

Alma 3

Alma 3:1–3

1 And it came to pass that the Nephites who were not slain by the weapons of war, after having buried those who had been slain—now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number—after they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands, and to their houses, and their wives, and their children.

2 Now many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men.

3 And now as many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been slain upon the bank of the river Sidon were cast into the waters of Sidon; and behold their bones are in the depths of the sea, and they are many.

Comments

Note the difference in the way the Nephite dead are treated as opposed to the Lamanite or Amlicite dead. The Nephite dead are buried. We do not know anything about the reasons for burial, but certainly it was a form of respect for their dead. In contrast, the Lamanites and Amlicites were left without burial. They were specifically thrown into the waters of the Sidon to be carried to the sea. It was clearly an intentional division in the treatment of the dead, and certainly intended to disrespect the Lamanite and Amlicite dead.

We are not told in what part of the year this war occurred, but it was some time after planting and before the harvest. When the fields were destroyed it would have led to the compound problem of the deaths of many of the men, and then the loss of the crops themselves. There was anguish for the people who were lost, and the specter of a coming famine.

The Amlicites Marked Themselves

Alma 3:4–5

4 And the Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites; nevertheless they had not shorn their heads like unto the Lamanites.

5 Now the heads of the Lamanites were shorn; and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them, and their bows, and their arrows, and their stones, and their slings, and so forth.

Comments

After noting that Amlicite and Lamanite bodies were tossed into the river, Mormon indicates how they were distinguished. The first method of distinguishing Amlicite (or even Nephite) bodies from Lamanites was that they had shaved their heads. While Mormon tells his readers that the Amlicites were distinguishable from Nephites because they had marked themselves with red on their foreheads, the Lamanites were easily seen because they had shaved their heads.

These two features suggest two different reasons for the differences. For the Lamanites, it may be that the shorn heads, if they were completely shorn, indicated that they were not going to be captured in battle. In Maya art, the act of capturing an enemy is represented by the victor grabbing hair that was pulled back. This hairstyle might be termed a ponytail, but it was worn higher on the head, and it is suspected that it was meant to represent corn tassels.

The Amlicite mark is probably confirmation that the meeting with the Lamanites was prearranged. If they were running toward the Lamanites with weapons in hand, the prearranged visual symbol would have told the Lamanites that these were not the enemy, even though they might appear to come in battle mode.

Alma 3:6–10

6 And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.

7 And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women.

8 And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

9 And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

10 Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.

Comments

These verses parallel the description Nephi gave in 2 Nephi 5:20–23 concerning the curse on the Lamanites. In 2 Nephi 5:21 a “skin of blackness” is mentioned during the description of the curse. In Alma 3:6, there is a dark skin which was a mark of the curse. Importantly, it is not the curse itself. In the discussion of 2 Nephi 5:21, it was noted that there is no evidence that the dark skin or the “skin of blackness” ever created a visible difference among the peoples. It was a metaphorical condition that perhaps people believed that they could perceive, but which was based on unrighteousness rather than pigment.

It is important, therefore, to remember that when Mormon is describing the visual differences, he mentioned the Lamanite shorn heads. Had all Nephite, and the Amlicites who were recently Nephites themselves, had a dramatically different skin color, there would have been no reason to note the shaved head as a distinguishing mark.

In both 2 Nephi 5:23 and in Alma 3:9, it is a curse that would come from intermarriage, but it is a cursing that is dependent upon righteousness, not genetics. Note that in 2 Nephi 5:22–23 it says: “And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing.”

The parallel in verse 8 above that the prohibition that was part of the curse was instituted: “that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.”

Alma 3:11–12

11 And it came to pass that whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed those records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and also in the tradition of their fathers, which were correct, who believed in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth—

12 And it is they who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.

Comments

The contrast to the unrighteous, and therefore, cursed, Lamanites were the righteous Nephites, “who believed in the commandments of God and kept them.” The difference was not visual, but rather spiritual.

It is interesting that Mormon notes that it is the Nephites “who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.” In verse 11, Mormon specifically indicates that Nephites should not mix with Lamanites and therefore not believe in Lamanite traditions, but rather in Nephite records. Even if no records are implied, there is certainly an implication that Lamanites told

and believed a very different history than did the Nephites. Mormon ties their truth to the “records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem,” or the brass plates.

Alma 3:13–17

13 Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them; yea, they set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads.

14 Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.

15 And again: I will set a mark upon him that minglETH his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also.

16 And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed.

17 And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed.

Comments

After the aside about the Lamanites, Mormon returns to the Amlicites. That return highlights the reason that he inserted the information about the curse on the Lamanites. The marking of the Amlicites became a symbolic indication that they had mingled with the Lamanites, and perhaps that they believed something of the traditions of the Lamanites. Thus, they were also cursed, and the mark was the symbolic indication and acceptance of that cursing.

By mingling with the Lamanites, the Amlicites were no more Nephites. “And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed.” After that statement, it is also clear that such people who left the Nephites were no longer covered by the Nephite promise of the land.

Alma 3:18–19

18 Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

19 Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation.

Comments

Mormon closes his discussion of the curse by noting that the Amlicites had not realized that they were cursing themselves. Note the important language: “the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.” The reason for the curse was not the marking of the forehead. It was the decision to come out in open rebellion against God. The mark on the forehead was the visible sign of it, but not the cause.

Verse 19 reiterates that they brought upon themselves the curse, but the very fact that they had to mark themselves with red tells us that the rest of their skin pigment did not suddenly change. They were immediately cursed and removed from protective covenants. They were unrighteous, and the “skin of blackness” was the symbolic mark of that apostasy, not a physical sign.

Alma 3:20–24

20 Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle which was fought in the land of Zarahemla, by the Lamanites and the Amlicites, that there was another army of the Lamanites came in upon the people of Nephi, in the same place where the first army met the Amlicites.

21 And it came to pass that there was an army sent to drive them out of their land.

22 Now Alma himself being afflicted with a wound did not go up to battle at this time against the Lamanites;

23 But he sent up a numerous army against them; and they went up and slew many of the Lamanites, and drove the remainder of them out of the borders of their land.

24 And then they returned again and began to establish peace in the land, being troubled no more for a time with their enemies.

Comments

Mormon concludes the story. There is another battle and Lamanites are driven out of the land. Contrast these few details with the previous war. The difference is that there was an important lesson in the defection of the Amlicites. This was just another war. There were no lessons Mormon cared to pull from it, so he reports it succinctly. As noted, Mormon is ironically uninterested in war. He is interested in the people and the lessons to be learned from the conflicts. Mormon notes that they again “began to establish peace in the land.” As typical, this statement is simply a prelude to the next time that things go wrong.

Alma 3:25–27

25 Now all these things were done, yea, all these wars and contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

26 And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one.

27 For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth. And thus endeth the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

These verses end Mormon's chapter I as structured on the manuscripts and the 1830 print edition. He closes with the end of the fifth year of the reign of the judges. As noted in the comments on Alma 1:1, the Maya called a five-year period a *hotun*, and used the *hotun* as a unit of history. Mormon pays attention to those years. In this case, both the essential story and the five-year period end, creating two reasons for Mormon's ending of this chapter before beginning a new one.