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He Knows My Affliction: The Hill Onidah as Narrative Counterpart to the Rameumptom

Author(s): Matthew L. Bowen

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HE KNOWS MY AFFLICTION: THE HILL ONIDAH AS NARRATIVE COUNTERPART TO THE RAMEUMPTOM

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *The toponym Onidah, attested as the name of a hill in Alma 32:4, most plausibly derives from Hebrew ʿōnî / ʿōnî / ʿōnî (ʿonyî, “my affliction”) + yāda / yēda (“he knew,” “he knows”) — i.e., “he has acknowledged my affliction” or “he knows my affliction.” This etymology finds support in the context of the Zoramite narrative in which it occurs. In view of the pejorative lexical associations of the Rameumptom, the “high” and “holy stand,” with Hebrew rām (< rwm, “high”) and haughtiness, arrogance, and pride, we see Mormon using the Rameumptom, the “high” platform for Zoramite self-exalting worship, with Onidah, the hill from which Alma and Amulek taught the Zoramite poor and humble. The latter name and Alma’s teaching from that location constituted a sign that the Lord “knew” their “affliction.” Alma devotes a significant part of his message not only extolling the spiritual value of their state of “affliction” and humiliation or compelled “humility” (ʿōnî Exodus 3:7, 17), but teaching them how to “plant” the “word” (even Jesus Christ himself) in their hearts through prayer — the word that would grow up into a “perfect knowledge” of God — experientially “knowing” God (Alma 32:16–36) and being known by him (cf. Alma 7:12).*

“Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.” (Psalms 138:6)

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.” (Psalms 119:71–72)

“And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down.” (2 Samuel 22:28)

In his account of the mission of Alma, Amulek, Zeezrom, Alma's sons, and the sons of Mosiah¹ among the Zoramites (Alma 31–35), Mormon mentions “Onidah” as the name of a hill where Alma and Amulek taught the “poorer class”² of Zoramites in Alma 32:4. This single mention of a single, nondescript hill in the land of Antionum seems superfluous unless it serves some sort of intentional function within the narrative. In the study that follows, I propose that Mormon's mention of Onidah constitutes more than a mere literary ornament or textual artifact. Its literary and rhetorical significance begins to emerge as we unpack its most likely meaning within the narrative context in which it occurs. I will attempt to show that the name *Onidah* is most plausibly explained as a derivation from *ʿonyî* (=“my affliction,”³ or alternatively rendered, “my humiliation,” “my humbled state”) + *yādaʿ* (perfect “he knew,” but can also have the present sense “he knows”⁴). In other words, Onidah suggests the meaning “he [the Lord] knows my affliction” (literally, “he has known my affliction”) or “he has acknowledged my humiliation.” If such is the case, the origins of this name may lie within — or have reference to — acts of divine deliverance within the salvation history of Israel and that of the Nephites.

I further propose that, just as Mormon uses the names *Zoramites* and *Rameumptom* pejoratively in terms of Semitic/Hebrew *rām* (“high”) to inveigh against the Zoramites' unrighteous pride, he also uses the name Onidah in opposite fashion. Mormon uses the name Onidah and its meaning to affirm the value of the afflictions and humility of the poor Zoramites who responded to Alma's teaching.

Their *ʿōnî/ʿōnî/ʿōnî* (“affliction,” “poverty”⁵) and *ʿānāwā* (“humility”⁶) — albeit compelled humility at first — prepared them to receive his

1. See Alma 31:6–7, 32.

2. Royal Skousen, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, part 4: *Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2014), 231 (hereafter cited as *ATV*). Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 393, 768.

3. See, e.g., Genesis 31:42; 2 Samuel 16:12 (Ketiv); Job 10:15.

4. Cf., e.g., Exodus 3:7; Leviticus 5:3–4; Deuteronomy 2:7; Deuteronomy 34:7 [Masoretic Text 6]; other examples could be multiplied. Hereafter the versification of the Masoretic Text will be cited as *MT*.

5. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 777 (hereafter cited as *BDB*).

6. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2001), 855 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*).

word. In this context, the name Onidah — if Mormon understood it as “the Lord knows my affliction” or “the Lord has taken knowledge of my affliction” — constitutes the perfect symbol of the divine providence evident in Alma, Amulek, Zeezrom, et al.’s teaching of the poor and humble class of the Zoramites as well as the perfect literary counterpart or antitype of the Rameumptom and the self-exalting worship carried out thereon.

The Etymology of Onidah

The *Onidah* mentioned as the name of the hill from which Alma preached in Alma 32:4 probably represents a different location than *Onidah/Oneidah*, “the place of arms” mentioned in Alma 47:5.⁷ In the Book of Mormon Onomasticon entry for *Onidah*, Paul Hoskisson has adumbrated some of the more or less plausible etymologies for *Onidah*.⁸ The first element makes best sense as either *’ôn*, “generative power,” “physical power,” “wealth,”⁹ *’ônî*, “mourning,”¹⁰ or even more likely, *’ônî/’ônî/’ônî* “affliction,” “humiliation,” “humbled state.”

The second element, *-idah*, is more opaque. Here Hoskisson himself proposes the most likely and plausible way forward. He cites the attested

BDB, 776. Cf. Zephaniah 2:3: “Seek ye the Lord, all ye *meeek* [humble, *’anwê*] of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek *meeekness* [humility, *’ânāwâ*]: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

7. On *Onidah* in Alma 32:4 and *Onidah/Oneidah* 47:5 as distinct places, see, e.g., George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 5, *The Book of Alma: Chapters 45 through 63* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 48; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Alma* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 447. Skousen distinguishes the two locations and recommends *Onidah* as the correct spelling for Alma 32:4. See also Robert F. Smith, ed., *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 2nd ed. 3 vols. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986–1987), 2:722. Both the original manuscript and printer’s manuscript have *Oneidah* at Alma 47:5, which is changed to *Onidah* in the 1830 edition. Skousen thus accepts *Oneidah* as original and distinct from *Onidah* in Alma 47:5. See *ATV*, 4:2575 and Smith, *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 2nd ed., 2:809. Other Latter-day Saint scholars — e.g., Jenny Webb and Robert F. Smith — think they likely represent the same place. See, e.g., Jenny Webb, “It is Well That Ye Are Cast Out: Alma 32 and Eden,” in *An Experiment on the Word: Reading Alma 32*, ed. Adam Miller (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2011), 45n2.

8. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Onidah,” by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified April 26, 2019. <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ONIDAH>

9. *HALOT*, 22.

10. *HALOT*, 23.

Semitic names *Abida* (ʿābîdā, “he [God] has known my father,” “he knows my father” or “my father knows”) from Genesis 25:4 (1 Chronicles 1:33) and *Shemida* (šēmîdā, “he [God] knows my name” or “my name he has known”) from Numbers 26:32; Joshua 17:2; and 1 Chronicles 7:19. Unlike other suggestions for the second element in Onidah, the third person masculine singular perfect verb *yāda* is actually attested as a part of Semitic names and comfortably corresponds to grammatical rules of Semitic naming. Thus, as noted above, the most likely Hebrew etymology of this name is “He [the Lord] knows my affliction” or “he knows my humiliation.”

The likelihood of ʿonyî (“my affliction”) as the first onomastic element in Onidah is strengthened by the fact that forms of this element occur early in biblical narrative in connection with etiological naming reports. For example, the Genesis narrator reports Ishmael’s naming thus: “Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name *Ishmael*; because *the Lord hath heard* [šāmaʿ yhw̄h] *thy affliction* [ʿonyĕk]” (Genesis 16:11). The Genesis narrator creatively explains the name Reuben loosely in terms of the verb *rāʾâ* and *bĕʿonyî* (rather than its transparent etymological meaning, *rĕʾû + bĕn* = “Look! A son”): “And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name *Reuben*: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked [rāʾâ] upon *my affliction* [bĕʿonyî]; now therefore my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:32). The expression ʿonyî and the verb *ʾānâ* (*tĕʿanneh*) whence it derives constitute an important part of the etiology for the naming of *Jegar-sahadutha/Galeed* (Gilead) and *Mizpah* (“God hath seen [rāʾâ] mine affliction [onyî, i.e., Jacob’s hard labor in Laban’s household]”; “If thou shalt afflict [tĕʿanneh] my daughters” Genesis 31:42, 50). Subsequently, in the Joseph cycle, the narrator explains the naming of Ephraim, again against the backdrop of ʿonyî: “And the name of the second called he *Ephraim*: For God hath caused me to be fruitful [*hipranî*] in the land of *my affliction* [ʿonyî]” (Genesis 41:52) — i.e., in Egypt. This latter etiology has within its horizons the affliction or humble condition (ʿōnî) in which the children of Israel, including the Ephraimites, found themselves in Egypt generations later. In all of these examples, God “hears” or “sees” — i.e., knows or acknowledges someone’s affliction or humiliation.

In fact, the idea of Yahweh “looking upon,” knowing or acknowledging affliction, occurs with particular frequency in connection with Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The exodus narrative attributes one of the most important of these statements to Yahweh himself: “And the Lord said, I have surely seen [rāʾô rāʾîtî] *the affliction* [ʿōnî] of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for *I know* [*yādaʿtî*, literally “I have known] their sorrow” (Exodus 3:7; cf. “thou hast

considered [*rā'itā*, thou hast seen] *my trouble* [*onyî*]; *thou hast known* [*yāda'tā*] *my soul in adversities*," Psalms 31:7 [MT 8]). He further promises, "I will bring you up *out of the affliction* [*mē'ōnî*] of Egypt" (Exodus 3:17). Later on, the narrator reports the response of Israel to Moses as prophet: "And the people believed: and when they heard that *the Lord had visited the children of Israel*, and that *he had looked upon* [*rā'â*] *their affliction* [*onyām*], then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exodus 4:31). In the Pentateuch thereafter, forms of *'ōnî* refer back to Israel's experience in Egypt, as emblemized by the unleavened Passover bread, "the bread of affliction [*lehem 'ōnî*]," Deuteronomy 16:3). Israel's experience in Egypt is also characterized as *'ōnî'ōnî'ōnî*: "And when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, *and looked on our affliction* [*onyēnû*], and our labour, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 26:7-8; see further Nehemiah 9:9). The descriptions of Israel's collective *'ōnî* in Egypt upon which Yahweh "looked" became mirrored in the experience of individual Israelites upon whose "affliction" the Lord also "looked" and thus took knowledge of (see, e.g., 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalms 31:7 [MT 8]; 119:153; see also Psalms 9:12-13 [MT 13-14]; 44:24 [MT 25]; 107:10; 119:50, 92).¹¹ All of this, too, has potential implications for *Onidah* as a Lehigh toponym.

Exodus motifs occur throughout the Book of Mormon. One of the most important of these occurs in Mosiah 24, which describes the bondage of Alma the Elder's people and their deliverance in terms that distinctly echo Exodus 3:7 and 4:31:

And it came to pass that *so great was their afflictions* [cf. Hebrew *'onyām*, Exodus 4:31] that they began to cry mightily to God. And it came to pass that¹² Amulon commanded them that they should stop their cries and he put guards over them to watch them, that whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death. And it came to pass that Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord their God but did pour out their hearts to him; and *he did know* [cf. Hebrew *wayyēda'*] *the thoughts of their hearts*. And it came to pass that *the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions*, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for *I know of the covenant* which ye have made unto me. And

11. On the term *'ōnî'ōnî'onyî* as a description of Israel/Judah's experience in exile, see Lamentations 1:3, 7, 9; 3:1, 19.

12. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Skousen, *Earliest Text*. On the reading "And it came to pass," see Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 258.

I will covenant with this my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which is put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage. And this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and *that ye may know of a surety that I the Lord God do visit my people in their afflictions.* (Mosiah 24:10-14)

The text here repeats for emphasis a noun translated “affliction[s]” and a verb translated “know.” In addition to other lexical connections in this pericope (burdens, taskmasters, etc.), the language of affliction and divine knowledge of that affliction connects this passage to the exodus narrative, Exodus 3:7, 17 and 4:31, in particular. These linked concepts resurface again in Alma 31–35. Whether ultimately related to the experiences of Alma the Elder and his people or not, the toponym *Onidah* appears to express a similar sentiment: the Lord “knows” of the “affliction” (or “humiliation”) of his people. Even if not directly related to the deliverance of Alma the Elder’s people, the name appears to express what ancient Israel had experienced throughout its salvation history whenever the Lord had “known” their affliction and intervened on their behalf.

“Hearts ... Lifted Up” Versus the “Poor in Heart”: The Rameumptom Versus Onidah, *rām* Versus *’ōnî*

In Alma 31, Mormon describes the apostate Zoramites and the nature of their heretical practices. In order to create a concrete verbal picture of the pride that characterized the Zoramites, Mormon describes their use of a “stand” or “a place of standing” that was “built up in the center of their synagogue.”¹³ Mormon describes this “stand” as being “*high*

13. Alma 31:13. Robert F. Smith notes: “It is remarkable that the set prayer delivered at the Rameumptom appears to be an early form of the very important Jewish *’Amida* prayer (Eighteen Benedictions), which is done ‘standing.’” Moreover, as pointed out by Eisenman & Wise, one finds “word-for-word correspondences” between that *’Amida* prayer and a messianic text from Qumran cave 4, 4Q521 frag 1, column 1.” (Robert F. Smith, personal communication, October 2019). See Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents withheld for Over 35 Years* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 20–21. Smith further notes, “This may extend to the *’Amida* as part of the Paragraph of the King read at Israelite covenant renewal time.” Compare Deuteronomy 17:14–20, 2 Chronicles 20:3–5, 1 Esdras 9:37–55, 1QS (Manual of Discipline) 1:16–2:19, and Babylonian Talmud *Sotā* 7:6, 8 (38a, 41a). For the *’Amida* as part of the ‘Portion of the King’ at Covenant Renewal time, see John Tvedtnes, “The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles” in *Tinkling*

[*rām*] above the head” (Alma 31:13-14), as a wordplay on Zoram and Rameumptom in terms of *rām*.¹⁴ Moreover, the term *Zoramites* came to have a pejorative meaning, “those who are exalted/high/lifted up,”¹⁵ or “the lifted up persons” (*zû/zô*, “the one who”¹⁶ + *rām*, “[is] exalted,” cf. *Zeram* = “he [this one] is exalted,” attested in Alma 2:22),¹⁷ and that Mormon exploits this meaning in his account of the Zoramites.¹⁸

Mormon emphasizes the condition of the Zoramites’ hearts in Alma 31¹⁹: “their hearts were set upon gold and upon silver and upon all manner of fine goods, ... and ... *their hearts were lifted up* unto great boasting *in their pride*” (Alma 31:24-25). Mormon records that Alma, in his prayer, laments “*their hearts are swallowed up in their pride*” and calls attention to “their costly apparel and their ringlets and their bracelets and their ornaments of gold and all their precious things which they are ornamented with,” averring, “and behold, *their hearts are set upon them*” (Alma 31:27-28). In other words, a reflection of the Zoramites’ “lifted up” hearts could be seen in the “high” Rameumptom from which they prayed and in the costly apparel in which they prayed and upon which “their hearts” were “set” (Alma 31:38).

Brant Gardner insightfully describes the social semiotics that inevitably would have been in play in the Zoramites’ worship atop the Rameumptom:

Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley, ed. John W. Welch (Los Angeles: privately printed, 1978), 159–60; Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 2:224–26; “Did the Nephites Have a ‘Holiday Season’ Like We Do Today?” KnowWhy #394, Book of Mormon Central, Dec 28, 2017. <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/did-the-nephites-have-a-%E2%80%9Choliday-season%E2%80%9D-like-we-do-today>.

14. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up’: The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 109–43.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bruce M. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 337.

17. Bowen, “The Name Zoram,” 114.

18. Bowen, 109–43.

19. Alma 31:1, 24–25, 27–28. The word *heart* (Hebrew *lēb/lēbāb*, Egyptian *’ib*) constitutes a lead-word (*Leitwort*) in Alma 31–32 (see Alma 31:1–2, 17, 22, 24–25, 27–28, 31; 32:3–4, 8, 12, 16, 28) and arguably in 31–35 as a whole (see further Alma 33:1, 20–21, 23; 34:4, 27, 31, 36; 35:15). Notably, the whole pericope is framed as an *inclusio* by Mormon’s comments on the effect of the Zoramites’ apostasy on Alma’s heart (see Alma 31:1–2; 35:15). The planting of the “word” in the “heart” frames Alma’s teaching on prayer in Alma 33 (see Alma 33:1, 23).

Zoramite worship required the worshipper to come forward, stand in an elevated location in the sight of everyone, and utter a prayer declaring the superiority of his beliefs. His visible “costly apparel” would reinforce his superiority. Now imagine the effect of a poor farmer who chose to also mount the Rameumptom and offer the prayer. Almost certainly, in contrast to the others who prayed, this farmer would have little political influence or social standing. His inadequate clothing would reinforce his social inferiority. Uttering the prayer proclaiming his cultural superiority would be a further incongruity. Thus, he would not only be exposed in public (traditionally a forum the poor avoid) but also recited a prayer that highlighted differences in a way that did not favor him. The humiliation of being in such a position was the only mechanism of exclusion that was necessary.²⁰

The pejorative connotations of Semitic/Hebrew *rām* (**rwm*) in terms of “high,” “haughty,” “arrogant,”²¹ “proud” not only find expression in the “height” of the Rameumptom (described as “high above the head,” Alma 31:13) and their “lifted up” hearts,²² but also in the ostentatious display of one’s clothing demanded by the worshipper’s “standing on the top [of the Rameumptom] and stretch[ing] forth [one’s] hands towards heaven and cry[ing] with a loud voice” in such a public way. The “costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things” would have become, in effect, the garb expected of the worshipper, functioning as quasi-sacred or religious clothing.

Alma’s message to the poor Zoramites would constitute a very different one regarding their inherent worth than the semiotics and praxis of the Zoramites’ “worship.” Since we can very plausibly link the name *Onidah* with Hebrew *ʾōnî* “(state of) affliction, humility” and its parent verbal root *ʾny/ʾnh* — by historical etymology or by way of homonymy (paronomasia) — the *Onidah* provides the perfect onomastic and thus symbolic counterbalance to the Rameumptom, as I will endeavor to show.

20. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:446.

21. See, e.g., *HALOT*, 1203.

22. See Deuteronomy 8:14; 17:20; Ezekiel 31:10; Hosea 13:6; Daniel 11:12.

Alma's Afflictions

Alma's immediate response to seeing that the Zoramites' hearts "were lifted up ... in their pride" (Alma 31:25) was that he "lifted up his voice to heaven" in prayer (Alma 31:26). Alma's prayer expresses distress at "afflictions" that he knows his interactions with the Zoramites will bring upon him:

O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength that I may bear with mine infirmities! For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul. O Lord, my heart is exceeding sorrowful. Wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ! *O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength that I may suffer with patience these afflictions* [cf. Hebrew 'unnôt/'ônî] *which shall come upon me* because of the iniquity of this people! O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul and give unto me success! And also my fellow laborers which are with me — yea, Ammon and Aaron and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, and also my two sons — yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord! Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ! *Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions* [cf. Heb. 'unnôtām, 'onyām] *which shall come upon them* because of *the iniquities* [Hebrew 'ăwōnôt]²³ of this people! O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ! (Alma 31:30–34)

Alma's prayer evidences several terminological parallels with Isaiah's poem of the suffering Servant and his own earlier christological interpretation of that poem (e.g., "bearing with ... infirmities,"²⁴

23. It is very tempting to posit a wordplay (paronomasia) involving the similar-sounding 'unnôt (or 'ônî) and 'ăwōnôt. The Hebrew normal idiom nś' 'ăwōn ("bear iniquity") may reflect a clever substitution of a form of 'ny, "affliction." In this case Alma, et al., do not "bear iniquity" but "bear affliction" because of iniquity. Cf. Isaiah 53:11.

24. Cf. Alma's christological interpretation of the Suffering Servant poem (Isaiah 53) in Alma 7:11–13. See, e.g., Thomas A. Wayment, "The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103, 130. Alma had previously taught the people in the city Gideon, "he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

wickedness that “pains”²⁵ his soul; “exceedingly sorrowful,” “these afflictions which shall come upon me”). It thus helps us to see Alma, like Jesus Christ himself, as someone fully able to empathize with the Zoramites in their “affliction” or compelled “humility” (*’ōnî*). Alma’s prayer exemplifies the type of prayer he and Amulek will teach the Zoramites, prayer being essential to planting “the word.”

Mormon concludes the first part of the Zoramite narrative with the statement that the Lord, in response to Alma’s prayer, “gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith” (Alma 31:18). Ultimately, Mormon’s quotation of Alma’s prayer seems to include the following purposes: (1) to establish a stark contrast between the Zoramites’ arrogant, self-exalting, rote “prayer” with Alma’s own prayer in humility and faith; (2) to provide a narratological transition from the haughty, ostentatious “worship” of the wealthy, prosperous Zoramites to the religious plight — i.e., the *’ōnî/’ōnî* — of the poor Zoramites as *’ānāwîm*; and (3) to demonstrate the type of “pray[ing] in faith” capable of growing “the word” into a full-fledged “tree of life” (Alma 33:3-23; cf. Alma 32:37-43), including a “perfect knowledge” of God (cf. Alma 32:21, 26, 29).

The “Poor in Heart” Taught at Onidah

In addition to the exodus *’ōnî*-texts cited previously, numerous additional biblical text offered the poor and the humble hope in Yahweh for relief from their temporal and spiritual “poverty.” For example, the Psalmist declared: “Yet setteth he the poor [*’ebyôn*] on high *from affliction* [*’ōnî*], and maketh him families like a flock” (Psalms 107:41). One Isaianic prophecy promised, “but to this man will I look, even to *him that is poor* [*’ānî*] and of a contrite spirit [*’ūnēkē-rûah*], and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). Alma, Amulek, et al., discovered quickly that the Zoramite poor provided a far more receptive audience for “preach[ing] good tidings to the poor” (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18) than the Zoramite upper-crust. Alma’s teaching, including his dramatic shift in address, all

25. *The Complete Jewish Bible* renders *’iš mak’ōbôt* in Isaiah 53:3 as “man of pains” (KJV “man of sorrows”) and *’ūmak’ōbēnû sēbālām* in Isaiah 53:4 as “our pains from which he suffered.” Similarly, Donald W. Parry renders *’ūmak’ōbēnû sēbālām* as “and [he] carried our pains” in Isaiah 53:4 (“Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains”). Donald W. Parry, *Harmonizing Isaiah: Combining Ancient Sources* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2001), 211.

transpire on the hill Onidah. The meaning “he has taken knowledge of my affliction/poverty/humble state” would certainly be relevant in this context:

And it came to pass that they did go forth and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets. And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the *poorer*²⁶ class [cf. Hebrew ‘*anwê/‘ăniyyê*] of the people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel. Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness. *Therefore they were poor* [cf. Hebrew ‘*ăniyyîm*]; yea, *they were esteemed by their brethren as dross*. Therefore *they were poor* [cf. Hebrew ‘*ăniyyîm*] *as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart* [cf. ‘*ăniyyê hallēbāb/lēb*]. Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon *the hill Onidah* [‘*onyî + yāda* or *yēda*] there came a great multitude unto him, which were those of which we have been speaking, which were *poor in heart* [Hebrew ‘*ăniyyê hallēbāb*] because of their poverty [cf. Hebrew ‘*onyām*] *as to things of the world; and they came unto Alma*. And the one which was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do? For they are despised of all men *because of their poverty* [‘*onyām*], yea, and more especially by our priests. For they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands. And they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty [‘*onyēnû*²⁷], that we have no place to worship our God. And now behold, what shall we do? And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him. And he beheld with great joy, for he beheld that *their afflictions* [cf. Hebrew *‘*unnôtām*²⁸ or ‘*onyām*] *had truly*

26. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 768.

27. Cf. Psalms 44:24 [MT 25].

28. See, e.g., Psalm 132:1: “Lord, remember David, and all *his afflictions* [‘*unnôtô*]:” KJV reads — or at least renders — the plural infinitive (“being afflicted”) as a plural noun (“afflictions”).

humbled [cf. Hebrew ‘*annôt* ‘*innâ/û*] ²⁹ *them* and that *they were in a preparation* to hear the word. (Alma 32:1-6)

The Hebrew Bible widely uses the somewhat synonymous terms ‘*āniyyîm/‘ānāwîm* (the poor, literally the “crouching,” “bowing” or “bowed” — i.e., the “humble,” “pious”),³⁰ the *dallîm* (literally, the “weak” and thus the “low, poor”; “helpless”; “powerless”; “insignificant”),³¹ and the ‘*ebyônîm* (the “needy, poor”)³² descriptions of poor or poorer classes of people. All three of these terms have relevance for the “poor” and “humbled” Zoramites described by Mormon in Alma 32. The mention of *Onidah* occurs amid a profusion of repeated terms that derive from — or relate semantically to — the verbal root ‘*ny/‘nh*: “(the) poor,” “poorer class” (‘*āniyyîm/‘ānāwîm* [‘*anwê/‘āniyyê*]), “their poverty”/“their afflictions” (‘*onyām*, *‘*unnôtām*) and the verb “humble.” This evident polyptoton, a wordplay on cognates from the same root,³³ creates a verbal picture: poverty and humility surround Alma on Onidah, in contrast to the scenes of self-exaltation transpiring atop the Rameumptom.

Brant Gardner offers the following explanation as to why a hill would have been an appropriate place for Alma, et al. to preach the gospel to the poor: “On such mountains, communication could occur between the heavens, the earth’s surface, and the underworld. . . . For Alma, using a hill from which to preach the gospel would employ these connotations of preaching about sacred things in a naturally sacred location.”³⁴ He further notes that “by using the hill — a natural feature — Alma was unconsciously underscoring the difference between the city’s artificiality (including its artificial elite) and the natural world of the country, where the farmer-poor were in their element, no longer subservient.”³⁵ Given the pejorative meanings of *rām-* brought into the name Rameumptom (and “Zoramites”) and all that the worship atop the Rameumptom conveyed in terms of semiotics and symbolism, Alma could not have

29. Exodus 1:11–12: “Therefore they did set over them taskmasters *to afflict them* [‘*annôtô*] with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more *they afflicted them* [yě‘*annû*], the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.”

30. HALOT, 855.

31. HALOT, 221–22.

32. HALOT, 5.

33. Richard A. Lanham describes *polyptoton* as a wordplay involving a “repetition of words from the same root but with different endings.” Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 117.

34. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 4:447.

35. Ibid.

done better than picking a “naturally sacred” hill — particularly one named Onidah — to teach the “poorer class” of Zoramites. The Lord and Alma “knew” their affliction, poverty, and humility.

In one biblical psalm or temple hymn, the Psalmist pleads, “Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand: forget not the humble [Ketiv: ‘nyym; Qere: ‘ānāwīm]” (Psalms 10:12). We can see Alma’s teaching the Zoramites as another scriptural example of the Lord’s not forgetting the humble. Moreover, as the Psalmist stated in the same Psalm, “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of *the humble* [‘ānāwīm]: *thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear*” (Psalms 10:17). The Lord had heard the desire of “the humble” gathered to Alma at the hill Onidah who were now “in a preparation to hear the word” (Alma 32:6).

“Because Ye Are Compelled to Be Humbled Blessed Are Ye” (Alma 32:12–13)

Deuteronomy extolled the value of compelled humility for ancient Israel collectively. They had endured the “affliction” or “humbling” of bondage in Egypt (see above). Regarding Israel’s forty-year wilderness journey, Keith Meservy has noted, Yahweh needed to do more than just get Israel out of Egypt: “If God had wanted merely to get Israel from Egypt to Canaan, he would have chosen a more direct route. But the Lord needed more to get Egypt out of Israel. This was something that took much longer.”³⁶ In order to “get Egypt out of Israel,” the Lord “humbled” Israel spiritually during the wilderness period.

Deuteronomy stipulated to ancient Israel: “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to *humble thee* [‘annōtēkā], and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deuteronomy 8:2). They were to always remember that Yahweh “fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might *humble thee* [‘annōtēkā], and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end” (Deuteronomy 8:16). In the very same Deuteronomic legislation, Moses warned Israel against the time “when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, *and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied*, and all that thou hast is multiplied; *then thine heart be lifted up* [wērām], and thou forget the Lord thy God, which

36. Keith H. Meservy, “The Good News of Moses,” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Three: Genesis to Samuel*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 220.

brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 8:12–14). Like the Israelites in the wilderness, the poor class of Zoramites had been “humbled” by their circumstances, and this humbling enabled them to avoid having their “heart be lifted up” like their wealthier Zoramite counterparts whose “hearts were *lifted up* [cf. Hebrew *rāmîm*] unto great boasting, in their pride.” The contrast between *rām* and ‘nyl’*nh* established in Deuteronomy 8 helps us appreciate the elaborative wordplay involving Rameumptom (+Zoramites) vs. Onidah/‘ōnî (+‘ānāwîm) and the sociological juxtaposition that Mormon is working toward in Alma 31–35.

In the light of Israel’s “humbling” and “affliction” in the wilderness (on top of their ‘ōnî in Egypt), we note that Alma specifically detailed how compelled humility could prove valuable for the poor and humble Zoramites as well:

I say unto you: It is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, *that ye may be humble* [cf. Hebrew **tē‘unnû*], and that ye may learn wisdom;³⁷ for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom. For it is because that ye are cast out that *ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty* [cf. Hebrew *‘*onyĕkem*], that ye are brought to a *lowliness of heart*; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. And now because ye are compelled to be humble [cf. Hebrew *lē‘ānōt*], blessed are ye; for *a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble* [cf. Hebrew *lē‘ānōt*], seeketh repentance. And now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy. And he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. (Alma 32:12–13)

Whether Alma himself — as Mormon does — connected the ‘ōnî of the Zoramite ‘ānāwîm with the hill Onidah is uncertain, since Mormon does not quote Alma making any mention of it.³⁸ Nevertheless, Mormon’s inclusion of Alma’s speech with its repetition of the verb *humble* (Hebrew ‘*ānâ*) adds considerably to the ongoing polyptoton and wordplay on Onidah in terms of ‘ōnî, ‘ānāwîm/‘āniyyîm, ‘ānāwâ, and ‘ānâ.

Alma uses the Zoramites’ “humbling” and being “in a preparation to hear the word” (v. 6) as an opening to teach them the doctrine of Christ, which from the foundation of the society of the Nephites had been the

37. Cf. Psalms 119:71: “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted [humbled, ‘unnêtî]; that I might learn thy statutes.*”

38. It is equally possible that Mormon himself makes the association based on additional knowledge of the land of Antionum and other sources or that Mormon has merely abridged Alma’s mention of it.

bedrock of their religion.³⁹ In fact, Alma substitutes the phrase “compelled to be humble” where we would normally expect a mention of “faith” — especially faith in Jesus Christ. Clearly, compelled humility does not equal faith in Jesus Christ. Alma’s point seems to be that compelled humility can “sometimes” put someone in a position to have faith in Jesus Christ and thus fully repent, receive baptism by water and the Holy Ghost, then “endure to the end” in faith hope and charity, until receiving the promise of the Father: “Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20).

**“Blessed Are They Who Humble Themselves
Without Being Compelled to Be Humble” (Alma 32:14–16)**

Alma continues teaching the doctrine of Christ and repetition of *ʿōnī*-terms and in doing so emphasizes that humbling oneself has value even above compelled humility. The biblical exodus narrative holds up the Pharaoh of the exodus as one who refused to “humble [him]self,” even under the most compelling circumstances. The Lord, through Moses, asked Pharaoh: “Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse *to humble thyself* [*lēʿānōt*] before me? let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exodus 10:3). Because he does not “humble [him]self” he becomes the poster child for “hardening” one’s heart,⁴⁰ a course which the wealthy Zoramites also pursue. Alma praises those Zoramites who elected to “truly humble themselves”:

And now as I said unto you that *because ye were compelled to be humble* [cf. Hebrew *lēʿānōt*] ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are *more blessed who truly humble themselves* [cf. the practice of “humbling oneself” (infinitive *lēhitʿannōt*) mentioned in Ezra 8:12 and Daniel 10:12] *because of the word?* Yea, he that *truly humbleth himself* and repenteth of his sins and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed — yea, *much more blessed than they who art compelled to be*

39. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Noel B. Reynolds, “How to ‘Come unto Christ,’” *Ensign*, Sept. 1992, 7–13; Noel B. Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56; Noel B. Reynolds, “This Is the Way,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91; Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.

40. Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34; 1 Samuel 6:6 clarify that Pharaoh hardened his own heart in seeming contradiction to numerous passages in which Yhwh appears to harden Pharaoh’s heart.

humble because of their exceeding poverty. Therefore blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble. Or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word — or even compelled to know — before they will believe. (Alma 32:14-16)

Alma uses a form of *argumentum a minore ad maius* (called *qal wāḥômer* by later rabbinic sages, also sometimes known as *argumentum a fortiori*), which argues from a lesser premise to a greater one. In other words, if those who are compelled to be humble become “blessed” for their humility, those who “truly humble themselves because of the word” can only be “more blessed” — “yea, much more blessed” — for doing so of their own free will and choice. Ultimately, Alma’s rhetorical aim is to persuade his audience of the value of his message — “the word,” whose power Mormon thus characterized at the outset of the Zoramite narrative: “And now, as the preaching of the word had had⁴¹ a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just — yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword or anything else which had happened unto them — therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue [Latin *virtus* = power] of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). Since the transition from being “humbled” because of poverty (or for another reason) to one who chooses humility for pious reasons would be relatively easy, Alma subtly inserts his “word” or “the word of God” as the higher, nobler cause for humility — the “word” that they will need to plant like a seed.

Here again, Alma directs them to the doctrine of Christ, five of the six points of that doctrine being mentioned in these verses.⁴² He again emphasizes repentance and enduring to the end as a meristic⁴³ invocation of the entire doctrine of Christ; and he again substitutes “humbling [oneself]” for faith before making the equation between humility and

41. On the double use of “had” in the original manuscript and printer’s manuscript, see Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 767.

42. Noel Reynolds notes that four of the six points of the doctrine of Christ occur in Alma 32:13 as a merismus. However, given the correspondence that Alma draws between humility and faith, it is possible to see faith also as included in this list, as confirmed by v. 16. Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical *Merismus* in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017), 120.

43. For his discussion on *merismus* and its use as a device in adumbrating and teaching the doctrine of Christ, see Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” 109–13.

faith directly (“believe”) in Alma 32:16. Moreover, Alma equates the state of “blessed[ness]” with salvation in the kingdom of God or eternal life (“the same shall be blessed” = “the same shall be saved,” Alma 32:13, 15).⁴⁴ This constitutes the ultimate value of their *’ōnî*.

This equation reflects the vision of a kind of “realized eschatology” laid out by King Benjamin years earlier in his epic sermon at the temple in Zarahemla: “And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). The “blessed and happy state” of the faithful here and hereafter finds its symbol in the “tree, whose fruit [is] desirable to make one happy [cf. Hebrew *’ašrê*]” (1 Nephi 8:10)⁴⁵ that we partake of here in mortality; and the eschatological “tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7), that we may partake of hereafter. The “tree of life” (Christ) that Alma describes growing up in the poorer Zoramites (and us) conceptually bridges — or embodies — those two trees.

**“What Ye Should Do Because Ye Are Afflicted And Cast Out”:
Humbling Oneself in All Circumstances (Alma 32:24–27)**

Alma further uses the circumstances of the poor Zoramites’ compelled humility and the polyptotonic repetition of *’ōnî*-cognates as a springboard to teach the importance of humbling oneself in all circumstances:

And now my beloved brethren, as ye have⁴⁶ desired to know of me what ye shall do because *ye are afflicted* [cf. Hebrew *’āniyyîm/’ānāwîm*] *and cast out* — now I do not desire that ye should *suppose* that I mean to judge you, only according to that which is true — for *I do not mean that ye, all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves* [*lê’ānôt/lêhit’annôt*]. For I verily believe that there are some among you which would humble themselves, let him be in whatsoever circumstances

44. See also 2 Nephi 31:15; 3 Nephi 11:33; 27:6; Mark 13:13; Matthew 24:13; cf. also Mosiah 23:22.

45. On the wordplay involving *’ašrê* and the asherah in 1 Nephi 8:10, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 24.

46. See Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 395.

he⁴⁷ *might*. Now as I said concerning faith, that it was not a perfect *knowledge* [cf. *dā'at/dā'at*; cf. Genesis 2:9, 17],⁴⁸ — even so it is with my words. Ye cannot *know* of their surety at first unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect *knowledge*. But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith — yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe — let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. (Alma 32:24-27)

Notably, Alma emphasizes the concept of voluntary humility in connection with faith as the first principle of the doctrine of Christ in order to introduce his “comparing” (i.e., likening, cf. Hebrew *māšāl*) “the word” to “a seed” (Alma 32:28) and the “planting” of “the word” (Alma 32:28, 33, 36). In ancient times, even more than now, planting seeds required one to bend low to the earth to put the seed in the ground — in this case the “ground” of the heart (cf. Alma 32:28, 39). Thus the image of planting a seed in soil suggests the posture of humility (*ōnî* as a derivation from verb *ʿānâ*, literally means “bent over”) and perhaps even the posture of worship.

The Hebrew verb for “worship,” *hištaḥăwâ*, would inevitably have been part of the Nephite lexicon. This verb’s shape suggests the possible meaning “to cause oneself to live” (from the root, *hyy/hwy* = “to live”).⁴⁹ That idea might be particularly relevant in the present context in which Alma describes humbling oneself to plant “the word” that becomes “a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41; cf. *wāḥay lēʿōlām*, “and live forever,” Genesis 3:22). We recall that Nephi taught, “wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him [*wēhištaḥăwîtem*⁵⁰ *lô*] with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul. And if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out” (2 Nephi 25:29) — a promise that these “cast out” Zoramites would have particularly appreciated. In any case, the ancient Israelite conception that humankind (*hāʾādām*, Adam) was “taken” from “the ground” (*hāʾādāmâ*, Genesis 3:19, 23; Alma 42:2) here reinforces the notion, as articulated by Hugh Nibley, “get down

47. Ibid.

48. Cf. Genesis 3:5, 22.

49. For a short but useful discussion of the Hebrew verb *hištaḥăwâ*, see Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 360–61. They conclude that “the unusual shape of this word hints at its extraordinary cultural significance” (i.e., in ancient Israel).

50. For the verb form of *worship*, see Exodus 24:1.

there [in the dust] and realize what you are.”⁵¹ In so doing, men and women who plant the “the word” — or Christ — will grow up into a man or woman re-created in likeness of Christ: “For every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” (Alma 32:31).⁵²

If the proposed etymology of Onidah, “he knows my affliction,” is correct, Alma’s dramatic emphasis on the seed that, by faith, grows into “a perfect knowledge,” i.e., divine “knowledge,” takes on even greater importance. Words or expressions translated as “know,” “knowledge,” and “perfect knowledge” occur twenty-two times in Alma 32:16–36. The poor Zoramites’ humiliation and humility was key to the experiential knowledge that they were already acquiring. In christological terms, the “perfect knowledge” gained by the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:4, 11 (“acquainted with [*widûa*‘, knowing] grief,” “by his knowledge [*bēda*‘*tô*] shall my righteous servant justify many”) included being oppressed (as noted earlier). Alma himself had earlier interpreted the atoning suffering of the suffering Servant as described by Isaiah thus: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, *that he may know* according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). Alma’s preaching to poor, humbled Zoramites evidenced that Servant’s knowledge of them. Alma held forth that the poor Zoramites could

51. Hugh W. Nibley, “The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley,” in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 167. Nibley specifically addressed the issue of the Allied invasion of Europe on D-day and how the Germans had been expecting the Allies the day before (on June 5th), but weather forced the invasion to happen on the sixth: “Everything went foul here: people being landed on the wrong beach, the wrong things being landed at the wrong time, and so forth; all sorts of confusion; not getting the things you wanted. So this idea that we can carefully plan it, that we have the intelligence to manage it, or the character to control events, is utterly absurd! ‘Man is nothing,’ as the Book of Mormon says — ‘how great is the nothingness of man’ (cf. Helaman 12:7), and Moses said, ‘I hadn’t supposed that before’ (cf. Moses 1:10), but it is true. ‘I am nothing!’ And when King Benjamin says, ‘We are less than the dust’ (cf. Mosiah 2:25), he means get down there and realize what you are. But we don’t. We are very proud and arrogant. We still are — we have the power, we have the might. We can tell people what to do and they’ll do it. Especially certain people in Washington feel that very strongly, as you know” (166–67).

52. See, e.g., Webb, “Alma 32 and Eden,” 51; David E. Bokovoy, “The Word and the Seed: The Theological Use of Biblical Creation in Alma 32” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014):1–21. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1555&context=jbms>.

themselves one day know with a “perfect knowledge” (Alma 32:26–43) even as they were known — a divine knowledge obtained not simply by experience (cf. Genesis 3:5, 22), but by experiment and the continuous, diligent exercise of faith (cf. Ether 3:1–20; 12:19–20).

**“Therefore, I Will Cry unto Thee in All
Mine Afflictions” (Alma 33:10–11)**

In light of the foregoing, we can see *why*, when the poor Zoramites ask Alma “how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith” (Alma 33:1), he responds by addressing the interrelated topics of prayer and worship. Prayer and worship constituted the means whereby they could plant the word and thus “obtain the fruit” of eternal life.

The Zoramites had particularly gone astray with respect to both prayer and worship,⁵³ self-exalting forms of which, according to Mormon, occurred only once a week atop the Rameumptom. But the Zoramites had acquired a third major deficiency: they prayed “thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. . . . thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ” (Alma 31:16–17). They rejected scriptural testimony of Christ — the “word.” In addressing this threefold problem, a prayer of the prophet Zenos, presumably preserved on the plates of brass, furnished Alma with the perfect text wherewith to address the humbled Zoramite poor:

Yea, and thou hast also heard me when *I have been cast out* and have been *despised* by mine enemies. Yea, thou didst hear my cries and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction. And *thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions* and my sincerity. And it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me. Therefore *I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions*, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me because of thy Son. (Alma 33:10–11)

Alma’s use of Zenos’s prayer is nothing less than masterful. Zenos lays it before the Lord that he was “cast out, “despised,” and afflicted (“mine afflicted”), which spoke to the poor Zoramites’ own experience: “they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of

53. Alma 31:12–23; 32:9–11; 33:2–3.

their apparel” (Alma 32:2); “they are despised of all men because of their poverty” (Alma 32:5); “we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God” (Alma 32:9); “it is because ye are cast out that ye *are despised* of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty” (Alma 32:12) “ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye *are afflicted* and cast out” (Alma 32:24). But being “despised” and “afflicted” was not only Zenos’s experience and that of the poor Zoramites, it would also be Christ’s experience.

Isaiah had prophesied of the Servant that would be “*despised [nizbeh]* and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3), whom they would “esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and *afflicted [ûmĕ’ unneh < ‘ny]*” (Isaiah 53:4); and would be “oppressed [*niggaś*] and be *afflicted [na’ăneh;* or, he was oppressed, but he humbled himself]” (Isaiah 53:7). Appropriately, then, Alma uses Zenos’s prayer to bring it all back to Christ. Alma had previously said to the poor Zoramites, “for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved” (Alma 32:13). Like Alma himself,⁵⁴ Zenos found mercy in his afflictions and acknowledged, “*it is because of thy Son* that thou hast been thus merciful unto me.” The Lord knew his affliction.

**“If Ye Do Not Remember to Be Charitable, Ye Are as Dross,
Which the Refiners Do Cast Out” (Alma 34:28–29)**

After Amulek teaches the poor Zoramites about Christ and his atonement (see Alma 34:2–16), and exhorts them to prayer (Alma 34:17–27), he warns the poor Zoramites against becoming like those who have despised them and cast them out:

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you: Do not suppose that this is all. For after ye have done all these things, *if ye turn away the needy and the naked and visit not the sick and afflicted* [cf. ‘*ăniyyîm*] and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need — I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. Therefore *if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross which the refiners do cast out* — it being of no worth — and is trodden under foot of men. (Alma 34:28–29)

54. See, e.g., Mosiah 27:28; Alma 36:1–3, 27–30.

Mormon's earlier editorial statement that "they were esteemed by their brethren as dross" (Alma 32:3) seems to have been motivated, at least in part, by Amulek's statement here. Alma's warning to the poor Zoramites that a failure to be charitable going forward would mean that "ye are as *dross* which *the refiners*⁵⁵ do cast out" (Alma 34:29) alludes to a specific Isaianic and Nephite text with direct relevance to their 'ōnī/ōnī condition. "Behold, *I have refined thee* [šərapṭikā], but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of *affliction* ['ōnī]" (Isaiah 48:10; 1 Nephi 20:10). Isaiah had characterized Jerusalem's apostasy thus: "Thy silver is become *dross* [sīgīm], thy wine mixed with water" (Isaiah 1:22). But the promise the Lord had made apostate Israelites and Judahites — "And I will turn my hand upon thee, *and purely purge away* [wē'əšrōp, refine] thy *dross* [sīgāyik], and take away all thy tin" (Isaiah 1:25) — equally applied to the apostate Zoramites.

Additionally, Amulek's use of the image "trodden under foot of men" (Alma 34:29) appears to reference a Zoramite method of dealing with undesirables. Mormon had mentioned Korihor's ignominious demise at the hands (or feet) of the Zoramites as the event linking his heresy with the Zoramite apostasy: "behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead" (Alma 30:59). At least some of the Zoramites gathered to Alma at Onidah would have been aware of or even participated in that brutality.

Amulek's Final Exhortation: "Bear with All Manner of Afflictions ... Do Not Revile Against Those Who do Cast You Out Because of Your Exceeding Poverty" (Alma 34:40–41)

Amulek concludes the teaching at Onidah on the same themes that Alma established early on in his speech in Alma 32. Importantly, Amulek never promises the Zoramites that their afflictions or poverty would come to an immediate end by planting the word. In fact, he suggests that they would — like Alma, Amulek, et al. — need to bear with additional afflictions that would come upon them because of the wickedness of the wealthier Zoramites:

And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye *bear with all manner of afflictions*; that ye do not revile against those who *do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty*, lest ye become sinners like unto them; but that

55. Cf. Malachi 3:2–3, which compares the Lord to a *məšārēp*, "a refiner" (a substantive Piel participle of *šārap*).

ye have patience, and *bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.* (Alma 34:40-41)

Amulek closes his speech by exhorting the poor Zoramites not to perpetuate the cycle of mistreating others, even those who so callously mistreated them. Here Amulek emphasizes the fifth point or principle in the doctrine of Christ: “hav[ing] patience” and “bear[ing] with ... afflictions” with a “firm hope” is functionally until receiving divine rest amounts to enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity (cf. “if ye do not remember to be charitable,” cf. Alma 34:29). This statement clearly echoes Nephi’s great summation of the fifth principle in 2 Nephi 31:20: “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ [= “firm”], having a perfect brightness of hope [= “with a firm hope”], and a love of God and of all men [= “do not revile against those who have cast you out”]. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure [= “have patience,” “bear with ... afflictions”] to the end [= “ye shall one day rest”], behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.” Amulek’s description of a future “day” of “rest” from “all ... afflictions” is very arguably the most poignant and meaningful way that he could have ended a speech to people in state of *’ōnî*.

“They Did Receive All the Poor of the Zoramites” (Alma 35:8-9)

At the close of Amulek’s speech, Mormon immediately shifts the scene of the narrative to the land of Jershon (see Alma 35:1). At the outset of the Zoramite narrative he had situated Jershon just north of Antionum (see Alma 31:3).⁵⁶ Moreover, Mormon had earlier in the book of Alma established the land of Jershon in paronomastic fashion as the place of “inheritance” for the Lamanite coverts of the sons of Mosiah (Hebrew *yrš*, “inheritance,” + appellative *-ōn*).⁵⁷ If Mormon casts the hill Onidah in Alma 32:4 as a narrative ballast or counterpart to the Rameumptom

56. “Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites.” In the next verse, Mormon explains the strategic value of the land of Antionum for the Nephites in the face of the perennial Lamanite threat: “Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites” (Alma 31:3-4).

57. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Jershon,” by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified November 20, 2015. <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/JERSHON>.

in Alma 32:13–24, he also depicts the land of Jershon and the conduct the people of Ammon living there as the moral opposites of the wealthy Zoramites in Antionum:

Now the people of the Zoramites were angry with the people of Ammon, which⁵⁸ were in *Jershon*. And the chief ruler of the Zoramites being a very wicked man sent over unto the people of Ammon, *desiring them that they should cast out* of their land all those which came over from them into their land [i.e., the poor and the humble]. And he breathed out many threatenings against them. And now the people of Ammon did not fear their words. Therefore *they did not cast them out, but they did receive all the poor* [cf. Hebrew *ʾāniyyîm* or *ʾānāwîm*] *of the Zoramites that came over unto them. And they did nourish them and did clothe them and did give unto them lands for their inheritance.* And they did administer unto them according to their wants. (Alma 35:8–9)

Regarding the name Antionum, it is difficult not to see a direct connection with the *antion* mentioned in Alma 11:19 as “the most valuable unit of Nephite money” and thus “a fitting name for the Zoramite city of pride and wealth.”⁵⁹ Gordon C. Thomasson first noted that the connection between the *antion* and “the big-money town or pride-in-wealth city of Antionum”⁶⁰ (something like “Gold-town” or “Gold-land”) suggested a similar narrative metonymic connection between the *ezrom/ezrum*⁶¹ and Zeezrom (i.e., “he of the ezrom” — “Mr. Silver” or “Mr. Moneybags”; cf. also the “antion” of gold mentioned in Alma 11:19 and the ruler Antionah mentioned in Alma 12:20).⁶² The people in Jershon — which transparently denotes “place of inheritance” in Hebrew — treat the Zoramite poor in a manner diametrically opposite that of the Zoramite wealthy elite. Where the Zoramite elites cast them out and even pressured the Ammonites to do the same, the Ammonites “received

58. See Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 405.

59. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Antionum,” by Paul Y. Hoskisson, last modified November 21, 2015. <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ANTIONUM>.

60. Gordon C. Thomasson, “What’s in a Name? Book of Mormon Language, Names, and [Metonymic] Naming,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 15–16.

61. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 316.

62. Thomasson, “What’s in a Name?,” 15–16. Thomasson cites Benjamin Urrutia’s earlier correlation of Zeezrom and *ezrom/ezrum* as primary motivation for his own study.

the poor of the Zoramites,” “nourish[ed],” “clothe[d]” them and “g[a]ve them lands for their inheritance.” In fact, Mormon’s narrative emphasis on the Ammonites giving them “lands for their inheritance” deliberately plays on the meaning of Jershon as “place of inheritance”⁶³ and becomes particularly appropriate given biblical statements regarding the poor, such as “But the meek [or, *the humble, wa’ānāwīm*] shall inherit [*yīršū*] the earth [land]” (Psalms 37:11). The people of Ammon, once outcast themselves, treated the poor Zoramite outcasts in the very manner that Alma had instructed the poor Zoramites to treat the poor in the future (see again Alma 34:28-29).

Conclusion

The most plausible etymological explanation for the toponym *Onidah* is that it derives from Hebrew *’ōnî/’ōnî/’ōnî* (*’onyî*, “my affliction”) + *yāda/yēda* (“he knows”). This etymology finds remarkably strong support in the surrounding narrative. Thus, Alma’s single mention of *Onidah* constitutes something far more than a mere literary ornament or a casual narrative detail.

Given the pejorative associations of the Rameumptom, the “high” and “holy stand,” with Hebrew *rām* (< *rwm*) and haughtiness, arrogance, and pride, we can see a clear editorial and narratological effort on the part of Mormon to contrast the Rameumptom upon which the wealthy Zoramites prayed with *Onidah*, the hill from which Alma and Amulek taught the Zoramite poor and humble. The latter name and Alma’s teaching from that location constituted a sign that the Lord “knew” their “affliction.” Alma devotes a significant part of his message not only by extolling the spiritual value of their state of “affliction” and compelled “humility” (*’ōnî*), but teaching them how to “plant” the “word” (even Jesus Christ himself),

63. The correlation between Jershon and its description in the text as an “inheritance” was first noted by Robert F. Smith. (Robert F. Smith, unpublished manuscript). Paul Hoskisson suggests that John W. (Jack) Welch arrived at the same conclusion separately and “came up with his ideas while learning Hebrew in [Los Angeles]” (Paul Hoskisson, personal communication, August 2015). The idea was later mentioned in print by Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 258–59. On the narratological interrelationship and wordplay on the names Zarahemla and Jershon in migration accounts in the book of Alma, see Matthew L. Bowen, “They Were Moved with Compassion” (Alma 27:4; 53:13): Toponymic Wordplay on Zarahemla and Jershon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 233–53.

which would grow up into a “perfect knowledge” of God — experientially “knowing” God and being known by him (cf. Alma 7:12).⁶⁴

At the end of the Zoramite narrative we can see Mormon’s further efforts to draw stark contrasts between the Zoramite elite and the converted Lamanites who were willing to receive the Zoramite poor. Mormon does so with the additional juxtaposition of the land of Antionum (recalling the Nephite antion) vis-à-vis the land of Jershon (“place of inheritance”) which the poor or meek “inherit” (cf. Psalms 37:11: “But the meek [*wa’ānāwīm*, humble] shall inherit [*yîršû*] the earth”). The poor Zoramites had learned the truth of words attributed to David: “And *the afflicted people* [*‘am ‘ānî*] thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon *the haughty* [*rāmîm*], that thou mayest bring them down” (2 Samuel 22:28; see also Psalms 18:27 [MT 28]).⁶⁵ They knew by experience.

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Matthew L. Bowen was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an assistant professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.

64. 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall *I know even as also I am known.*”

65. See also Isaiah 49:13 (1 Nephi 21:13).