

Comments on Mosiah 20

This chapter recounts the events where Amulonite priests "took [Lamanite daughters] and carried them into the wilderness" and the unintended consequence of their actions, inciting slaughter between the Lamanites and the people of king Limhi. We typically conclude the Lamanite daughters were kidnapped or abducted. However, later in 23:31-35 the women plead with the Lamanite armies to spare the Amulonite priests, whom they consider to be their husbands. If they were unwilling captives, would they respond in this manner?

Mormon doesn't use the word "captive" in this account, a word he uses in surrounding text (cf. 12:15, 19:15-16), he instead says "took them and carried them into the wilderness" (cp. 22:12-13, Alma 16:4, Hela. 11:33 for similar phraseology). Perhaps the Lamanite daughters weren't really abducted, and maybe they weren't all that young. We assume they are girls or young women, where the text simply states "Lamanite daughters". It is safe to assume from this they are all unmarried single females, as the group is presented as uniformly female and called "daughters" not women or mothers.

Factors to consider when interpreting the text:

The story is being told from the point of view of the people of king Limhi, who are angry with the Amulonite priests for corrupting Noah, making sure Abinidi was executed, stealing their stuff, and now inciting war with the Lamanites. The victims of their crimes are naturally going to be hostile and assume the worst case scenario (cf. v. 18, 21:20-21). We also get the Lamanite point of view (v. 15), which is clearly hostile.

The land of Amulon was not far distant from the land of Nephi or the land of the Lamanites. The Amulonites were stealing from the land of Nephi (cf. 21:21), and the Lamanite army accidentally runs into the Amulonites after pursuing the departing people of Limhi (cf. 23:30-31). If the daughters of the Lamanites wanted to leave, it seems likely they could have.

The series of wars would very likely reduce the proportion of available males among the Lamanite population. This could have been a factor among the Lamanite daughters, either accepting abduction by or being willing to elope with the Amulonite priests.

Perhaps the Semitic tradition persisted among the Lamanites in that once a woman is compromised in this fashion her prospects for remarriage are not good. This is reflected in the Law of Moses in the various regulations dealing with rape and premarital sex. Of course, this assumes that tradition persisted among the Lamanites. Jacob 3:5-9 suggests the general Semitic traditions regarding chastity did persist for some time at least, but how long is unclear. However, 24:5 informs us the Lamanites had completely secularized and 24:7 says they delighted in all manner of wickedness.

When the Lamanite armies accidentally discover the Amulonites, the Lamanite daughters are "wives" who plead for their "husbands". We don't know how much time has passed with the Lamanite daughters being with the Amulonites, but it is enough that their relationships are as husband and wife. The priests have clearly not enslaved the Lamanite daughters.

Amulonite priests had established subsistence agriculture among themselves and introduced the Lamanite daughters to the life of an agriculturalist (cf. 23:31), as opposed to the apparent hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Lamanites, and maybe they preferred it. The Amulonites were also stealing from the people of king Limhi (cf. 21:21), so that could have made for easy living.

Could this be an ancient case of [Stockholm syndrome](#)?

Overall, what we are missing is the point of view of the Lamanite daughters, so we are left to speculate as to why they would defend the Amulonite priests when they ostensibly meet their liberators.

Now, this is not seeking to excuse the Amulonite priests in any way, as their behavior is awful most, if not all, of the time. The attempt here is to make sense of why the Lamanite daughters don't have the Lamanite armies slaughter them on the spot given the opportunity of freedom from them.

And, finally, setting this matter aside, the overarching story is how the Amulonite priests yet again cause terrible destruction because of their wickedness. A war erupts because of their selfish actions and much blood is shed between two groups who have nothing to do with the cause of the bloodshed.

A relatively small number of wicked and hypocritical men has had a massive negative impact on two different populations.

1 NOW there was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance, and to make themselves merry. 2 And it came to pass that there was one day a small number of them gathered together to sing and to dance. 3 And now the priests of king Noah, being ashamed to return to the city of Nephi, yea, and also fearing that the people would slay them, therefore they durst not return to their wives and their children. 4 And having tarried in the wilderness, and having discovered the daughters of the Lamanites, they laid and watched them; 5 And when there were but few of them gathered together to dance, they came forth out of their secret places and took them and carried them into the wilderness; yea, twenty and four of the daughters of the Lamanites they carried into the wilderness.

v1-5 The Amulonite priests of Noah apparently kidnap twenty four Lamanite young women, because they are afraid to return to their wives.

v1 "daughters of the Lamanites", suggesting these women are unmarried, as they are not "wives" or "mothers". There is nothing in the text to suggest what their age is. One would assume they were of teenage to adult single females.

v3-5 Mormon doesn't overtly address the underlying issue of the priest's depravity, he only hints at it saying they were too cowardly to return to their wives for fear of being killed by the townspeople.

v5 "twenty and four", when we think of the priests of Amulon, we don't typically think there are that many of them. But, if they have forcefully abducted twenty four people, there have to be nearly as many or more of the priests as there are captives. It seems unlikely a dozen priests could abduct twenty four girls or women.

6 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites found that their daughters had been missing, they were angry with the people of Limhi, for they thought it was the people of Limhi. 7 Therefore they sent their armies forth; yea, even the king himself went before his people; and they went up to the land of Nephi to destroy the people of Limhi. 8 And now Limhi had discovered them from the tower, even all their preparations for war did he discover; therefore he gathered his people together, and laid wait for them in the fields and in the forests. 9 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had come up, that the people of Limhi began to fall upon them from their waiting places, and began to slay them. 10 And it came to pass that the battle became exceedingly sore, for they fought like lions for their prey. 11 And it came to pass that the people of Limhi began to drive the Lamanites before them; yet they were not half so numerous as the Lamanites. But they fought for their lives, and for their wives, and for their children; therefore they exerted themselves and like dragons did they fight.

v6-11 When the Lamanites discover twenty four of their daughters to be missing, they assume they were abducted by Limhi's people. The Lamanites prepare for attack, but Limhi is apprized of their attack by virtue of their tower. When the Lamanites approach his people attack the Lamanites viciously.

v9 The element of surprise in conjunction with the ability to attack the flank and rear of the Lamanites was probably a significant factor in the present Nephite success in the conflict. Note in v. 19-20 Gideon states they will be wiped out if the Lamanites come against them in force. Once they have lost the element of surprise and the Lamanites can regroup, this small group of Nephites hasn't got a chance.

v11 "like dragons", the term "dragon" appears commonly in the KJV OT and typically refers to some kind of venomous snake or lizard, cp. Deut. 32:33, Ps. 91:13 (a number of the KJV OT appearances of "dragon" are bad translations, e.g., Isa. 13:22 has "dragons" when it should be "jackals").

From the context, one would assume the imagery is intended to convey soldiers who inflict death at every quick strike they make, just as a poisonous serpent would strike and kill.

12 And it came to pass that they found the king of the Lamanites among the number of their dead; yet he was not dead, having been wounded and left upon the ground, so speedy was the flight of his people. 13 And they took him and bound up his wounds, and brought him before Limhi, and said: Behold, here is the king of the Lamanites; he having received a wound has fallen among their dead, and they have left him; and behold, we have brought him before you; and now let us slay him. 14 But Limhi said unto them: Ye shall not slay him, but bring him hither that I may see him. And they brought him. And Limhi said unto him: What cause have ye to come up to war against my people? Behold, my people have not broken the oath that I made unto you; therefore, why should ye break the oath which ye made unto my people? 15 And now the king said: I have broken the oath because thy people did carry away the daughters of my people; therefore, in my anger I did cause my people to come up to war against thy people. 16 And now Limhi had heard nothing concerning this matter; therefore he said: I will search among my people and whosoever has done this thing shall perish. Therefore he caused a search to be made among his people.

v12-16 After the initial surprise attack, the Lamanites retreat to regroup. Among the dead and wounded they find the Lamanite king. They bring him up and ask him why they attacked, he tells them it is because they kidnaped their daughters. Limhi insists it was no plot of theirs and says whoever did it will die.

17 Now when Gideon had heard these things, he being the king's captain, he went forth and said unto the king: I pray thee forbear, and do not search this people, and lay not this thing to their charge. 18 For do ye not remember the priests of thy father, whom this people sought to destroy? And are they not in the wilderness? And are not they the ones who have stolen the daughters of the Lamanites? 19 And now, behold, and tell the king of these things, that he may tell his people that they may be pacified towards us; for behold they are already preparing to come against us; and behold also there are but few of us. 20 And behold, they come with their numerous hosts; and except the king doth pacify them towards us we must perish. 21 For are not the words of Abinadi fulfilled, which he prophesied against us--and all this because we would not hearken unto the words of the Lord, and turn from our iniquities? 22 And now let us pacify the king, and we fulfil the oath which we have made unto him; for it is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives; therefore, let us put a stop to the shedding of so much blood. 23 And now Limhi told the king all the things concerning his father, and the priests that had fled into the wilderness, and attributed the carrying away of their daughters to them. 24 And it came to pass that the king was pacified towards his people; and he said unto them: Let us go forth to meet my people, without arms; and I swear unto you with an oath that my people shall not slay thy people. 25 And it came to pass that they followed the king, and went forth without arms to meet the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did meet the Lamanites; and the king of the Lamanites did bow himself down before them, and did plead in behalf of the people of Limhi. 26 And when the Lamanites saw the people of Limhi, that they were without arms, they had compassion on them and were pacified towards them, and returned with their king in peace to their own land.

v17-22 When Gideon gets word of the cause of the Lamanite attack he realizes what must have happened, it must have been Noah's priests. He then encourages Limhi to have the king of the Lamanites stop the conflict because the words of Abinadi are about to be fulfilled in their being annihilated if they don't.
v17 "Gideon...the king's captain", this is the first time Gideon's status is explicitly identified. Whether he was Noah's captain as well is debatable.

v21 The implicit message here is that if the Lamanites come against them again they will be annihilated as predicted by Abinadi in 12:8. Gideon points out that all of his other predictions have been fulfilled, and this one will too if they don't choose slavery instead of death.

v23-26 Limhi explains to the king what probably happened concerning the Lamanite daughters (v. 24), so the king promises to stop the conflict (v. 25). The king and the Nephites then confront the army without any weapons (v. 25) resulting in a halt to the Lamanite attack, and they subsequently return to their own lands (v. 26).

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