from the ground” (Mormon 8:40)
<b>Destruction</b>	“They shall be visited with thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble” (2 Nephi 26:6)  “They shall be visited of the Lord . . . with thunder and with earthquake, and with a great noise, and with storm, and with tempest, and with the flame of devouring fire” (2 Nephi 27:2)	“There shall be heard of fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke in foreign lands; and there shall also be heard of wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places” (Mormon 8:29–30)
<b>Opposition</b>	“Those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not have them, for they seek to destroy the things of God” (2 Nephi 26:17)	“He that . . . shall say: We will destroy the work of the Lord, and the Lord will not remember his covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel—the same is in danger to be hewn down and cast into the fire” (Mormon 8:21)
<b>Wealth</b>	“The laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31)	“. . . lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel. . . . For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel” (Mormon 8:36–37)
<b>Priestcraft</b>	“. . . preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain” (2 Nephi 26:20)  “He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the	“There shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins” (Mormon 8:32)  “Leaders of churches and teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts” (Mormon 8:28)  “. . . because of the praise of the world” (Mormon 8:28)

	world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion" (2 Nephi 26:29)	the world" (Mormon 8:38)
<b>Many Churches</b>	"... have built up many churches" (2 Nephi 26:20)  "There are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice" (2 Nephi 26:21)	"There shall be churches built up" (Mormon 8:32)
<b>Sign-Seekers</b>	"And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them" (2 Nephi 27:15)	"And he that saith: Show unto me, or ye shall be smitten—let him beware lest he commandeth that which is forbidden of the Lord" (Mormon 8:18)
<b>Secret Combinations</b>	"And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil" (2 Nephi 26:22)  "And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord! And their works are in the dark" (2 Nephi 27:27)	"The blood of the saints shall cry unto the Lord, because of secret combinations and works of darkness" (Mormon 8:27)  "Why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain?" (Mormon 8:40)

If this table assembles primarily thematic resemblances between 2 Nephi 26–27 and Mormon 8, it overlooks one further similarity between Nephi and Mormon/Moroni: a turn to the future.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly relevant in terms of something I will call covenant displacement. A temporal gap is evidenced in the division of 2 Nephi 26–27 as outlined above. The second half of these chapters (2 Nephi 26:19–27:33) looks ahead to the role of the Gentiles, emphasizing the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant in their day, completely disregarding the two-thousand-year-long separation between that fulfillment and the very nation to whom the covenant owes its name. Mormon and Moroni likewise show a heavy preoccupation with the future readers of their record, going so far as to leave off writing narrative in order to address the Gentiles directly (see Mormon 5:22–24; Ether 8:23–24; Moroni 10). This strong orientation to future readers—Mormon’s and Moroni’s as much as Nephi’s—is a direct result of their having witnessed the destruction of the Nephites. With the Nephites destroyed and the Lamanites in a state of complete wickedness, it must have seemed clear to these ancient prophets that the fourth, main element of the Lehitic covenant—namely, that a remnant would be brought to knowledge of the covenant and become a righteous people—would not be accomplished within their lifetime. They had no recourse left but to send their record to a group of temporally distant Gentiles. Their hope, like the covenant itself, was *displaced* to a later generation; thus they sent a record to accompany and to facilitate that hope, a record containing instructions and warnings to the future arbiters of covenant fulfillment.

## Helaman and Covenant Displacement

That Mormon paid careful attention to and had a deep comprehension of Nephi’s threefold focus from 2 Nephi 26–27—on covenant displacement, the emergence of the record, and the role of secret combinations—is best exemplified in his editing of the book of Helaman.

Helaman 5 is the key chapter in this editorial work. It is the miraculous story of a small Lamanite conversion initiated by Nephi and Lehi—two sons of Helaman (to be distinguished from the Nephi and Lehi of the small plates)—within the confines of a prison. Nephi and Lehi, obeying a commission from their father to preach repentance (Helaman 5:6), seem to encounter wave after wave of failure<sup>6</sup> as they progress across the land, until their journey

culminates in their being tossed into prison. Like Alma and Amulek before them (see Alma 14:17–29), the power of these missionaries was not inhibited by temporal restraints. Intent on killing their Nephite prisoners (Helaman 4:22), Lamanite guards enter the prison to find the two men conversing with angels, prompting a transcendent, elemental conversion of everyone in the prison, complete with dark clouds, fiery pillars, earthquakes, and angelic visitation. This small Lamanite contingent of converts proceeded to preach to their brethren until “the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received. And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their fathers” (Helaman 5:50–51).

I see two hands involved in this text: the original author and Mormon (as editor).<sup>7</sup> It seems clear that the original author understood this Lamanite conversion as the fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant and, as such, inscribed it into his narrative. This was accomplished by two main techniques: (1) allusions to major events in Nephite history and (2) symbolic parallels with Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8).

The astute reader will notice almost immediately that Nephi’s acquittal of the judgment seat (Helaman 5:4) echoes Alma’s identical decision in Alma 4:15–19. Equally interesting is the concentration of important Book of Mormon characters mentioned *by name* (Helaman 5:9–12): King Benjamin, Amulek, Zeezrom, Ammon, and Limhi, not to mention the sources for the names of the two main characters, Nephi and Lehi.<sup>8</sup> Further allusions are made to Alma and Abinadi, as well (see table 2). By mentioning such potent figures and events in Nephite history, the author marks this event (Helaman 5) as the culmination, *the* event to which all others had merely been segues.

Table 2. Cataloging Nephite History

	Helaman 5	Reference
<b>Gives Up Judgment-Seat</b>	“Nephi had become weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon him to preach the word of God the remainder of his days” (Helaman 5:4)	“Alma . . . seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful. . . . And he selected a wise man . . . and he was appointed chief judge. . . . He delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah” (Alma 4:15–19)
<b>King Benjamin</b>	“Remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9)	“There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ” (Mosiah 3:17)  “There is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ” (Alma 38:9)
<b>Amulek &amp; Zeezrom</b>	“Remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins” (Helaman 5:10)	“And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not. . . . He shall not save his people in their sins” (Alma 11:34–37)
<b>Prison Type-Scene</b>	“They were taken by an army of the Lamanites and cast into prison” (Helaman 5:21)	“Alma and Amulek answered him nothing; and he smote them again, and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison” (Alma 14:17)
	“. . . cast into prison; yea, even in that same prison in which Ammon and his brethren were cast by the servants of Limhi” (Helaman 5:21)	“They were surrounded by the king’s guard, and were taken, and were bound, and were committed to prison” (Mosiah 7:7)
<b>Angelic Message/ Earth Shaking</b>	“Nephi and Lehi did stand forth and began to speak unto them, saying: Fear not, for behold, it is God that has shown unto you this marvelous thing . . . And behold, when they had said these words, the earth shook exceedingly” (Helaman 5:26–27)	“God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way. . . . And behold, he spake unto us, as if it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet” (Alma 36:6–7)
<b>Shining Faces</b>	“The faces of Nephi and Lehi . . . did shine exceedingly” (Helaman 5:36)	“After Abinadi had spoken these words . . . his face shone with exceeding luster” (Mosiah 13:5)

The author’s second technique is more subtle, employing imagery that corresponds with Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. Again, the names of Nephi and Lehi are crucial since they also refer back to the two founders of the Nephite nation, both of whom witnessed this vision. The most recognizable element common to the vision and Helaman 5 is the cloud of darkness that fills the prison (Helaman 5:28), analogous to the “mist of darkness” through which the

masses made their way to the tree. Lehi's great and spacious building finds its parallel in the prison itself, which threatened to "tumble to the earth" (Helaman 5:31), just as the great and spacious building actually did. These parallels would mean little, however, if they did not include the most important element of the tree of life vision—the tree itself. Here the text supplies a "pillar of fire" (Helaman 5:43). Not only does the vertical linearity of a "pillar" evoke the image of a tree trunk, but the light and glory of fire is reminiscent of brilliant, white, almost luminescent fruit (1 Nephi 8:11). Cementing the parallel is the fact that, after Lehi reached the tree and tasted the fruit, his soul was "filled . . . with exceedingly great joy" (1 Nephi 8:12), language that is strikingly similar to the effect of the pillars of fire: the people within the prison "were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory" (Helaman 5:44–45).

Thus, while Lehi's original vision was tainted by the sting of Laman and Lemuel's rejection of the fruit (1 Nephi 8:17–18), a happier version comes some 550 years later when Laman and Lemuel, through their Lamanite descendants, gather at the root of the tree, beckoned through history (neatly cataloged in Helaman 5) by the fathers—two figures literally named Nephi and Lehi!—who now symbolically stand before them.



**Table 3. Tree of Life Vision**

	<b>Helaman 5</b>	<b>Tree of Life Vision</b>
<b>Names</b>	"Behold, my sons, . . . I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem" (Helaman 5:6)	"[Lehi] spake unto us, saying: Behold, I have . . . seen a vision" (1 Nephi 8:2) "I [Nephi] had desired to know the things that my father had seen" (1 Nephi 11:1)
<b>Metaphor</b>	"Encircled about as if by fire" (Helaman 5:23) "Shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels" (Helaman 5:36) "They were filled as if by fire" (Helaman 5:45)	"A large and spacious field, as if it had been a world" (1 Nephi 8:20)
<b>Cloud of Darkness</b>	"They were overshadowed with a cloud of darkness" (Helaman 5:28)	"There arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness" (1 Nephi 8:23)
<b>Great and Spacious Building</b>	"The walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth" (Helaman 5:27) "Behold the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison trembled again, as if it were about to tumble to the earth" (Helaman 5:31)	"The great and spacious building . . . fell, and the fall thereof was exceedingly great" (1 Nephi 11:36)
<b>Tree of Life</b>	"The walls of the prison did shake as if they were about to tumble to the earth" (Helaman 5:27)	"I beheld a tree" (1 Nephi 8:10)
<b>Fruit of the Tree</b>	"They were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. And behold, the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled" (Helaman 5:44–45)	"As I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also" (1 Nephi 8:12)

While the original author of Helaman 5 understood and portrayed this event as the miraculous and sublime fulfillment of the Lehitic covenant,<sup>9</sup> Mormon had the (dis)advantage of historical perspective. He understood that the brief righteousness manifested by the Lamanites in the wake of their Helaman 5 conversion did not qualify as a *full*-filment of the covenant, because secret combinations would eventually, by effecting the Nephite destruction, cut off the very possibility of true covenant fulfillment for the next fifteen hundred years. Mormon edited the book of Helaman to draw our attention away from, or at least to downplay the lasting significance of, the miraculous events of Helaman 5, and so to focus our attention on the problem of secret combinations.<sup>10</sup>

Mormon lessens the initial impact of Helaman 5 by surrounding the chapter with narratives about secret combinations. Chapters 1–2 deal with secret murders and contention for the judgment seat, eventually introducing Kishkumen, relating the formation of the Gadianton robber band, and describing their flight into the wilderness. After chapter 3 describes at great length the industrial endeavors and northward migration of the



Nephites, chapter 4 regales us further with details about war and contention among the Nephites and Lamanites. That Helaman 5 is introduced only *after* all of this wickedness and destruction shows that the situation was not quite as benevolent as the original author of Helaman 5 thought. This is confirmed drastically when, in chapter 6 and immediately after the mass conversion, the Gadianton robbers suddenly return from their wilderness sojourn to take over the government. Helaman 5 is editorially sandwiched between narratives of violence and destruction initiated and perpetuated by secret combinations, and the effect on the reader is—or at least should be—the shock of realizing that it is secret combinations first and foremost that keep God’s promises from being immediately fulfilled.

### Shining Forth out of Darkness: The Role of the Book of Mormon

Having discussed the self-conscious nature of the small plates, argued for Mormon’s editorial relationship to Nephi’s encapsulation of that awareness, and explored the role of secret combinations in this story, I return, finally, to 2 Nephi 26–27, where we learn that one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon is to overturn secret combinations. 2 Nephi 27:24 introduces a significant change from Isaiah 29:13, the addressee suddenly becoming “him that *shall read* the words that shall be delivered.” Verses 27 and 28 add “I will show unto” and “saith the Lord of Hosts,” strengthening the emphasis that these are the words of the *Lord*. Nephi makes sure to emphasize that these words will come through a written record by changing the audience in verse 24 (as noted above) to create a framing parallel with Isaiah’s retained language in verse 29 (“the words of the book”). In the intervening verses, he pronounces woe on “them that seek deep to hide their counsel” (presumably secret combinations) and foretells that “[he] know[s] all their works” (2 Nephi 27:27). To demonstrate this, the Lord announces a number of reversals: Lebanon will be made a fruitful field, the deaf will hear, the blind will see out of obscurity and darkness.

By addressing these deliverances to the reader of the Book of Mormon, the Lord demonstrates that it is the Book of Mormon itself that will effect the reversals. Foremost among them: the secret combinations Isaiah had described will be revealed and “brought to naught” (2 Nephi 27:31).

Language of reversal in connection with secret combinations in the Book of Mormon is not exclusive to Nephi, however. Alma 37:23 describes a stone that will “shine forth in *darkness* unto *light*,” with the result that the Lord “may discover unto my people who serve me . . . the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness.” This verse also carries important implications for Joseph Smith’s role as translator of the Book of Mormon. Also in verse 23, we find the name “Gazelem,” a name employed as one of Joseph’s code names in the early editions of the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of whether or not the Gazelem of Alma 37:23 makes reference to a seer or a stone,<sup>12</sup> Joseph’s adoption of the name implies that his role is *also* to “discover . . . secret works,” a task, one could argue, that was accomplished primarily in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

By far the most direct and explicit statement of this revelatory aspect of the Book of Mormon comes from the record itself. In Ether 8,<sup>13</sup> Moroni turns to his latter-day readers and offers a warning so crucial to his message that it deserves to be quoted in full:

Wherefore, O ye *Gentiles*, it is wisdom in God that *these things should be shown unto you*, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these *murderous combinations* shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be.

Wherefore, the Lord commandeth you, when ye shall see these things come among you that ye shall awake to a sense of your awful situation, because of this *secret combination* which shall be among you; or wo be unto it,

because of the blood of them who have been slain; for they cry from the dust<sup>14</sup> for vengeance upon it, and also upon those who built it up. (Ether 8:23–24)

Neither Nephi nor Moroni let their message to latter-day Gentiles conclude on that note, however. Both point to a fuller purpose behind the covenant. In Ether 8:26, Moroni continues, “I . . . am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved.” In 2 Nephi 27:33–34, the Lord goes on to inform us that, once secret combinations are completely overturned, Israel as a whole will be redeemed: “Thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of my hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.” Secret combinations and works of darkness, like the Book of Mormon itself, are never far removed from the question of the covenant. Abraham and Jacob, the two patriarchs representative of the Lord’s covenants with his people Israel, are always waiting at the conclusion of this chapter. The ultimate goal of the Lehitic covenant remains, as it always has been, to “land . . . souls at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out” (Helaman 3:30), something that can only be accomplished as secret combinations are obliterated.

Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni, having seen the destruction caused by secret combinations and having their hopes dashed by these covert organizations, wrote their records to warn the future generation about the danger secret combinations pose to the fulfillment of the covenant. Standing on the edge of the temporal chasm that separated them from those future Gentiles who housed the hope of the Lehitic covenant, these ancient authors could do nothing more nor less than speak from the dust, alerting future readers to the marvelous gifts they offered: a record, a warning, and a covenant.

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## NOTES

1. For this information and the evidences that follow, I am indebted to Heather and Grant Hardy, who introduced it during the course of the online collaboration of the seminar.
2. “He that fighteth against Zion shall perish” (2 Nephi 10:13, 16; 26:30–31); “I will be a light unto them” (2 Nephi 10:13; 26:29); “secret works of darkness and murders” (2 Nephi 10:15; 26:20); and “both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female” (2 Nephi 10:16; 26:33).
3. For examples, see Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 2:382, 385–91. Ed J. Pinegar and Richard J. Allen, *Commentaries and Insights on the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi–Alma 29* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2007), 222–24. George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955–61), 1:396. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 1:320–23. Monte S. Nyman, *I, Nephi, Wrote This Record: A Teaching Commentary on the First Book of Nephi and the Second Book of Nephi* (Orem, UT: Granite Publishing, 2003), 659. Robert A. Cloward, “Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 223–26. Among these, only S. Michael Wilcox attempts to read the passage as allegorical, and only after first attesting the Charles Anthon

interpretation, in “Nephi, Isaiah, and the Latter-day Restoration,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 236–37.

4. Mormon 8 is a fascinating confluence of editorial intentionality. It marks the beginning of Moroni’s first contribution to the Book of Mormon after the death of his father, which demonstrates a concerted effort to include the letters and prophecies of Mormon, perhaps as a posthumous get-to-know-you of the man responsible for much of the Book of Mormon. That Moroni uses his position as narrator to resurrect the voice of Mormon creates a truly unique textual relationship between father and son.

5. This point has recently been recognized by Grant Hardy as well. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 78–79, 82, 94. German scholar Gerhard von Rad finds this orientation to the future in Isaiah, as well: “It is at this point, the passionate elimination of all reliance on oneself, that Isaiah’s zeal begins. That he saw a great act of deliverance lying in the immediate future was only one side of his message. . . . The ‘object’ upon which this faith should be based did not, however, as yet exist for his contemporaries; it lay in the future. The astonishing thing was therefore this: Isaiah demanded of his contemporaries that they should now make their existence rest on a future action of God. . . . If his own generation had rejected it, then it must be put in writing for a future one” (*Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. G. M. Stalker, 2 vols. [New York: Harper and Row Publishes, 1965], 2:160–67).

6. The text is not entirely clear on this point. A more nuanced view might hold that the text’s silence regarding potential missionary success among the Nephites has been deliberately muted in order to highlight this conversion experience and to draw a sharper distinction between the Nephites and Lamanites, a theme that is particularly strong in Helaman.

7. I recognize the distinct possibility that the original authorship of Helaman 5 could be attributed to Mormon, but it is ultimately the recontextualization of this chapter that is of importance to this paper.

8. Even more striking is that most of these figures had experienced at least one angelic visitation: King Benjamin in Mosiah 3:2, Amulek in Alma 10:7, and Ammon in Mosiah 27:8–11.

9. The Nephites generally most likely had a different understanding of the Lehitic covenant than we see evidenced by Nephi or Mormon. It is unknown how widely the writings of Nephi were circulated. Mormon himself wasn’t aware of the small plates when he initially began his project, and only inserted them after his abridgment of the large plates was underway (Words of Mormon 1:3–5). Coupled with his historical vantage point, this must have influenced Mormon’s thinking considerably. It is unlikely that the Nephites as a whole were so privileged. Throughout the book of Helaman, the emphasis is placed predominantly on the relationship between the Lamanites and the Nephites. The fulfillment of the covenant represented in Helaman 5 is followed by a period in which both peoples were righteous. If they were unaware of their future annihilation, the Nephites most likely interpreted the Lehitic covenant to imply a future utopia where the recently righteous Lamanites finally joined their always-fairly-righteous Nephite brethren. Again, Mormon had the advantage of historical perspective. When the Nephites were destroyed, that utopian possibility was eliminated, and thus Mormon’s editing of Helaman began.

10. Mormon audiences are largely indebted to Ezra Taft Benson for their awareness of secret combinations: “In the Book of Mormon we find a pattern for preparing for the Second Coming. A major portion of the book centers on the few decades just prior to Christ’s coming to America. . . . From the Book of Mormon we learn how disciples

of Christ live in times of war. From the Book of Mormon we see the evils of secret combinations portrayed in graphic and chilling reality. . . . And more than anything else, we see in the Book of Mormon the dangers of materialism and setting our hearts on the things of the world. Can anyone doubt that this book was meant for us and that in it we find great power, great comfort, and great protection?" ("The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 4). A brief review of the literature available on the book of Helaman will demonstrate how well both President Benson and Mormon succeeded in shifting our attention in Helaman almost exclusively to secret combinations!

11. D&C 78:9; 82:11; 104:26, 43, 45, 46. See Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Seven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books*, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jesse, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 267; Curt A. Bench, ed., *The Parallel Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2009), 149, 152, 204–5.

12. There is some ambiguity here, although the punctuation of the verse would seem to imply the latter. Royal Skousen offers compelling evidence for understanding Gazelem as the name of the servant (*Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* [Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007], 4:2361–63). For a possible etymology, see George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1955–61), 4:162. Like Skousen, Reynolds and Sjodahl agree that Gazelem is the name of the seer.

13. Like his father, Moroni also sees fit to include a narrative description of the formation of secret combinations. Ether 8 parallels Helaman in a number of linguistic and thematic ties: "Upheld" (Helaman 2:3; Ether 8:22), "exceedingly expert" (Helaman 2:4–5; Ether 8:8–12), "flatter" (Helaman 2:5; Ether 8:2), "gain power" (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:16), "secret plan" (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:9), "combination" (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:18–24), "ye shall see" (Helaman 2:13; Ether 8:24), "the overthrow" (Helaman 2:13; Ether 8:23), a succession narrative/list of descent (Helaman 1:2; Ether 8:1), governmental contention (Helaman 1:2; Ether 8:2), flattery and cunning (Helaman 2:4–5; Ether 8:2), fathers succeeded/overcome by sons (Helaman 1:2; Ether 8:3–4), violent/subversive action takes place "by night" (Helaman 2:6; Ether 8:5), large-scale warfare (Helaman 1:17; Ether 8:5), the ruler is slain (Helaman 1:21; Ether 8:6), plans put into the "heart" (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:17), covenant made (Helaman 2:3; Ether 8:14), "combination" is named (Helaman 2:8; Ether 8:18), ultimate destruction foreshadowed (Helaman 2:13; Ether 8:21).

14. It hardly needs commenting that Moroni is here making reference to Isaiah 29:4, quoted in 2 Nephi 26:16.