

ALMA 43–52

John W. Welch Notes



In this very long block of chapters and also in the next, we will be covering the whopping total of twenty-one chapters that comprise the last third of the Book of Alma. This section in the Book of Mormon is often called “the war chapters.” And it can be a battle for average readers to get through them. I will save the discussion of warfare for the next installment of these Notes, so that all of these chapters can be analyzed together from the perspective of military science. In this set of Notes, we will look primarily for spiritual and other kinds of lessons that can be learned.

At this outset, pause to notice that the nature of the Book of Alma shifts here quite decisively in two ways: First, Alma leaves. He will soon depart and not return. His son Helaman will emerge as the leading high priest of the Church until he dies, as reported in Alma 62:52. So one might wonder, Why wasn’t this block of text presented as a separate book called “the Book of Helaman, the Son of Alma”? One answer, as we will see, is that this seven-year period of war is the direct aftermath of problems that began in Alma 28–35.

Second, Mormon takes greater charge of the narrative. At this point, Mormon will become much more prominent as historian, abridger and narrator. This makes good sense because four hundred years later Mormon himself was the Nephite military commander. He had studied these records from the perspective of war. He appreciated the practical and spiritual lessons that his predecessors had learned, as well as those that they should have learned, from the high costs and risks of war. He knew that we, as his latter-day readers, would need to learn many of these same lessons, most of which Mormon’s own people failed to learn, which led to their destruction. Thus, even though Mormon does not mention himself by name anywhere in the Book of Mormon until 3 Nephi 5:12, we can tell that these war chapters could only have been produced by someone like Mormon, the

prophet and commander in chief. These military chapters are indeed very meticulous, precise, and purposeful.

But pause again, and think about that for a moment. Joseph Smith did not know anything about ancient military science. And, from the records he had translated up to this point, as far as we know, he didn't yet know the name of the abridger of this record that he was bringing forth! While the names of Mormon and Moroni are on the Title Page of the Book of Mormon, Joseph did not translate that the Title Page until after he had translated the Book of Moroni—since the Title Page was at the back of the plates of Mormon, as Joseph Smith once said. It is possible that the Angel Moroni told Joseph a few things about his father Mormon, or that he may have learned something about Mormon in translating the 116 pages that got lost; but until 3 Nephi 5:12, the name of Mormon had not come up in the translation of the books of Mosiah or Alma. Before 3 Nephi 5, Joseph would not yet have known from the record anything about Mormon's purposes, his personality, his interests in warfare, let alone his apparent fondness for "the Waters of Mormon" (mentioned 12 times in Mosiah 18). Nor would Joseph have had any hint that Mormon might have named his own son Moroni, after the bold Captain Moroni, who figures prominently throughout these war chapters. Naturally, we think of Mormon's role in these connections as we read these war chapters, but they make sense to us only because we already know how the story of the Book of Mormon will end. But imagine Joseph Smith's sense of surprise and discovery as these intertwining details first emerged to his understanding as the text of the Book of Mormon unfolded before his eyes.

Alma 43

For each of the following chapters, here are some study questions for you to consider as you read. I used these questions to start class discussions. I hope they will also help you to see spiritual lesson from these chapters of military history.

1. What can you do to be sure that you are preaching "the word and the truth according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation"? (43:2)
2. How can people today best "support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children"? (43:9)
3. Can young people help the world in special ways to be prepared, with innovative ideas, that will help people today to win life's battles? (43:17–20)

4. Captain Moroni was smart and faithful enough both to gather information and to consult with the prophet before he went into battle (43:23). Have you ever done something similar when you faced an important decision in your own life? How did it turn out for Moroni? How did it turn out for you?
5. What justified the Nephites' defensive use of military force in going to battle against their enemies? (43:46–47)

Alma 43:1–2 — Alma and His Sons Preached the Gospel

At the outset, what did Alma and his sons choose to do? They chose to “go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them” (Alma 43:1). Alma’s words to Corianton in Alma 42 had a negative, though kindly, tone to them. Corianton had a lot of doctrines wrong, and Alma was straightforward and blunt in talking to him. When we finish reading that powerful chapter, we as readers are almost gasping for air! And then we turn the corner into Alma 43, and what did Alma do after delivering all of those powerful instructions to his three sons? They all picked right up and got back to work! Alma himself took his sons—Corianton included—and they went to work together. Work will win when wishing won’t. Work is a big part of what we can and should do in facing our most challenging times.

We have not talked much about Mormon up to this point in the Book of Mormon. It is his book, and we need to realize that he was not far in the background deciding which points we would need most. While Mormon was a great general, that was only his day job. He was grounded in the gospel first and foremost (as we will learn firsthand from his words later on).

In Alma 43:2, Mormon declines to elaborate more about their preaching, even though that is something we would love to know more about. He assumes we can figure that out from all he has included in Alma 5, 7, 12–13, and 32–42. But here, Mormon did add, “except to say that they preached *the word* and *the truth* according to the spirit of *prophecy* and *revelation*, and they preached *after the Holy Order of God* by which they were called.” At this point, Mormon wanted us to know that, whatever they specifically said about the plan of eternal salvation, they delivered that message in a holy way. They were motivated by the spirit of prophecy, they spoke as revelators, and they stayed within the scope of their holy priesthood authority and calling. Thus, they were able to give the people exactly what they needed most in order to righteously fill their needs at that time.

Alma 43:2 — How Do We Teach by the Spirit of Prophecy and Revelation?

What can we do to ensure that we “preach the word and the truth according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation”? What can we do to be sure that we are preaching *the word*?

What was *the word* in Alma's vocabulary? In Alma 33:22–23, *the word* was shorthand for what we would call the Plan of Salvation, and especially its central focus on the Atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alma's sons went out and continued to preach *the word*, as they had in Alma 31–34. They focused on *the word*, and we should do the same, remaining focused on what matters most and being certain that *it* is what we are ultimately teaching as we minister today.

This text speaks of preaching *the word* and preaching *the truth* according to the spirit of *prophecy* and *revelation*. What might be the difference here between *prophecy* and *revelation*? Presumably, these are not just synonyms. And are there differences between *the word* and *the truth*? The gift of the spirit is that we can see things as they were, as they are, and as they will be. Seeing everything—that grand sweep of time, as when Moses saw the great unfolding of things from beginning to end. Perhaps you have the gift of seership to see the past, the spirit of prophecy to foresee the future, and the revelatory power of unveiling the way things actually are in order to speak the present. This can help us be sure that while we are proclaiming the message to the nations and to our families, we are also striving to focus on all three domains of truth—past, present, and future—and to do this in a way that will help people embrace the fullness of the gospel.

Alma 43:3 — How Are the War Chapters Relevant Today?

If you have any doubt about how relevant the “warfare” chapters of Alma are for our day, think back over your lifetime and count the years when there were not wars occurring somewhere in the world? There have been “hot” and “cold” wars, and a continuous array of the problems that the Book of Mormon addresses. How far does this condition go back? All the way back to the War in Heaven! As long as we live in an age of agency and accountability, there will be people making choices, and pressures will be placed to persuade people to go one way or another. We have to stand up, be counted, and be engaged in every possible way or things will turn out a way they should not. There are important lessons for us to learn here.

In the ancient world, wars were not named as we might name them today, but we may think of them as we would our own historical campaigns. The wars in the Book of Mormon were not all the same. There were different parties involved in each of these wars with different and specific causes. We can see why these wars were fought. They were fought with different technology, with different strategies, and with very different outcomes. This is precisely what Chart 137 shows (Figure 1), as it names 15 wars, giving their dates, locations, causes, and outcomes. I hope this chart will help you understand how each was as a very unique conflict. All wars were not created equal. So, avoid approaching each of these war chapters with the attitude, “Oh, here we go again with just

another war.” Strive to discover what really happened in each case and what you can learn from it. Conflicts today are likewise unique and complicated.

Data on Wars Involving the Nephites

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
1. Early tribal wars	6th–2nd century B.C.	Land of Nephi	A popular and fraternal hatred; resentment; desire to destroy the Nephites	Jacob 1:10, 14; Enos–Omni	Nephites did not thrive and later left land of Nephi
2. Wars of King Laman’s sons	160–150 B.C.	City of Nephi, land of Zarahemla	Lamanite fear of growing Nephite strength; Lamanite belief that Nephi had wronged his elder brothers	Mosiah 9–10; Omni 1:24; W of M 1:13–14	Established land of Zarahemla as Nephite territory and land of Nephi as Lamanite territory
3. War of Amlici	87 B.C./ 5th year of reign of judges (R.I.)	Zarahemla, hill Amnihu, river Sidon	Political unrest caused by changing the government from a kingship to a judgeship	Alma 2–3	Uneasy peace in Zarahemla with Alma as chief judge
4. Destruction of Ammonihah	81 B.C./ 11 R.I.	Ammonihah	Lamanites seeking revenge on the Nehorites for causing a civil war	Alma 16:1–11; 24:1–25:14	Virtual elimination of Nehorites as a political force
5. War of the Ammonite secession	77 B.C./ 15 R.I.	Zarahemla, land of Jershon	Lamanites attack in retaliation for the Ammonite secession	Alma 28	Ammonites established in land of Jershon
6. Zoramite war	74 B.C./ 18 R.I.	Between Antionum and Jershon	Lamanites attack in retaliation for the Zoramite secession	Alma 43–44	Important use of innovative armor; a Zoramite oath never to attack again

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
7. First Amalickiahite war	72 B.C./ 20 R.J.	Ammonihah, Noah, east seacoast near the narrow neck of land	Political unrest caused by Amalickiah, who dissented from Nephites with political ambitions	Alma 46:1–50:11	Amalickiah defeated, but he swore to return and to kill Captain Moroni
8. Second Amalickiahite war (seven years' war)	67–61 B.C./ 25–31 R.J.	Throughout land of Zarahemla	Return of Amalickiah, coinciding with the armed revolt of the king-men and his brother Ammoron's assumption of the Lamanite kingship	Alma 51–62	A very costly Nephite victory
9. Rebellion of Paanchi	52 B.C./ 40 R.J.	City of Zarahemla	Dispute over Pahoran, son of Pahoran, becoming chief judge	Hel. 1:1–13	Paanchi executed; Pahoran assassinated
10. War of Tubaloth	51 B.C./ 41 R.J.	Cities of Zarahemla and Bountiful	After the turmoil of Paanchi's rebellion, Coriantumr tried to capture the throne of Zarahemla	Hel. 1:14–34	The rise of Gadianton robbers
11. War of Moronihah	38, 35–30 B.C./54, 57–62 R.J.	Land of Zarahemla	Continuing dissension in the church	Hel. 4	Half of Nephite lands occupied by dissenters; Nephi resigns judgment seat

War	Dates	Location	Causes	References	Results
12. War of Gadianton and Kishkumen	26–19 B.C./ 66–73 A.D.	Entire land, but centered in the land of Zarahemla	Assassinations of chief judges Cezoram and his son; Gadianton robbers attain power	Hel. 6:15–11:20	The famine declared by Nephi ended the war as Gadianton's band dissolved
13. War of Giddianhi and Zemnarihah	A.D. 13–22	From Zarahemla to Bountiful	Gadianton robbers come out of the hills to obtain food and to regain control of the government	3 Ne. 2:11–4:28	Unification of the victorious Lamanites and Nephites against the threat of the robbers
14. Rebellion of Jacob	A.D. 30	Land of Zarahemla	Lachoneus tried to expose corrupt judges, who in retaliation tried to make Jacob king	3 Ne. 6:14–7:14	Collapse of reign of judges; degeneration into tribal society
15. Final Nephite wars, phase I	A.D. 322, 327–28	Land of Zarahemla and northward	Overpopulation; infestation of robbers	Morm. 1:6–2:9	Nephites driven back to the narrow neck of land
Final Nephite wars, phase II	A.D. 346–350	Lands of Zarahemla, Jashon, and Shem	Continual Lamanite aggressions	Morm. 2:16–3:1	Nephites enter ten-year peace with Lamanites
Final Nephite wars, phase III	A.D. 361–385	Narrow neck of land and all the land northward	Lamanite greed; gross wickedness on both sides	Morm. 3:4–6:15	Eventual annihilation of Nephite people

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Data on Wars Involving the Nephites," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 137.

Alma 43:3 — Mormon as an Editor (see also Alma 46:8)

In this verse, Mormon says, "And now I return to an account of the wars" When Mormon abridged the large plates of Nephi, as a military commander himself, he no doubt was extremely interested in this material. Yet, there are also important religious

messages here. It seems to me that Mormon had been more restrained when editing before this point. Previously, he more often let those people speak for themselves. However, from this point on in the Book of Mormon, you will see Mormon's voice coming through more directly and urgently.

Alma 43:4 — The Nephites Prepare for War

This brewing conflict goes back to Alma 35. When Alma the Younger went to try to convert the apostate Zoramites, Alma feared that they would create an alliance with the Lamanites and cause armed conflict. He took with him the best people he could, went north to Antionum, and tried to convert them. It did not quite work. This conflict now was the result of the partial failure of Alma's mission.

Preparatory blessings and commandments are included in Alma's parting words to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton (Alma 36–42). These powerful chapters act as a hiatus between the brewing war in Alma 35 and the actual outbreak of conflict here in Alma 43. Those blessings may have been placed in the midst of those increasing tensions in order to show that, although he had not had all the success that he had hoped for in Antionum, Alma came home and said to himself, "We need to prepare. I need to strengthen my people. I need to be sure that my sons have all the blessings and instruction that they possibly can have."

The righteousness that allowed the Nephites to win in Alma 43 and 44 is, in part, attributable to the preparation that Alma the Younger consciously interjected. He wanted his sons and future generations to know that the way to be prepared for conflicts is to understand the doctrine, be committed, and follow the ways of righteousness, as he laid out in his sons' blessings.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Was the Zoramite Defection So Disastrous? \(Alma 35:11\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 143 (July 14, 2016).

Alma 43:5 — Who Was Zerahemnah?

The Lamanites' leader in this war was Zerahemnah. We do not know his origins, but his name hints that he was probably a Mulekite, a descendent of Zarahemla. Thus, he may have been chosen as a leader because of his knowledge of the land. At least as far as his honor goes, Zerahemnah seems to have been a good leader; he refused to take the oath to Captain Moroni because he knew of an oath's importance. The Lamanites and Zoramites may not have valued an oath that much, but the Mulekites had been more integrated into the Nephite worldview. They had sworn a covenant under King Benjamin, and knew the importance of solemn oaths, which the Zoramites had repudiated.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Would Zerahemnah Not Swear an Oath to Moroni?](#) (Alma 44:8),” *KnoWhy* 152 (July 27, 2016).

Alma 43:7–8 — Why Were the Zoramites Angry?

But what were the Zoramites, who were behind all of this, so angry about? Why were they attacking? In Alma 31:8–10, we learn that the Zoramites decided not to observe the Nephite religious requirements, especially the performances of the Church. The Zoramites left, and Alma the Younger tried to convert them back. Did he win any converts? Yes, but who were they? The poor and the working classes. As in all ancient societies, the rich, like those who had built the Rameumptom and a synagogue, needed cheap human labor more than anything else, but Alma the Younger had taken the working-class Zoramites to the land of Jershon.

The people of Ammon and other refugees from the land of Nephi-Lehi were already in the land of Jershon, and some of the Lamanites were also already angry about their having left, as was seen in the War of the Ammonite Secession in Alma 28, when there had been a terrible battle in which the Lamanites unsuccessfully tried to get them back. So, it is logical here that the Zoramites and the Lamanites would combine their forces to set right a similar grievance.

Alma 43:9 — What Must We Defend?

As the armies of the Lamanites invaded, led by Zerahemnah, the mission statement of the Nephites was clear: “To support their lands, and their houses, and their wives and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty that they might worship God according to their desires.”

How can we best be mindful of these same needs and objectives today? We can build the kingdom of God, because that is where our strength will be, in our organization. In the meantime, we must be good citizens. All this can start in the home, with a father and a mother who are true and faithful and who can teach children to be firm and steadfast.

One of the greatest things that people can do in this regard is to appreciate and value our land (the earth), our houses (communities), and our families, rather than looking to material possessions that are not so satisfying. We can read the Proclamation on the Family and follow its counsel. That is an inspired document, revealing the truth about the way things are and shall be. About protecting those things, Isaiah 54:13 said, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children.” The peace is not only the peace of knowing the Lord; we also learn continually throughout the

Book of Mormon that He is on our side when we are obedient to his commandments. This is another form of peace that will be found as our wives and children thrive. The blessing of Isaiah is a millennial promise, but we can have a little bit of heaven and of the millennium here in our families already if we will live those principles.

Alma 43:13 — The Lamanite Troops Are Listed by Tribe

The Zoramites have done some serious political lobbying here. The invading soldiers are a compound of the sons of Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, so we have Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, combining with all who had dissented away from the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla. The Amalekites are included in the list here. Who were the Amalekites? It is uncertain. Research done by Royal Skousen indicates that they may relate to Amlici and his rebellion from Alma 2 to 4. The Zoramites and the descendants of the priests of Noah are also listed. The Amlicites and the priests of Noah were most involved in destroying the city of Ammonihah, leaving in their wake the land called the Desolation of Nehors. There had been a lot of political work behind the scenes. This is a massive force now aligned against the Nephites. Alma's previous worries that the Zoramites would form such an alliance are shown here to have been well founded. And it appears that the Zoramites were the major instigators of this development.

Alma 43:17–20 — What Is Significant about Captain Moroni's Age?

Mormon now goes out of his way to remind us of the youthfulness of Chief Captain Moroni as he leads the forces of the Nephites against this onslaught. He was only twenty-five years old. Mormon himself was a young leader, so he could especially relate with Moroni.

One of our keys to success in the modern world is looking to our youth, empowering them, and relying on them to help give us answers in a world that they are in greater touch with. Can young people help us to be prepared with innovative ideas that will help us in our life's battles? When Captain Moroni comes on the scene, the first thing that he says is, "We must have better armor. We must have better weapons." And that worked! It worked so well that, when the Lamanites were defeated, they essentially said, "It is not that your God gave it to you, it is just that you had these new-fangled kinds of armor."

Those defensive and innovative ideas, I think, came from the young Captain Moroni. It did not come from old military leaders entrenched in their own ways of doing things. It helped to have someone not too deeply or rigidly committed to doing things the way things were done before.

The Savior himself was not very far beyond that age-group when he took upon himself the battle of the Atonement. Neither was the Prophet Joseph Smith. The average age of

the first Quorum of the Twelve called in 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio was under 30. These were people who were idealistic and were ready to cast their lot with Joseph Smith. They did not have vested interests and built-in resistance. In fact, the ones who had the hardest time getting on board with the gospel were the older ones—Martin Harris, an establish landowner, and David Whitmer, who liked certain doctrines the way he had always known them. As all the new revelations were coming forth, some people could not keep moving with the Prophet Joseph. In many ways, the Restoration was, and is, a young people’s movement, a Church of those who are continually young at heart.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Was Moroni’s Young Age an Advantage? \(Alma 43:17\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 151 (July 26, 2016). “Moroni followed divine counsel in wartime preparations and by so doing succeeded in the face of impossible odds. He not only preserved the Nephite people from a dangerous adversary, but he also secured his place in Nephite history. President Nelson directly declared, of the millennial generation of the church—those who are close to the same age as Moroni was when he assumed command of the Nephite armies: ‘As a True Millennial whom the Lord can count on, you will make history too! You will be asked to accept challenging assignments and become an instrument in the Lord’s hands. And He will enable you to accomplish the impossible.’” (See President Nelson, “Becoming True Millennials,” at [lds.org](#)).

Alma 43:17 — Mentoring the Youth Is of Utmost Importance

The missionary training manual, *Preach My Gospel*, is based on implementing especially the principle of personal revelation. As young missionaries go about their Church service and forming their own families, they are going to be more in tune with what is revealed to them than ever before. They are being taught that pattern. We send our young missionaries to represent the Church, but we do not use them much when they come back. Maybe we ought to listen more to what they say and what they are finding out. Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to plead with us to mentor our younger folks, which is one thing that we can always do better. We should be working today in a different way than we were twenty years ago.

Alma 43:23 — Captain Moroni Sought the Prophet’s Advice

Moroni was smart and faithful enough to gather his own intelligence and to consult with the prophet before going into battle. There is a two-pronged attack here that we can follow. We must know what is going on, and then follow the spirit to get revelation to know our course of action. Captain Moroni followed through and it worked. He learned exactly what he needed to do, and he went and did it.

Alma 43:44 — They Fought Like Dragons

The Lamanites fought like dragons! This is an interesting image. In Mesoamerica, soldiers saw themselves as fighting like dragons, and they would even put on masks—jaguar masks especially—to make themselves look more ferocious and try to intimidate and dishearten the other side. This idea of fighting like dragons is a window into a part of their warfare that we can appreciate.

Captain Moroni was the Nephite leader, and he led them personally into battle. He was not sitting on the back lines just calling the shots. Napoleon sat back in his tent or on his horse. But the greatest conqueror of the world, Alexander the Great, was always the first man over the wall when they took a city. He was the first man over the wall in Sidon, the first man over the wall in Tyre. He led his men just like Captain Moroni, and there is something to be said about that, at least in their way of fighting. I do not know that it would work the same way today.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Does Jacob Choose a 'Monster' as a Symbol for Death and Hell?](#) (2 Nephi 9:10)," *KnoWhy* 34 (February 16, 2016).

Alma 43:46–47 — Were the Nephites Justified in Using Stratagems?

The Nephites were on the defensive here, defending their families "even unto bloodshed." If Captain Moroni had been on the offense, or if this had been some kind of war for aggrandizement or conquest, it would have been much less honorable to use trickery or deception. There was no ancient equivalent of the Geneva Convention, but there were customary rules of engagement and ways in which wars were fought. However, the Nephites were defending themselves from an attack and their enemies were not playing by the rules.

One of the rules of engagement under Deuteronomy 20:10–12, was that an Israelite attacker had to announce to a city that they were going to attack it. "We are about to attack you, and you have a choice; you can surrender, here are the terms, or we will obliterate you."

The Zoramites and their new allies were coming in from three directions. They had warriors coming from the north, west, and south. These armies were coming from different lands, and the Nephites were caught in the middle. Even under those conditions, Moroni was apologetic about having to use a *stratagem*, but I think he was justified. At the same time, as the battle raged and their stratagems were paying off, what really got the Nephites through was their loyalty and commitment to their cause. They were not imperialistic or in search of conquest; they were defending their land, their people, and their sacred things.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“How Can the Book of Mormon Provide Peace and Meaning to Those in Military Service? \(Alma 43:47\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 496 (January 1, 2019).

Alma 43:51–53 — What Was Significant about the Battle at Sidon?

Captain Moroni had consulted Alma. The Prophet told Moroni what the Lord had revealed to him about what was going to happen. The Lord would not have revealed it, if he did not expect Moroni to follow through. Moroni and his men now knew that God was on his side, and this must have been of great comfort to the Nephites, who were underdogs in this conflict. They likely did not have as many soldiers under arms as their opponents. They succeeded partially because of the terrain; they knew the value of the high ground. When you have the higher ground, and you can attack people who are slowed as they are wading through a river or coming up out of the valley. There you can inflict a lot of damage. So it worked for the Nephites. They were much better prepared, and events proceed in their favor in this particular war.

Alma 44

Here are some study questions to consider as you read this chapter:

1. Why would Zerahemnah not swear an oath of perpetual surrender? (44:8). What oaths have you sworn in your life? Do you take them as seriously as he did?
2. Why and how did Moroni show mercy to Zerahemnah and his soldiers? Is this a model of how God shows mercy to us?
3. How important is it to give the dead a proper burial, especially our military dead? (44:22). How do you feel when you go to a cemetery, especially a war cemetery?

Alma 44:6–7 — Why Did Moroni Let Them Go with Only an Oath?

The Nephites believed that oaths had enormous power and effect, and that if one’s oath were to be violated there would be severe consequences. For example, when Nephi was making an oath to Zoram, it was binding if they swore an oath on anything living. They truly believed in curses, oaths, vows, and solemn promises sworn with conditions that “if I break this oath, may very severe consequences follow.” They took these oaths seriously. Could this be a model for us?

There is continuity here between Alma 42, where we are taught that the essence of mercy is the granting of time to repent. Mormon may have preserved Alma’s teaching in Alma 42 knowing that in Alma 44 we would see an instance of its application. After all that

Zerahemnah and his allies had done, Captain Moroni was still willing to say, “I will give you time. You can fix this. You can repent.”

It is a very practical application of the very doctrine that Alma the Younger was teaching—that God gives us time. That is his mercy to us, and we see Captain Moroni putting that into effect under a very difficult situation. It would have been easy for him to say, “You guys have killed a lot of my friends and soldiers. Let us just finish you off right now.” He is willing to extend the same kind of mercy that God would.

Alma 44: 8 — Why Did Zarahemnah Refuse to Make an Oath?

Zerahemnah was given a chance to swear an oath, and he responded, “Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children.”

Captain Moroni’s terms included the following conditional: “if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us” (Alma 44:6). To Zerahemnah, that meant, “You will not come again, and you will not have your children come either.” He counteroffered, “Take our weapons of war and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness.” In other words: “Just let us go. You can have our weapons, but we are not going to swear this oath.” But Moroni refused.

Why would Zerahemnah rather risk losing his head than swear that oath? That is all he needed to do, and Moroni would have let him go free. Why would he not do that? He knew that neither he nor his posterity would keep it, but so what? Would someone today worry about that? It goes back to how they viewed oaths in the ancient world as binding commitments enforceable by God, and he was not prepared to deal with the consequences of breaking the oath.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Would Zarahemnah Not Swear an Oath to Moroni? \(Alma 44:8\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 152, (July 27, 2016). “The elements of Alma 44 combine to show that both the Nephites and Lamanites, including even the wrathful Zerahemnah, respected the seriousness of oaths, especially oaths sworn in God’s name. This in turn demonstrates the rich complexity of the Book of Mormon as well as it supports its ancient provenance.”

Alma 44:11 — Why Did Moroni Say He Could Not Recall His Words?

“I cannot recall [meaning that he could not *recant*] the words which I have spoken.” Because he had said, “I command you in the name of that all-powerful God” (See Alma 44:5), he had made his demand something that he alone could not recant. Only God could retract it.

Alma 45

Here are some questions to ponder as you read this chapter:

1. What questions did Alma ask Helaman when he interviewed him before blessing him, prophesying to him, blessing and cursing the land, and blessing the church? (45:2–8). How important are interview questions like these for us today?
2. Helaman was neither sustained nor accepted by the people of the Church (45:23–24). Why not? What does this tell you about the importance of sustaining our new Church leaders at the time they take office?
3. Would you count the events in this chapter as one of the greatest moments in Helaman's life? What do you find most impressive about them?
4. What prepared Helaman to righteously and successfully meet those challenging opportunities and responsibilities? Have you similarly prepared?
5. In what ways did Helaman carry forward the teachings and objectives of his father Alma the Younger and grandfather Alma the Elder?
6. In what ways does the life of Helaman inspire you? What lessons of life and encouragement do you learn from him, personally and spiritually?

Alma 45:2–8 — Alma Interviews Helaman

Shortly before his death, Alma the Younger spoke with his son Helaman and asked him to take the plates and continue to write so that their descendants would know what had occurred. He asked him to hold on to those scriptures. This interview in Alma 45 was one of Helaman's great moments.

This little block of text, seemingly separate from the rest of the narrative, provides a window into Alma's ecclesiastical administration. Alma was interviewing Helaman as he prepared to pass on his responsibilities. Perhaps he sensed that he was not coming back from the city of Melek. According to the text as we have it, these are the last things that he would say to his eldest son, as Alma held his final father's interview with his son. There are only three questions here.

1. Alma begins by ascertaining that Helaman understood the task. "Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept?" (Alma 45:2). In other words, do you believe the scriptures? An appropriate and important question for any father to ask his children.

2. "Believest thou in Jesus Christ who shall come?" (Alma 45:4). That is still the vital question for us in our world today. We know that he came in the flesh, but we do not ask, in temple recommend interviews or other settings, "Do you believe that Christ is coming again?" We are asked, "Do you believe in God the Eternal Father and in his Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Ghost?" Not "Do you believe in the Second Coming?" But that question has powerful implications in our life. It was also a concern that Alma had addressed throughout his life.
3. "Will you keep my commandments?" (Alma 45:6). This question referred to the commandments given by Alma the Prophet as the Prophet. And Helaman did not just answer "yes." He answered, "With all my heart" (Alma 45:7). "Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land" (Alma 45:8). Usually when we answer our bishop's questions, we just say yes; but maybe, "With all my heart" would be a better response.

How important are interview questions like these for us today? I hope you share with me a great feeling of gratitude and appreciation for the privilege it is to have interviews with our bishops and stake presidency, and to have a stewardship accounting, to be blessed by the opportunity to respond verbally and affirmatively to questions such as these as we renew our commitments to living the gospel, keeping the commandments, and doing everything we can do, as Alma and his people did, to be ready to work against conflicts that rage and swirl all around us. I am grateful for the support of the priesthood and of the guidance that we get from our Church leaders in the righteous living of our lives. I do not know of anywhere else that one can go to find anything like it.

Alma 45:2–8 — How Old Was Helaman at this Time?

One of the more sobering moments in Helaman's life comes in chapter 45, when his father, in his farewell speech, prophesied that the Nephite nation would dwindle in unbelief and eventually be destroyed. Helaman received a blessing, the interview, and then this prophecy from his father. Alma gave Helaman good news but ended with the bad news that the people would not remain faithful. Then he departed as if he were going to the city of Melek, and he was never heard of again. How old was Helaman when his father went missing in action?

Helaman was blessed and interviewed by his father in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 45:2). He was likely born only a few years before the commencement of the reign of the judges, since Alma was still a young man when he and the sons of Mosiah were stopped by the angel. And so one may figure that Helaman must have been about twenty-two at that time, in order to allow Shiblon and Corianto to have been old enough to have gone on the mission to Antionum and to go astray as Corianton did. So, it would

seem that Helaman couldn't have been much more than twenty-two at the time his father left him with a very daunting challenge.

Alma 45:17–18 — Alma Disappeared from the Land

What would the effect have been on Helaman, a first-born son, when his father left? When a father left this world under biblical law, the eldest son became responsible for his mother, for his unmarried sisters, and for his single aunts. He would take responsibility for the family estate, and, as in this case, he inherited certain priestly duties. How did Helaman respond when he realized that his father was gone?

As far as we know, there was no psalm-type mourning, as there had been from Nephi when Lehi died. For Helaman, the situation may not have been much different than when his father Alma had left on previous occasions. Helaman had been left behind when Alma had gone on other missions, and there was no technology to send frequent messages and updates back and forth as we have today. It may have been some time before they realized that Alma was not coming back. Helaman just carried on doing many things as he was already doing when his father had departed before.

Alma 45:21–22 — Helaman and His Brothers Declare the Word of God

There had been some contention and disputes, “many little dissensions and disturbances among the people.” The text says, “It became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them.” Alma was gone. Helaman and the family probably mourned over his loss, although they did not know for certain that he was dead, and there was no body to bury.

There would likely have been an interlude, a time when they continued to think that Alma might yet return, and then a time when Helaman finally said to Shiblon and Corianton that they knew well what their father would have wanted them to do. They knew they needed to hold the place together, so they went forward, they “regulated” the church, and put new priests and teachers in place. That was what Alma had done. When he went to the city of Gideon, he appointed priests and teachers as needed. So Helaman and his brothers went and did the things that Alma himself had done.

Alma 45:22–23 — The Significance of Establishing Churches

Alma and Helaman established churches *before the coming of Christ*. They were covenant churches related to those that Alma the Elder established when he brought together the people who had been baptized at the Waters of Mormon. When they arrived in Zarahemla, Alma the Elder obtained a special decree from King Mosiah for them to live in separate covenant communities; they called them churches. The word for *church* in both

Hebrew and Greek means a gathering or a collection, a community. There were seven of these churches in Alma the Elder's day.

Alma the Younger established similar covenant communities in various cities, and his son Helaman continued the same activity. While these may not have been churches exactly in our modern manner, they were organizations that encouraged people to keep their covenants. Perhaps they were more akin to what the ancient Jews called a synagogue, a house of scripture reading and prayer and community concern and celebrations.

The Book of Mormon gives us something that is not in the Bible, namely records of the transition of a group of Israelite people, who started out in Jerusalem and developed over six hundred years. There were covenantal changes with King Benjamin, and organizational changes under Alma, and finally they were prepared as a people for the Savior to come and institute such things as the administration of the sacrament by twelve appointed disciples. In the Book of Mormon, the church can be seen emerging, unlike in the Bible, where nothing is contained for the years between Daniel and the birth of Jesus.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why Did Alma and Amulek Preach in Synagogues? \(Alma 16:13\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 124 (June 17, 2016).

Alma 45:23–24 — “They Would Not Give Heed to the Words of Helaman”

The culprit behind this movement was a “large and strong man” named Amalickiah, who, through flattery, had convinced many “lower judges of the land” to “support him and establish him to be their king” (Alma 46:3–5). Not only was he popular among Nephite society at large, but “there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah” (Alma 45:7). For those Nephites familiar with their own history, this state of affairs would have indeed seemed “exceedingly precarious and dangerous” (Alma 45:7). Less than twenty years earlier, King Mosiah had, in allusion to King Noah, reminded them of “how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction” (Mosiah 29:17).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[How Did Seeking a King Get in the Way of Sustaining a Prophet? \(Alma 45:23\)](#)," *KnoWhy* 153, (July 28, 2016).

Alma 46–48

In these three chapters we are presented with a stark contrast between two polar opposites, Captain Moroni and the treacherous Amalickiah. Several things are notable and memorable in these chapters. As you read these pages, consider some of the following questions as they might intrigue you. Hints are given below, but full answers still remain to be developed:

1. Who was Amalickiah? Where did he come from? What did he want? How did he go about trying to get what he wanted? Why was he able to attract such devoted followers? Why did he attack at this time, and why did he think he could succeed?
2. In contrast, who was Moroni? How did he behave? What did he want? How did he go about accomplishing his objectives? How did he mobilize his soldiers?
3. While we obviously recognize that no human being is either completely good or completely bad, how does it help you in your life to revere ideal figures such as Moroni and to shun clear autocrats such as Amalickiah?
4. Can you tell the story of a person whom you respect because he or she acted courageously and admirably under difficult situations?
5. How many times in these chapters do you encounter words such as “intent” and “desire” or “desiring”? Why do you think Mormon placed such emphasis on these words in these accounts? What factors influence the things that you want or desire? How can you improve the intents or your mind and the desires of your heart?
6. In Alma 46:24–25, Moroni quotes some interesting words from the ancient patriarch Jacob about a piece of Joseph’s coat. How does Captain Moroni know these words? What contemporary use did he make of those ancient words? How foundational was that ancient covenant image in motivating the loyalty of the Nephite soldiers and population throughout all of these war chapters?
7. Throughout these chapters, some interesting points are to be found about military conventions, martial law, and their order of battle. What use might we make of these points in our personal and social lives today?

Alma 46:1–4 — Who Was Amalickiah?

In Alma 46–48, many facets in the lives of Captain Moroni and Amalickiah are presented. It is very interesting to contrast them: what were their stories? what were they interested in? and what were their strategies? As their lives are examined, one will hopefully find

many things in Captain Moroni's behavior that is worthy of emulation, and things in Amalickiah's life that one would like to avoid.

Amalickiah was an imposing man and was able to push many people around. He was a Nephite, but in Alma 46:3 it states that he was wroth against his brethren. In Alma 46:1, we read, "It came to pass that as many as would not hearken to the words of Helaman and his brethren, were gathered together against their brethren." Amalickiah became the party leader, no doubt in part because of his physical size and strong will. But this man was a member of the church, who had no doubt listened to Helaman preach and had rejected his authority as the successor to Alma.

A point about his descent. Amalickiah was a Nephite, but remember that the group known as "Nephites" incorporated Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Do we know which of those groups Amalickiah came from? In fact, in Alma 54:23, his brother, Ammoron, tells Captain Moroni that he was a descendant of Zoram. Most of the Zoramites had formed an alliance with the Lamanites and gone down to the land of Nephi. There had been Zerahemnah's attack, and while all that occurred, Amalickiah was apparently still living in the Land of Zarahemla. His trademark was treachery; he may have been biding his time for a moment when he could conquer Zarahemla from the inside.

Alma 46:1 — Why Did Amalickiah Start His Revolt When He Did?

When Helaman regulated the church, he and his brothers established the church in all the land. In each city, they appointed new priests and teachers. Some of them may have been new appointees, and some may have been the same priests and teachers reinstated under their new leadership. When King Benjamin passed the kingship to his son Mosiah, the same thing was done, as was the pattern in the ancient world in general. The text does not state whether Helaman reinstated the same people as priests and teachers, but it also may be that he actually did not. Perhaps it was time for a change. We, today, believe in change, and accept it as a normal part of giving other people an opportunity to serve in the kingdom. But for some, those changes mean a loss of power, leading to resentment.

At the beginning of this era, Alma the Younger had held three roles: High Priest, Chief Judge, and military leader, but he divided up some of his responsibilities. When he died, all of his original appointees were gone, and political instability arose. The same thing will occur again at the end of the Book of Alma. In chapter 63, all leaders of this generation died, and in Helaman 1, the three sons of Pahoran—Paanchi, Pacumeni and Pahoran—squabbled over who would be the next leader. That squabble became such a serious problem that it opened the way for Kishkumen, the founder of an insurgent party—the Gadiantons—who plagued the Nephites for the next fifty years. It was transition-in-power moments that opened the way for dissenting voices to come in and seize the opportunity.

Alma 46:3–4 — Amalickiah Attempts to Become King

This Nephite government was a new experiment in governing without a king. The reign of the judges was only a generation old, and in the first five years of Alma's time as chief judge, he had to literally fight Amlici and his followers, who believed they ought to reinstate the kingship. When Alma the Younger departed and his son Helaman took his place, the same problem arose again, leading to a perilous situation which Amalickiah saw as an opportunity.

When the new system was adopted, judges were called by the voice of the people in some type of popular vote. Some Nephites may have believed that anyone who wanted to be elected could put themselves forward as a candidate. However, the system apparently operated most like the way appointees are sustained in the modern church rather than elected by campaigning. That is most likely what King Mosiah intended when he spoke of the role of the "voice of the people."

This background helps put Amalickiah's case in perspective. There were many people in this society who could have been dissatisfied with the way things had gone. They were likely unhappy with Helaman telling them that they needed to repent. For an opportunist like Amalickiah, there were religious, political, economic, and personal dissatisfactions which he could use to his advantage. As a Zoramite, he saw his opportunity, and he took it.

Alma 46:8 — Mormon Was Actively Editing the War Chapters

As Mormon abridged and edited the record, he often used the phrase, "and thus we see." He could not restrain himself from letting the people know how all this happened; he already knew the end from the beginning. In Mormon's own day, he said that the Nephites had become so wicked that he could do nothing but stand as an idle witness to their downfall. It must have been terribly heartbreaking for him to look back on these days and wish that his people could have been more like these stalwart people.

He wanted that so badly that he named his son Moroni. It isn't known how many sons Mormon had, perhaps not many, as he was very young himself when he was given formidable duties. He named his son Moroni after this Chief Captain Moroni who also was in the field as a military leader at a very young age. With this in mind, we can see the Book of Mormon becoming Mormon's book much more powerfully than before.

Alma 46:11 — Captain Moroni Was Angry Because of Amalickiah

Amalickiah stirred his followers, as well as his opponents, to anger. This included Captain Moroni, who was angered at what was occurring. Some might excuse it, saying it was justifiable anger, and it probably should not be thought of as being in a rage. But it was anger, nonetheless, and if we do not restrain ourselves, we can slide from naturally strong

feelings into harmful rage and fury. Something of an impulsive side of Captain Moroni will emerge again when he exchanges letters in frustration and urgency with Pahoran. Perhaps it is something of a flaw for him., but Mormon states that “if everyone were like Moroni, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” (Alma 48:17). He was still a very good man and a strong military leader. But as good as someone might be, we all may have flaws, and it is important to remember to temper ourselves in that regard.

Alma 46:12 — The Significance of Tearing a Coat in Covenants

Captain Moroni does not just write down his Title of Liberty and put it on a nice plaque on a wall somewhere. Instead, in a very dramatic way, he impresses upon the people the significance of these words. He tore his shirt or his coat, and put that piece “on the end of a pole” (46:12, 13). It likely wasn’t as large of a piece of cloth as is depicted in popular art, but still, there is something extremely important and personal about a man’s coat in the ancient world. So, Moroni was making a very powerful personal statement. In the ancient world, when people tore their garments, it was a sign of deep emotion, grief, great concern, and willingness to put their lives on the line. “I am willing,” Moroni was saying, “to fight for these things even until I am dead. I will give my life for this.” He tore his personal coat as a symbol that he was willing to be torn himself. This simile curse must have been a very dramatic thing for his people to witness.

Further Reading

Mark J. Morrise, “[Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon](#),” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 124–138.

Donald W. Parry, “[Symbolic Action as Prophetic Curse](#),” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 206–208.

Alma 46:13–15 — Believers in Christ Are Ridiculed as Christians

Name-calling was a part of Amalickiah’s rhetoric. The text tells us that Amalickiah’s followers began calling their opponents *Christians*. It does not appear that this was meant to be a flattering name. Today, we think of Christians as a very noble term, and Latter-day Saints are concerned when others deny us the right to call ourselves Christians. Why might this word have been used as a slur here? Amalickiah’s followers had dissented from the Church, and generally did not believe that the Messiah (the Anointed One or the Christ) would ever come. It was a fundamental axiom of these dissenters that the believers could not know that he would ever come. Thus, calling them “Christians” was not a compliment, and might even have branded them as targets. However, the faithful Nephites gladly adopted that name and took that name upon themselves, perhaps at considerable risk.

Alma 46:20 — The Nephites Gathered around the Title of Liberty

The Nephites did not have a standing army. There was generally no such thing in the ancient world. When a nation went to war, the farmers had to leave their plows and their fields. They knew where to gather, because a commander would walk around the town or the land holding a pole up in the air. This was a traditional signal to come report for battle. I recall reading a brief account in Roland de Vaux's impressive work, *Ancient Israel*, about a group of surveyors who were mapping the hill country in Palestine a century ago. They put their sighting picket on the top of a hill and then were unnerved to see the local men charging up the hill asking, "Where's the battle?" Captain Moroni evidently knew of this ancient tradition as well, for the thing that brought the people running with their weapons was the "pole" (mentioned in 46:12–13). The covenantal declaration on this piece of cloth, not the pole, was the innovative thing. Captain Moroni then also ran a good public relations campaign, as he placed those words on similar banners on the walls and towers of the Nephite cities.

Further Reading

Kerry Hull, "War Banners: A Mesoamerican Context for the Title of Liberty," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 84–118.

Alma 46:21–22 — The Nephites Entered a Covenant with Moroni

After Captain Moroni had torn his coat, the people tore their own garments to participate individually in the covenant. In this covenant they are essentially saying, "We agree with this and we will fight." They threw their coats on the ground right in front of Moroni—right at his feet. But why at his feet? They were agreeing to be led by him and saying in effect, "We are below you. We will follow your command." Captain Moroni probably walked around on their coats. While the text does not say this explicitly, it is implied by the words of the covenant:

We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression" (Alma 46:22).

This dramatic symbolism of the making of a covenant, either civilly or religiously, and then depicting the punishment that would follow if they did not keep it was a standard part of covenant-making in the ancient world. For example, there are texts from the Hittite area, which is eastern Turkey today, in which people would make a contract or a covenant and they would take a small animal, sometimes a lamb or a dog, and they would cut off the animal's head, or slit its belly open, and as they did, they would say, "May this happen to me if I do not keep this contract." They would invoke that curse or consequence upon

themselves. It was a way of saying “I am taking this very seriously.” That kind of symbolically dramatized covenant-making, not only among these soldiers but also with God, is what is happening here among the Nephites. War in the ancient world was always seen as involving God (or the gods) in many crucial ways.

Further Reading

Mark J. Morrise, “Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 124–138.

Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’ in the Book of Mormon and the Ancient Near East,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 58.

Stephen D. Ricks, “‘Holy War’: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 103–117.

Alma 46:23–27 — Why Did Moroni Refer to Joseph in Egypt?

The coat of Joseph, Jacob’s son, represented his life and who he was. In Genesis 37, Joseph’s brothers took his ripped coat back to Jacob, who was blind, sitting at home, and in verse 33, it says that “he knew it.” That may just mean he recognized it, but some scholars think the Hebrew there may mean that he knew by the smell, which means the coat smelled like Joseph. That convinced Jacob that Joseph was dead.

Moroni pointed to Jacob’s observing that a part of the coat had not decayed over the many years and thus to Jacob’s seeing that as a symbol that a remnant of his seed would be preserved. Moroni said, “Let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph” (Alma 46:24).

And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ” (Alma 46:27).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Moroni Quote the Patriarch Jacob about a Piece of Joseph’s Coat? (Alma 46:24),” *KnoWhy* 154, (July 29, 2016).

Alma 46:29–33 — Amalickiah Fled from Moroni’s Army

Amalickiah was not the first one to attack. He gathered all the men loyal to him, and Captain Moroni started assembling troops to go after him. Because the numbers were not in his favor and because he doubted the conviction of his followers (Alma 46:29), Amalickiah then fled to the land of Nephi, taking only a few men with him and

abandoning the rest. He was a coward, and loyal to only himself. As soon as he saw Moroni's troops, he fled—for Moroni had headed Amalickiah off. Captain Moroni had wanted to talk and make a covenant.

Amalickiah was smart, a very shrewd man. He knew that he did not have the strength at that point to follow through, so he did not stay. When he returned, he came using his Zoramite heritage to his advantage. He appointed other Zoramites as the leaders of his army, because the Zoramites knew the landscape. They knew the strengths of the Nephites, and they knew their weaknesses. There is nothing as useful as an insider, someone who knows the land and is able to make an effective attack.

Alma 46:29 — Amalickiah's Followers Doubted Their Cause

Amalickiah was more interested in destroying than building up. One cannot see any positive agenda here. He very selfishly wanted to be the king, but he was mostly *against* things, not for things. That was a bad sign and his followers recognized it. In this verse, the text explained, "He also saw that his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken."

Alma 47

Alma 47:1–2 — The Lamanites Were Too Scared to Fight

When Amalickiah arrived in the Land of Nephi, he convinced the king of the Lamanites to gather troops to war against the Nephites. Did these soldiers have a choice? In fact, many of them did not want to participate. They could well have said something like, "Wait a minute! It was only a couple of years ago we got beat pretty soundly up there," or more exactly, as Mormon states, "they feared to displease the king, and they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives."

We can almost hear them complain: "Those Nephites knew what they were doing. We were fighting on foreign land. We were much too exposed. We did not have supply troops. We were over-extended, and they had better armor. We do not want to go back." But they were afraid and did not want to offend the king.

Alma 47:3 — Amalickiah Uses Force and Fear to Gain Power

There was no opportunity for the soldiers to feel individually committed to Amalickiah's cause. That stands in stark contrast to the way in which Captain Moroni gathered his men, and it is interesting to note that Amalickiah did not even gather his troops himself. He did everything by delegation. Who knows what he was doing meantime? He was probably relaxing at the palace of the king while others were out doing the hard work. That is not

like Captain Moroni, who had other men who helped him, but very clearly went recruiting himself. They are two drastically different types of leaders.

Alma 47:10–12 — Evil Is Persistent

The Lamanite soldiers who did not want to fight took shelter at the top of the hill. Amalickiah tried to get them down. He was smart enough, again, to know not to place the hill under siege. He enticed them to come down, and they finally did come down, but still would not surrender. He wore them down into supporting him in his ambitions, selling out his own troops. That persistence was another one of his strategies. We need to take great care about the evil forces arrayed around us. Ofttimes they are persistent people whom we wish would go away. We may ignore them, but they just keep coming back, and sometimes we give in.

Alma 47:24–29 — The Lamanite King is Murdered and His Servants Flee

Amalickiah had his servants slay the king of the Lamanites, and he falsely accused the king's servants of the treachery. It is interesting that when those falsely accused servants of the king's servants ran, they escaped to the lands of the Nephites, specifically to Jershon. Why did they there, of all places? They must have had friends there. At least the initial inhabitants of Jershon had been the people of Ammon. It also may be that the underlying records of the king's murder were partially furnished by these servants.

Alma 47:33 — Why Did the Queen Ask Amalickiah to Spare the City?

Why did the queen request Amalickiah to spare the city? In ancient warfare, when a new general captured a land, he could do whatever he wanted. If he felt like the people were not going to play ball (so to speak), it was very common for a captured city to be simply obliterated. They did not have effective ways to keep captives of war; there were likely no prison camps. Even the ancient societies that we think of as more enlightened, such as the Athenians and the Spartans, killed all the men when they conquered a city or island, and all the women and children were sold off into slavery. That was one of the common realities of ancient warfare.

Alma 47:33–35 — Amalickiah Gains the Kingdom through Fraud

Amalickiah took the queen to wife. How and why did he do that? By murder, fraud, and deceit, he had placed himself at the head of the Lamanite armies. With the king dead, he took the throne. In the ancient world, a new king had the legal right to take the wife (along with the other women) of his predecessor. Amalickiah knew the tricks of the trade and exactly what he needed to do. By marrying the queen, the queen's children were now his children, and he had eliminated the potential future problem of claims by the heirs of his predecessor or of sons who might otherwise arise as pretenders to the throne.

Alma 48

Alma 48:1–3 — Amalickiah Spreads Propaganda

Amalickiah appointed men to speak from towers against the Nephites. Walls, towers, and hillsides acted as natural amphitheaters where speakers could be heard a long way off. This was undoubtedly a smear campaign about all the bad things that the Nephites had supposedly done. Most of the Lamanites, of course, were still quite willing to accept the idea that their forefathers, Laman and Lemuel—and by extension their people as a whole—had been wronged by Nephi in the desert, and that they were wronged by Nephi when he took the plates. There was plenty of rhetoric to be broadcast in reiterating these old party lines. The flames were fanned again. However, it is also interesting that Amalickiah sent his men to do it. Amalickiah did not even go out and do that much himself. Perhaps that would have looked too obviously like the pot calling the kettle black.

Alma 48:13 — What Was the Oath Moroni Swore?

Moroni and the Nephites had previously sworn an oath that they would fight when they essentially promised, “May we be trampled upon just as we are trampling on our coats, if we do not fight valiantly.” Now we learn in this verse (48:13) that Captain Moroni, who was “a man who was firm in the faith of Christ,” had himself sworn “to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.” This contrasts with an oath that Amalickiah had made: “He did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood” (Alma 49:27)! “On the other hand,” it says, “the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies” (Alma 49:28).

When men are ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, it is with the making of an oath and a covenant. When men and women receive their endowments in the temple, they make covenants. That word *covenant* is just another word for an oath. There, we just say, “yes.” But what does Jesus say about swearing oaths? Don’t swear by the heavens or the hair of your head; but “just let your speech be yea, yea, [or] nay, nay” (Matthew 5:37; 3 Nephi 12:37). When done right, that is how we are supposed to swear oaths: we say *yes*, and we mean it.

Alma 48:14 — The Nephites Did Not Instigate War

Moroni taught his people never to give offense; but to fight to preserve their lives; and to follow the oracles of the Lord on where to go. A few years ago, President Hinckley said the following:

There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, against tyranny, threat and oppression. When all is said and done, we of this Church are a people of peace. We are followers of our redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ who was the Prince of Peace, but even he said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

Further Reading

Gordon B. Hinckley, “[War and Peace](#),” General Conference April 2003.

Alma 48:17–19 — Nephite Heroes

How is the word *hero* defined? Perhaps someone that is viewed as admirable because of difficult choices or difficult things they did. Heroes can come from all walks of life. They can be ordinary or unusual, but they leave an indelible mark. The world changed because they were there.

There is great value and importance in having these heroes set forth for us. Mormon knew that. He knew that people in the latter days would need Captain Moroni as a hero. The war chapters set out the behavior of Captain Moroni and Amalickiah in some detail. Mormon recorded those details so that readers could understand what made Moroni heroic, and Amalickiah despicable.

We need to be more conscious and careful of the heroes that we pick. Some people pick the wrong kind of hero, and that can be a problem. Of course, from the Greeks with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is where we get the concept of heroes. Odysseus and Achilles and those figures became models of behavior for better or worse among the Greeks. In our own literature, we have heroes like Joseph Smith and Moroni and others that will serve us even better.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Mormon See Captain Moroni as a Hero? \(Alma 48:17\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 155, (July 29, 2016).

Alma 48:21–23 — Why Were the Nephites Reluctant to Fight?

Did Moroni like this war? Moroni was a professional soldier. At least he would be classified as such today, but he was still a reluctant participant in the war. He sorrowed that it had to happen this way. “[The Nephites] were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.”

“Compelled reluctantly” is a picturesque phrase. They were forcefully driven, compelled, and yet remained reluctant. They were very mindful of the oath that they had sworn. All

of these people had made a vow, and vows in ancient Israelite religion were virtually irrevocable. They were taken very seriously. So Captain Moroni was compelled not only by the circumstances, but by the oath that he had made before God and all of those witness that he would fight, as unpleasant as it became.

He tried to avoid the situation, “Let us cut them off; let us give them the choice of the covenant.” He tried everything else he could, and now, in the end, he was compelled to lead armies in actual combat. This expression hints at the turmoil he must have felt as he was torn in two directions by a very hard situation.

Alma 49

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- Amalickiah’s chief captains decide not to attack Ammonihah but go against the city of Noah instead, lose badly, and are all killed, having sworn an oath that they would destroy the Nephites in that city (49:1–25)
- In anger, Amalickiah swears an oath to drink Moroni’s blood (49:26–28)
- The Nephites thank God and give heed to the word of God (49:28–30)

Discussion questions to think about:

1. The chief captains of Amalickiah decided to attack Ammonihah and Noah because they thought those cities were weak places but were strategically important. What weaknesses do you think Satan is attacking right now in your life and family? Is he going after your weak places? How can we anticipate Satan’s attacks?
2. After great successes, Moroni did not stop preparing for further attacks. How can we prevent our temporary successes from lulling us into a sense of false security?

Alma 49:1–3 — Rebuilding Ammonihah

Two of the rare times in the Book of Mormon where an event is dated to the day relate to the destruction and rebuilding of Ammonihah. It had been destroyed on the fifth day of the second month of the eleventh year of the reign of the judges (Alma 16:1). It was rebuilt “in part” by the tenth day of the eleventh month of the nineteen year. In other words, nine months and eight years later. Apparently, initial attempts to refortify it had only recently begun. Strategically, it must have been located in an important place. Perhaps it had not been reoccupied sooner because, in some cultures, a seven-year period was required to purify contaminated land. We don’t know that this idea of a sabbatical cleansing had factored into the resettling of Ammonihah, but if it wasn’t a concern, one wonders why

Mormon was so concerned about giving us these two precise dates here. And it makes sense in our lives to give our solved problems a cooling off period. Letting things heal and cure well is usually a good thing.

Alma 49:3 — The Lamanites Tried to Attack Ammonihah

The chief captains over the combined Lamanite forces knew the Nephites' territory. They were Zoramites, they knew the lay of the land, and where the weakest parts had been. Here, the Lamanites thought, "Let us just go get some easy pickings." They thought they knew of a weak spot and went after it. But that did not work out.

Satan does the same kind of thing. Does he know what your strengths are? Is he going to waste his time on going after them? He usually does not. How have you found that in your life? Do you think he knows your weaknesses well enough that he can head for them?

If we concern ourselves really with what the Lord thinks, then we will be in harmony with the Spirit. Then, if someone does not like us, at least we know we are in harmony with the Spirit. Do you think the adversary will try and make you believe that you are inadequate so that you will become preoccupied with the wrong things?

The adversary can be removed from our presence with light. Doctrine and Covenants Section 52 teaches the pattern of the gospel, and if we understand that pattern, we can chase the adversary away. He always follows the path of least resistance, and some believe that he will not spend time with a heart and mindset in the right direction because he will look for souls that are more easily influenced. We can take our model from Captain Moroni. Put up our defenses, and it will work. It is reassuring to know that there are ways that you can drive Satan away from you.

One may wonder how we can anticipate his attacks. He is not overly original. The Adversary will do what he has done before, and we know what he has done, both from what is written in the scriptures and from what he has previously done to us. He has his strategy and is going to want to try to keep with that program. He believes it is going to work.

If we look at what has happened before—remember what Amalickiah did with Lehonti—the adversary operates in much the same way. He just keeps sending us the same message. As we study the scriptures and remember, we know what is going to come and can be better prepared for it.

Alma 49:8 — Moroni Fortifies the Cities

It is important to be a step ahead of where Satan might come. We have to pray, we are told, that we not be led into temptation. If we know we have a particular weakness, we

need to pray for strength in that area, that the Lord will help us and strengthen us. The more specific that the Saints are in our prayers, the more the Lord can help us.

If you know the moves that your opponent is going use, you can anticipate their moves. If you are just a little bit ahead, you can stop that move before it has any momentum. Timing is important. It would be nice if we knew more. In the case of the Adversary, we do know quite a bit. We have been warned, we have been told. We just need to execute. That is something to learn from this otherwise rather unpleasant story.

The Nephites were always one step ahead of the Lamanites in terms of technology. Moroni's defenses were things that had never been done before in the five hundred years of Lehiite history. They had begun building actual defenses on their cities. For some reason, this had not been done before, and it came as a tremendous surprise to the Lamanites.

Alma 49:17, 27 — The Lamanites Swear Evil Oaths

When we think of an oath, we suppose that someone making it would have extreme integrity and honesty. However, here these Lamanite chief captains have sworn an oath to do evil, and they would do everything in their power to keep it.

Oaths have power for good or for evil. The Gadianton robbers swore oaths to each other, usually promising to support one another. The Nephite oaths were usually to obey God's law or fulfill his will. The oaths of the Gadianton robbers were so vile and fearful, that they were not published. The brethren did not want anybody to know about those oaths, because there was a wrong way to swear oaths and that created problems. Beware, even today, the oaths of secret combinations.

Alma 49:19–22 — The Lamanites Attempt to Pierce Nephite Defenses

It is so interesting to read of the Lamanites trying to dig down the banks of earth that they might obtain a path. They were swept off by stones, and the ditches were filled up in a measure with their dead. That is because they fought with waves of men coming, and they just kept sending them, and as they were killed with stones, arrows, or whatever, they were collapsing into the ditch and they could not pull them out even to rescue them if they were trying to save the wounded. That creates an amazing and quite horrific picture.

Alma 49:23 — The Lamanites Receive Talionic Justice

Moroni did not boast of his success. In Alma 50:1, he sent the people immediately back to work constructing more fortifications. This defeat in Ammonihah and Noah was a kind of poetic justice for the Lamanites, who fought until their chief captains were all gone. This can be seen on other occasions in the scriptures, where justice in the ancient world was talionic. Whatever they were planning to do to their enemy (such as kill them all) would happen to them (they were killed). For example, if you dig a pit for your neighbor,

you may fall in it. That is talionic justice. Abinadi was burned, and he warned, “What ye have done to me is going to happen to you.” This in the teachings of the Savior in several places. If you forgive, you will be forgiven, and if you do not you will not be forgiven. Whatsoever measure you use for measuring, that yardstick that is going to be used to measure you (Matthew 7:2).

Alma 49:28 — The Nephites Credit Their Victory to God

The Nephites credited God’s matchless power in delivering all of them from their enemies. They were thankful for that power. When they won, they did not credit themselves and instead gave thanks to the Lord. The Nephites had sworn an oath that they would fight. When an oath or vow was made in the ancient world, they said to God, “If you will give us victory, we will sacrifice or dedicate or do something for you.” After a victory like this, it is very natural that they would have had an explicit obligation to give God thanks in some way. Perhaps this thanksgiving is mentioned here to let readers know that they fulfilled the obligation that they had incurred when they swore their own oath. Their thanks was not just in word, but also in deed, as they did not rest but continued to prepare for the next wave of attacks.

Alma 49:30 — Corianton Actively Preaches Again

In Alma 49:30, Corianton is mentioned as being back and working with his brethren. It appears that his repentance was effective and complete. It is interesting that Mormon takes care to be sure that readers know this. He does not just say Helaman and his brothers, but specifically names Corianton, together with Shiblón and the sons of Mosiah, to ensure that this point is duly noticed.

Alma 50

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- Moroni does not rest in making more preparations for war (50:1–6)
- Moroni drives out all Lamanites (soldiers and civilians) in the surrounding lands and increases his army (50:7–12)
- The Nephites have a building and economic boom, and enjoy a time of peace and great happiness (50:13–24)
- Morianton tries to take the people of his city into the land northward; but he mistreated a servant girl who told Moroni, and their flight was stopped (50:25–36)
- Pahoran succeeds his father as chief judge in Zarahemla and takes an impressive oath of office (50:37–40)

Discussion questions to think about:

1. After great successes, Moroni did not stop preparing for further attacks. How can we prevent our temporary successes from lulling us into a sense of false security?
2. Do officials in our country today take oaths of office? Why or why not?

Alma 50:1–6— The Nephites Continually Strengthen Their Defenses

Once the Nephites had won, one might think they deserved a vacation. However, Moroni put the troops back to work, “And now it came to pass that Moroni did not stop making preparations for war, or to defend his people against the Lamanites” (Alma 50:1). Sometimes, after a successful Family Home Evening, or a great talk in Sacrament Meeting, we can be tempted to adopt the attitude, “Well, I do not have to worry about that next week, or keep it up for a while.”

The question here is, how can that syndrome be prevented? It is a normal inclination to want to let up once something is going well. It is a form of the pride cycle. When the grass is mowed and the weeds all pulled, one wants to rest, but they do not stay the way we want them. As Captain Moroni showed us, we have to keep working in order to keep up with the next development. He moved people out of the way when they were in a dangerous situation and populated strategic parts of the land with Nephites so that they would be a deterrent to the Lamanites. He did many other things in order to keep ahead of the game.

The first time the Lamanite/Zoramite forces approached, they came from the south up to the cities of Ammonihah and Noah (in Alma 49), and found that they were unexpectedly fortified, but the next time, things were different. They went up the east side of the Nephite lands, planning to attack Nephihah, then Lehi, and then they would make a sweep up along the seacoast until they came to Mulek and the borders of Bountiful (51:22–30). Bountiful guarded the narrow neck of land and was the most important piece of Nephite geography.

If the Lamanites could get to Bountiful, the Nephites would have had no way to escape into the land northward. Wherever that narrow neck was, it was a place that everyone needed to go through it. It would also prove to be just as important in Mormon’s final battles at the end of the Nephite people, and perhaps that is why Mormon knew that territory so well and focused on this campaign in particular. The Nephites were desperate to ensure that this advance in particular did not continue. They were somewhat prepared, but not quite prepared enough for this change of attack.

Alma 50:17–23 — Why Was This a “Happier Time” for the Nephites?

Meanwhile, Mormon pauses to speak of the prosperity and strength of the Nephites at this time. In Alma 50:20, Mormon quotes Lehi who had promised long before, “Blessed art thou and thy children and they shalt be blessed inasmuch as they keep the commandments.” Then in verse 22, Mormon adds, “And those who are faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times,” and then in verse 23, “But behold, there never was a happier people.” How Mormon had wished that people in his time had been this faithful.

If we keep the commandments, will we be a happy people? What were the conditions that made things so happy for Captain Moroni and his people at this time? Peace and happiness were about to come unraveled very quickly.

It is important to remember that this is Mormon writing and looking back. He said there was never a happier time among the people of Nephi, but was this a happier time than the first four generations in 4 Nephi? The text actually states, “Never was there a happier time since the *days of Nephi* than *in the days of Moroni* even at this time in the twenty-first year.” So Mormon was saying, down to that point in Nephite history, there had never been a happier time, even in the days of King Benjamin.

What made this such a happy time? Their faithfulness in keeping the commandments? The Nephites had been through very difficult circumstances, and never had there been such a mobilized, unified force. Could it be said that the pioneers’ crossing of the plains was the happiest time in the Church? It was hard, but they came singing their way across the plains, putting what they had been taught to the test. They put themselves in very dangerous circumstances, believing that God would deliver them and he did.

Never in known Nephite history had the centers of their territories been invaded. There had been other wars and skirmishes, but never had these outside armies come in and invaded them. They responded by mobilizing and unifying. It is also important that they had some faithful, charismatic leaders who were capable of uniting those who were willing to follow. They had confidence in them. It was not just the leaders who were strong but the saints who were willing to follow.

Alma 50:37–38 — Nephihah Refused to Take Charge of the Records

After the account of the plot by Morianton to take his people and flee to the land northward, his plot was revealed by a brave servant girl, he was killed in battle, and his people were restored by Teancum to their lands (50:24–46). We learn in Alma 50:37–38 that the chief judge Nephihah had been Alma’s first choice to receive the records, so his son Helaman had been his second choice (perhaps because of his young age). Nephihah’s

unwillingness to take that responsibility may have encouraged Alma to ensure that Helaman certainly did believe and was well instructed. When Helaman said, “I will keep thy commandments with all my heart,” he was not just saying this because he was obliged to take the responsibility. He knew that others could replace him.

Alma 50:39 — Pahoran’s Oath to the People

Pahoran then became the chief judge, the head of state: “The son of Nephihah was appointed to fill the judgment seat in the stead of his father; yea, he was appointed chief judge and governor over the people.” According to Alma 50:39, he swore to “Judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime.”

The text says that this was “an oath and sacred ordinance.” *Sacred* means it is holy, in other words that the Lord was involved. In those days, where the Law of Moses still applied, an oath like this may have involved a sacrifice or a votive offering to accompany the vow. The taking of this oath and ordinance likely was a kind of public ceremony, done in or around the temple.

What are some modern examples of oaths like this one? They are different, but there are oath-taking occasions throughout our lives. When we raise our arm to the square that we will support our Church leaders, or when we say “yes, we will be a ministering brother or sister.” It is not the oath of public officials, but it is a promise to God that we will fulfill that obligation. Raising our arms to the square is not verbally saying it, but it is publicly committing.

Alma 51

In this chapter we have the following episodes:

- The king-men try to alter a few particular points of the law but are politically defeated and silenced (51:1–8).
- Amalickiah now attacks in person (51:9–12).
- The king-men refuse to take up arms (which was a capital offense) and are killed or imprisoned under martial law without normal legal trials (51:13–21).
- Amalickiah marches through the east and north lands, winning easily (51:22–28).
- Teancum kills Amalickiah at night, in his tent, on New Year’s Eve (51:29–37).

Discussion questions to think about:

1. What justified Moroni's severe treatment of the king-men and Teancum's killing of Amalickiah? How far must we go in ensuring due process before we take extreme measures?
2. Mormon says, "there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni." What circumstances have brought about the happiest times in your life?

Alma 51:2 — What Did the King-men Want?

In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of the judges, the Nephites were experiencing internal conflict led by a group called the "king-men." What did these king-men want? They wanted power, and they again wanted a king. But how were they going to accomplish it? The ending of Alma 51:2 reveals their plans. The king-men did not try to change everything at once, but only claimed that a few "particular points of the law should be altered." What were these few points? The text does not say.

In today's world, are we a little too pliable? Willing to change just a few things here and there? Perhaps a small thing is changed every year, but at the end of a decade all those cumulative changes have had a large effect. We would not have bought into some proposals all at once, but changing a little bit at a time can take us to the same place. While this can be sometimes used to positive societal change, how concerned should the Saints be about this kind of mission-creep or slippery-slope in their own lives? Not only is this an issue in the public sphere, but in personal lives as well. Small changes administered strategically over time may have larger consequences than one would think.

Alma 51:7 — What Is the Difference between Liberty and Freedom?

Here we find the terms *liberty* and *freedom* both used. Today, we use the word *law* to mean many different things, and a richer vocabulary may help explain some differences. Is there a difference in the way the word *law* is used in the Book of Mormon? Likewise, we may wonder, is *liberty* talking here about something different from *freedom*? The English word *liberty* comes from the Latin *libertas*, and *freedom* comes from the German *freiheit*, but are *freedom* and *liberty* synonyms? In Greek, it is *eleutheria*, and it means *not a slave*, to be free meant not having a master.

The Book of Mormon has at least two senses in which the words *liberty* and *freedom* are used. There is the freedom to worship God and then there is liberty, meaning freedom from slavery. It isn't certain whether the words are always used to mean one or the other, but two different meanings did develop and so it is possible that there is a difference between them. In this particular case, the phrase "people of liberty" stood in contrast to

those who wanted a king, a master-ruler. The “cause of freedom” then referred to the social right to practice their religion.

Alma 51:8 — Who Were the King-Men?

The text shows that most of the king-men were of high birth. They were aristocrats. They were landed people. None of the sons of Mosiah had wanted to be king twenty-five years earlier, but opinions may have differed among some of his nephews or people in the court of King Mosiah. When it says “of high birth,” there must have been some sort of bloodline involved. They may have been otherwise unknown descendants of King Mosiah the Elder, or of King Benjamin, or King Mosiah, or they could have been descendants of King Zarahemla, the last king of the Mulekites.

Note that they are called *king-men*. The Hebrew word for *king* is *Melek*. In Hebrew, there are no vowels, so *Melek* and *Mulek* look the same, just *m-l-k*. A *Melek-man* could be seen as either a *Mulek-man* or a *king-man*. There may be a play on words going on here. It is certainly possible that the Mulekites could have thought the Nephite experience was not going well from their point of view. If things were going well, the residents of Zarahemla seemed to be quite happy. But now, with the Zoramites opposed the Nephites, perhaps some of the Mulekites were wondering why they were getting caught in the middle of all this, saying, “Why do we have to go fight this Nephite battle? This is not our war.” We can understand politically how that could be their view. These Nephites, after all, moved in with King Mosiah 120 years ago, and they had been in charge a long time. Maybe some of them were thinking they ought to reassert their rights.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites? \(Omni 1:19\),” KnoWhy 434 \(May 17, 2018\).](#)

Alma 51:14–17 — Moroni Fights the King-men Regime

Captain Moroni was very angry because the Lamanites were a present and powerful threat to his people, but the king-men were refusing to help. He was stern. But what justified his severe treatment of the king-men? The Nephites had their backs against the wall. If they did not use every possible resource at their disposal, Bountiful would be taken and they would be encircled, their lands invaded, and it would all be over.

It is important to notice that Moroni obtained authority to impose martial law here. He went to the people and got authority as commander-in-chief of the military to be able to deal with the king-men. Alma 51:15 tells us that, “He sent a petition, with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it, and give him [Moroni] power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to

death.” He gave the king-men an opportunity to take an oath. If they would not fight to defend the country, which was a normal legal obligation of all able-bodied men, they could then be put to death for not fighting. He could require them to swear the oath of allegiance and could put them to death for not swearing the oath. He put at least some of them in jail, and they sat there for six years until this war was over. The situation was urgent, so he planned to take care of the dissenters, but not immediately.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Moroni Speak of Pulling Down Pride? \(Alma 51:17\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 430, (May 3, 2018).

Alma 51:33–35 — Amalickiah Is Killed on the New Year

The twenty-sixth year of the reign of the judges in the land of Zarahemla began in a most unusual way. Having stemmed the tide of the advancing Lamanites in the first year of a seven-year offensive, Teancum and a servant “stole forth and went out by night, and went into the camp of Amalickiah.” The Lamanite soldiers being fatigued and asleep did not awaken as Teancum crept alone “into the tent of the king, and put a javelin to his heart.”

Undetected, Teancum returned to his camp and told his men what he had done (Alma 51:33–35). Few people have made much of the fact that this event happened on New Year’s Eve. But the book of Alma goes out of its way to identify the date of that precise occurrence, noting that when the Lamanites awoke the next morning, which was “on the first morning of the first month,” they found their king dead. And looking across the battle terrain, they also “saw that Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day” (Alma 52:1), which was New Year’s Day. This is another one of the rare times in the Book of Mormon that the specific day, month, and year is reported for an event. It is not certain, but it appears that the new-year kingship rituals may have something to do with Teancum’s choosing to slay Amalickiah on that very day, which was unconventional but crucial. On the day when the king would normally have been re-enthroned and celebrated as a demi-god, Teancum chose to leave a javelin in his heart. He knew that nothing could have demoralized Amalickiah’s soldiers more dramatically than this.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Teancum Slay Amalickiah on New Year’s Eve? \(Alma 51:37\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 160 (August 8, 2016).

Alma 52

In this chapter we encounter the following with some interesting morals:

- The soldiers awake to find their King Amalickiah dead (52:1–2): timing is everything!
- Moroni, Teancum and Lehi work together, each in his own way, and thus they were able to retake the city of Mulek, and accepted the surrender of many, but took others captive who would not deliver up their swords (52:5–40): teamwork triumvirate!

Alma 52:1–2 — A New Year’s Day Surprise

In warfare, timing can be everything. Gaining the advantage by a surprise attack is an important part of any military strategy. In the mentality of ancient warfare, making timely use of the religious meanings and symbolic powers associated with certain days of the year was even more so. We don’t know for sure, but it would seem likely that New Year’s day held some special significance in Lamanite or Zoramite culture.

New Year’s Day is not particularly meaningful to people today, but this was not so in ancient and premodern civilizations. Then, New Year’s Day was largely about the celebration and observance of such critical values and institutions as kingship, covenant renewal, the regeneration of the world and of the political order, the driving out of evil, and the reestablishment of correct leadership and goodness in the land. Much has been written about the year-rite in a wide variety of ancient cultures.

For example, the classic work by James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: The Roots of Religion and Folklore*, first published in 1890, reports that in some places “a king was put to death at the end of a year’s reign, and a new king appointed” in his place (1.225–26). Sometimes a temporary king or a pretender to the throne might sit on the throne for a few days, and then the real king would return and depose or even kill the phony king (1.228–34). On New Year’s Day in many cultures, special steps were taken in various ways to drive out evil and to protect the land from disease or misfortune by animal or substitutionary sacrifices (2.193–94).

In ancient Israel, the New Year, or Rosh Hoshanah, was the time of formal coronation of kings, the renewal of kingship, and the determination of destiny. The king’s restoration to the throne during this year-rite festival symbolized his continuing ability to stabilize the society and the elements of nature. If the Lamanites had in any way adopted any such commonly held beliefs, would not those expectations or superstitions have had a powerful effect on the Lamanite soldiers when they found their king dead on the morning of the very day when he would have been expected to reassert his rightful role as king and to drive evil out and to give assurances of good fortune?

Did the Lamanites at that point even know who had killed their king? The text says nothing about whose javelin was used. Maybe Teancum used Amalickiah's own royal weapon, which would have made his people wonder even more who had done it. All that uncertainty would only have added to their sense of calamity upon seeing a javelin stuck into King Amalickiah's heart. In sum, the total effect on the Lamanite army was sudden and powerful. Knowing that their king was dead, they immediately fell into fear and disarray. "They were affrighted and abandoned their design in marching into the land northward, and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications" (Alma 52:2).

Teancum's actions could have appeared bold and courageous on any night, but his timing on New Year's Eve would have been completely astounding. His timing more than explains the ensuing fear and abrupt retreat of the entire Lamanite army. Having wrung out the evil past, he rang in a propitious new beginning.

Further Reading

Robert F. Smith and Stephen D. Ricks, "New Year's Celebrations," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 209.

Alma 52:8–10 — Moroni Wrote to Teancum

Moroni next sent quite a few instructions to Teancum:

- Retain all the prisoners who fell into his hands to be used for ransom for Nephite prisoners (v. 8)
- Fortify the land Bountiful (v. 9)
- Secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side (v. 9)
- Be faithful in maintaining that quarter of the land, which he did, "as much as was in his power" (v. 10)
- Take again by stratagem or some other way those cities which had been taken out of their hands (v. 10)
- Fortify and strengthen the cities round about, which had not fallen into the hands of the Lamanites (v. 10)

The Lamanite captains had taken an oath to take the city of Noah or die in the attempt, and they did indeed die. In the fight at Mulek, Jacob, the Zoramite leader who had an "unconquerable spirit" also would die (Alma 52:35). Moroni had asked only for the best that Teancum could do. He went beyond those specific orders.

Further Reading

For more on the Israelite New Year, see Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 160–73.

Alma 52:19 — The Nephite Leaders Work Together

Moroni, Teancum, and Lehi worked together, each in his own way, and thus they were able to retake the city of Mulek. They held a council of war. Moroni was the strategist, Teancum would be the decoy, and Lehi would be the backup, then Moroni would go into the city. It worked because each did their part. The leaders were all united. Note the camaraderie between these three leaders who loved each other. In war, it is often said, soldiers do not die for their country, but for their friends.

Alma 52:36 — Avoid Rash Decisions in Confusing Times

Since Jacob the Zoramite had died, the Lamanites soldiers found themselves without a leader. Some threw down their weapons, and others “being much confused they knew not whether to go or to strike.” War is rarely organized and rational. Confusion leads to fear, which sometimes leads to very bad decisions. To avoid that in our own lives we should always strive to be patient and find sanctuary. Do not act rashly. Attend the temple if possible, or counsel with a leader or with the Lord in prayer.