

# Alma 2

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## Amlici Seeks to Become King

### *Alma 2:1–2*

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—

2 Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people.

### *Comments*

Originally part of the same chapter, Mormon begins with events of the first year of the reign of the judges, and now discusses the fifth year. This more frequent marking of the years will continue through the end of 4 Nephi. At the end of our current Alma, chapter 1, Mormon had set the stage by showing that there was prosperity and peace. The real events now unfold as that peace is broken by “a contention among the people.” Although Nephi had originally indicated that the large plates would discuss the wars and contentions of his people, it is in Mormon’s editing that we more clearly see that wars are with external enemies, and contentions come from within. This incident clearly comes from within.

We have two pieces of information about Amlici. The first is that he is after the Order of Nehor, though instead of the name, we get the description of Nehor the murderer. That defines Amlici as a point of social contention, but the second piece of information is even more divisive. Amlici desires to be king. Only five years after the monarchy was dissolved and the reign of the judges implemented, there was a movement to return to kingship. This will not be the only time that we will see this desire for a return to a monarchy dividing Zarahemla society.

## ***Alma 2:3–6***

3 Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.

4 Therefore, if it were possible that Amlici should gain the voice of the people, he, being a wicked man, would deprive them of their rights and privileges of the church; for it was his intent to destroy the church of God.

5 And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land, every man according to his mind, whether it were for or against Amlici, in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.

6 And thus they did assemble themselves together to cast in their voices concerning the matter; and they were laid before the judges.

### ***Comments***

These verses provide the only description of how the voice of the people worked. There is no indication of ballots, but rather “that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the line, every man according to his mind.” This description makes it appear that groups who felt the same way about a topic gathered together. Next, there was “much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.” It would appear that they argued back and forth to try to convince others.

We don’t know how they decided who won the voice of the people. We can only tell that they “cast in their voices,” not cast ballots. This would appear to indicate that if someone changed their mind, they might physically move to the group that they agreed with. After some time, it would become obvious which group was larger. How this worked across the whole of the population is not at all clear. It is important for many modern readings concerning the idea of “voice of the people” that we understand that the use of “voice” was not metaphorical, and that it did not represent the modern concept of ballots.

## ***Alma 2:7–10***

7 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people.

8 Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor.

9 And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king.

10 Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.

## *Comments*

The sanctioned method of change in the laws decided against Amlici's bid to become king. However, he did not accept that result. There were sufficient numbers of followers that he attempted to enforce the minority choice through civil war.

In order for this to happen, there had to have been a large number who desired to follow Amlici. It is possible, although there is no evidence in the text, that these were members of important royal lineages that might have been in line to become king in the absence of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>'s sons, but the change in the nature of government took away their opportunity. Then, after five years of perhaps consolidating their followers, they attempted to return to power.

## **Amlici Leads His Followers to Battle with the Nephites**

### ***Alma 2:11***

11 Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God.

## *Comments*

The intertwining of religion and politics is evidenced in the way Mormon defines the word "Nephites." We know that that was the designation of the political entity, but Mormon expands that to be "the people of God."

In contrast, the people of Amlici were designated by his name. Royal Skousen found that there were some spelling variations in the name, and that a name we will see later, Amalekites, may have been essentially the same name. In the manuscript, it appears that it was a hard "c" in name Amlici, and the emphasis may have been on the first syllable. Thus, it is entirely possible that they were the same designation.

While that might suggest that they were the same people, the timings and locations of the names suggest different peoples. However, what links them is the desire for kings. In Hebrew, the *mlk* root designates "king." It appears that Mormon intentionally designates many peoples who desired a return to the monarchy, or otherwise represented a contention within Nephite society, with names using the *mlk* root. Thus, Amlicite (pronounced Amlikite) and Amalekite might be essentially the same name, but not because they represented the same people. Rather, they represented the same idea, and therefore, Mormon gave them a name by which Mormon appears to have assumed his readers would understand that they were similar in their desires.

### ***Alma 2:12–14***

12 Therefore the people of the Nephites were aware of the intent of the Amlicites, and therefore they did prepare to meet them; yea, they did arm themselves with swords, and with cimeters, and with

bows, and with arrows, and with stones, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons of war, of every kind.

13 And thus they were prepared to meet the Amlicites at the time of their coming. And there were appointed captains, and higher captains, and chief captains, according to their numbers.

14 And it came to pass that Amlici did arm his men with all manner of weapons of war of every kind; and he also appointed rulers and leaders over his people, to lead them to war against their brethren.

### *Comments*

Throughout the Book of Mormon, there is evidence that there were no standing armies. This is the way that many ancient cultures worked, and specifically those in Mesoamerica where many scholars would place the Book of Mormon events. Therefore, it isn't surprising that when hostilities erupted, each side was quickly armed. In many cases, the arms were simply repurposed hunting weapons, but it was also probable that many men would have military weapons available in the chance that they were called to defend their lands.

Thus, there was no need to call up armies because there were no armies. Those who decided to fight simply picked up their weapons and gathered with those who were of a like mind. Note that it is not until the Nephites are preparing to meet the Amlicites that they appoint captains and higher captains. There was no standing army which already had those positions filled.

### ***Alma 2:15–18***

15 And it came to pass that the Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla, and there they began to make war with the Nephites.

16 Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle.

17 And they began to slay the Amlicites upon the hill east of Sidon. And the Amlicites did contend with the Nephites with great strength, insomuch that many of the Nephites did fall before the Amlicites.

18 Nevertheless the Lord did strengthen the hand of the Nephites, that they slew the Amlicites with great slaughter, that they began to flee before them.

### *Comments*

One difference between Mormon's editing of the large plates and what we saw from the writers on the small plates is that Mormon spends more time on the battles and wars than did those earlier writers. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the fact that the large plates were intended to record the wars and contentions of the people, and therefore more of that information was available.

Perhaps Mormon's career in the military made him more sensitive to military matters. In spite of the larger amount of writing about wars, it isn't typically the wars themselves that interest Mormon. He is interested in the people involved in them, and the lessons to be learned from them. In this case, he notes that Alma<sub>2</sub> himself leads the armies, and the Nephites began to defeat the Amlicites. Of course, that was due to Yahweh, who "did strengthen the hand of the Nephites."

### ***Alma 2:19–22***

19 And it came to pass that the Nephites did pursue the Amlicites all that day, and did slay them with much slaughter, insomuch that there were slain of the Amlicites twelve thousand five hundred thirty and two souls; and there were slain of the Nephites six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls.

20 And it came to pass that when Alma could pursue the Amlicites no longer he caused that his people should pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword; and in this valley the Nephites did pitch their tents for the night.

21 And Alma sent spies to follow the remnant of the Amlicites, that he might know of their plans and their plots, whereby he might guard himself against them, that he might preserve his people from being destroyed.

22 Now those whom he had sent out to watch the camp of the Amlicites were called Zeram, and Amnor, and Manti, and Limher; these were they who went out with their men to watch the camp of the Amlicites.

### ***Comments***

The Nephites pursue the Amlicites but pause in the pursuit. They send spies to see what has happened. Of course, this is a typical military tactic, but Mormon reports it because it is important to the story that continues. The importance of the spies is related in the next verses.

## **Amlicites Unite with the Lamanites**

### ***Alma 2:23–26***

23 And it came to pass that on the morrow they returned into the camp of the Nephites in great haste, being greatly astonished, and struck with much fear, saying:

24 Behold, we followed the camp of the Amlicites, and to our great astonishment, in the land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla, in the course of the land of Nephi, we saw a numerous host of the Lamanites; and behold, the Amlicites have joined them;

25 And they are upon our brethren in that land; and they are fleeing before them with their flocks, and their wives, and their children, towards our city; and except we make haste they obtain possession of our city, and our fathers, and our wives, and our children be slain.

26 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi took their tents, and departed out of the valley of Gideon towards their city, which was the city of Zarahemla.

### *Comments*

The Amlicites met a large Lamanite army and joined them. Of course, by the fact of rebellion they had become enemies of the Nephites, and therefore considered Lamanites. Reading between the lines of the story, it is possible that this joining of forces was part of the plan. Perhaps, had the Amlicites been successful, the Lamanites would have invited them and formed a new alliance. In this case, the Amlicites are fleeing and meet with the Lamanites.

It is that fact itself that suggests that there may have been some prior understanding. It is difficult to imagine an army in enemy territory passively waiting to accept a large number of armed men running quickly towards them. It would surely have been bloodshed first and questions later. If, however, the meeting had been arranged, it would explain why the Amlicites survived the encounter.

The new army was greater than the force that Alma<sub>2</sub> led, so the Nephites retreated towards Zarahemla, perhaps as a more defensible position, perhaps as the location for reinforcements.

### ***Alma 2:27–29***

27 And behold, as they were crossing the river Sidon, the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea, came upon them to destroy them.

28 Nevertheless, the Nephites being strengthened by the hand of the Lord, having prayed mightily to him that he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, therefore the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them, and the Lamanites and the Amlicites did fall before them.

29 And it came to pass that Alma fought with Amlici with the sword, face to face; and they did contend mightily, one with another.

### *Comments*

Another aspect of ancient warfare was the importance of the leader in the battles. It was not unusual for Alma<sub>2</sub> to engage with Amlici. It is probable that they were distinguished by battle flags or clothing so that their own armies, and also their enemies, would know where they were. It is also not unusual that the victor in this individual battle would be considered the victor in the overall battle.

Thus, Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amlici face each other directly. Although this sounds like a battle of champions, it appears that the battle continued around them. They were the important focus, but not the sole combatants.

## ***Alma 2:30–33***

30 And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried, saying: O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.

31 Now when Alma had said these words he contended again with Amlici; and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword.

32 And he also contended with the king of the Lamanites; but the king of the Lamanites fled back from before Alma and sent his guards to contend with Alma.

33 But Alma, with his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drove them back.

### ***Comments***

Alma<sub>2</sub> invokes Yahweh's aid and defeats Amlici. While this might have ended a war with the Amlicites, there was a king of the Lamanites as well. That king retreated and sent guards to battle with Alma<sub>2</sub>, and certainly with Alma<sub>2</sub>'s guards. They are repulsed.

The point, from Mormon's point of view, is that Yahweh's hand is evident in the battle. Alma<sub>2</sub> is righteous, and therefore is protected against those who would fight against him. Mormon doesn't specifically invoke the promise of the land but expects that his readers understand that it is being dramatically fulfilled.

## ***Alma 2:34–38***

34 And thus he cleared the ground, or rather the bank, which was on the west of the river Sidon, throwing the bodies of the Lamanites who had been slain into the waters of Sidon, that thereby his people might have room to cross and contend with the Lamanites and the Amlicites on the west side of the river Sidon.

35 And it came to pass that when they had all crossed the river Sidon that the Lamanites and the Amlicites began to flee before them, notwithstanding they were so numerous that they could not be numbered.

36 And they fled before the Nephites towards the wilderness which was west and north, away beyond the borders of the land; and the Nephites did pursue them with their might, and did slay them.

37 Yea, they were met on every hand, and slain and driven, until they were scattered on the west, and on the north, until they had reached the wilderness, which was called Hermounts; and it was that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.

38 And it came to pass that many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been found, and have been heaped up on the earth.

## *Comments*

When the combined armies of the Amlicites and Lamanites are forced across the river Sidon, they appear to understand that they have been defeated, and therefore they begin to flee the battlefield. The miracle of the victory is emphasized when Mormon notes that those who were defeated “were so numerous that they could not be numbered.”

The combined Amlicite and Lamanite armies flee into the wilderness to the northwest of the Nephite lands, even though Lamanites typically enter Nephite lands from the south. This suggests that they were fleeing, and that their typical means of entrance was blocked by the Nephite armies.

We do not hear of many incursions from the west, and these verses help readers understand why. This was a dangerous wilderness. Mormon declares that many who fled in that direction did not survive, but fell to the beasts of the wilderness.

Although our current chapter ends here, Mormon’s original chapter continues without a break. The story of the war is over, but Mormon originally included the aftermath as part of his whole chapter. That story now comes in the next chapter.