

General Comments on Alma 43-52

These chapters could be summarized as "Moroni versus the Bad Guys". The history covered in these chapters presents one bad guy after another being beaten by Moroni:

Moroni versus Zerahemnah (ch. 43-44)

Moroni versus Amalikhiah (ch. 46-51)

Moroni versus King men (ch. 51)

Moroni versus Ammoron (ch. 52)

While it would be easy to say the underlying message is the good guy survives and wins while the bad guys are destroyed, this is obviously a gross simplification. The real underlying message is Moroni is a righteous Nephite and most, if not all, of the leaders he is fighting against are apostate Nephites. The Nephite problems throughout these chapters are not instigated by the Lamanites, but by the dissident and apostate Nephites. If it were not for the apostate Nephites inspiring the Lamanites to war the Nephites would never have to defend themselves. Who are the Nephites worst enemies? Themselves.

Moroni's prominence in these chapters is why Mormon exclaims in 48:17 that if all men were like Moroni, then hell would have no power on earth.

General Comments on Alma 43-46

Chapters 43-44 deal mainly with events surrounding a Lamanite invasion inspired by apostate Nephites. Chapter 45 mainly addresses Alma's departure from Zarahemla. And chapter 46 deals with Amalikhiah's leadership over a group of apostate dissenters and Moroni's reaction to them.

While the chapters appear to be largely historical, there is an underlying spiritual theme. In ch. 43-44 the Lamanites attack the Nephites and fail because, as Moroni puts it:

God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith. (44:4)

Then in ch. 45 Alma predicts the demise of the Nephites:

Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, ... shall dwindle in unbelief. Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come. (45:10-12)

While Alma's prediction of the annihilation of the Nephites is still hundreds of years off, we see a similar situation only months later because of the evil desires of Amalickiah:

Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake (cf. 46:10).

However, again, the believers are led by Moroni and once again prevail because, as Moroni puts it:

Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions (cf. 46:18).

This remains a major underlying theme throughout the rest of the book of Mormon. The Nephites and Lamanites wax and wane in righteousness for the next 500 years until the final Nephite slide into apostasy. This final act of rebellion results in their annihilation as the Lord abandons them to their enemies.

Comments on Alma 43

1 AND now it came to pass that the sons of Alma did go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them. And Alma, also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth. 2 Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except 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.

v1-2 conclude Mormon's detailed account of the history of Alma and his sons and segue to the more general historical accounts of the Nephites.

Alma and his sons return to preaching the gospel among the Nephites (v. 1) according to the Spirit and their callings in the Priesthood (v. 2).

3 And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges. 4 For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon. 5 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader. 6 And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites.

7 Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs. 8 For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage. 9 And now the design of the Nephites was 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. 10 For they knew that if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites, that whosoever should worship God in spirit and in truth, the true and the living God, the Lamanites would destroy. 11 Yea, and they also knew the extreme hatred of the Lamanites towards their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, who were called the people of Ammon--and they would not take up arms, yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it--therefore, if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites they would be destroyed. 12 And the Nephites would not suffer that they should be destroyed; therefore they gave them lands for their inheritance. 13 And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah. 14 Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites; and thus the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren, even unto bloodshed.

15 And it came to pass as the armies of the Lamanites had gathered together in the land of Antionum, behold, the armies of the Nephites were prepared to meet them in the land of Jershon. 16 Now, the leader of the Nephites, or the man who had been appointed to be the chief captain over the Nephites--now the chief captain took the command of all the armies of the Nephites--and his name was Moroni; 17 And Moroni took all the command, and the government

of their wars. And he was only twenty and five years old when he was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites.

18 And it came to pass that he met the Lamanites in the borders of Jershon, and his people were armed with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war. 19 And when the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, or that Moroni, had prepared his people with breastplates and with arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing-- 20 Now the army of Zerahemnah was not prepared with any such thing; they had only their swords and their cimeters, their bows and their arrows, their stones and their slings; and they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were naked, save it were the Zoramites and the Amalekites; 21 But they were not armed with breastplates, nor shields--therefore, they were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites because of their armor, notwithstanding their number being so much greater than the Nephites. 22 Behold, now it came to pass that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Antionum into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone.

v3-22 Mormon's account returns to the general history of the Nephites (v. 3). The Zoramites, who are dissident Nephites, combine with the Lamanites and instigate a Lamanite invasion of the Nephites (v. 4-5). The leader of the invasion force (v. 6) uses apostate Nephites as military leaders because their hatred is so great it inspires the Lamanites to war against an otherwise peaceful group of people who have caused no offense to the Lamanites (v. 7-14).

When the invasion force approaches Nephite territory the two armies face off (v. 15). The Nephite armies have been well prepared with weapons and armor by their leader (v. 16-19), but the Lamanite armies are completely without armor. The result is the Lamanite armies are scared of conflict even though they outnumber the Nephite armies (v. 20-21) by more than double (cf. v. 51).

The result is the Lamanites decide not attack here, but to start their invasion where they assume the Nephites will not be so well defended (v. 22).

v4 This group of Zoramites consist of the most hardened and apostate members of that population as the more repentant persons who were favorably disposed to Alma's message were expelled in 35:6.

v5 "Zerahemna", while the text never explicitly states he is an apostate Nephite, his connection to and use of Zoramite and Amlicite leadership suggests he is.

v7-14 This section of text is a lengthy parenthesis by Mormon explaining how it is the Lamanites in general were persuaded to go to war with the Nephites when they did nothing to instigate it per v. 9-10. It was only the intense hatred of this tiny minority of apostate Nephites placed in leadership positions that pushed the larger Lamanite population to invasion.

v13-14, 21 Mormon reviews the relative sizes of populations and the relative numbers involved in the war. Even though a sizeable population of Lamanites left and joined the Nephites as Anti-Nephi-Lehis the two populations are roughly the same size. This is because the Lamanites are composed of the natural lineage of Laman as well as all of the descendants of dissenters and current dissenters as well.

However, while the populations are roughly the same size the armies are not. The Nephites maintained a well-equipped (cf. 43:18-19) professional standing army (cf. 27:23-24, 28:1, 43:16-17; note in 43:26 the professional armies muster all available hands for the Nephite defense against the Lamanites, which necessarily implies there was no general mustering of troops among the Nephites previous to this) where the Lamanites appear to have mustered all available men for a war of conquest. Hence the Nephite armies being smaller (cf. v. 21) but better equipped (cf. v. 20-21) than the recently mustered Lamanite armies.

v18 "cimeters", the contemporary English spelling for a curved blade sword is "scimitar". Anciently, straight swords were typically thrusting weapons rather than slicing weapons. A scimitar would have been different in that it had a curved and sharpened edge used for slicing. They were commonly employed by cavalry, so this might imply the Nephite forces included cavalry. But, the few references to horses in the Book of Mormon are exclusively in the context of transportation, and never in military applications, as is so common in the Hebrew Bible. The syntax might simply be to differentiate straight stabbing swords versus curved slicing swords.

v20-21 Note the jab Mormon takes at the apostate Nephite leaders among the Lamanites. They have thick clothing and helmets to protect themselves while the men under their command are effectively naked.

23 But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness Moroni sent spies into the wilderness to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites. 24 And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

25 Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means a part of the Lamanites should come into that land and take possession of the city, took the remaining part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti. 26 And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land should gather themselves together to battle against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites. 27 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his army should be secreted in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon, which was on the west of the river Sidon in the wilderness. 28 And Moroni placed spies round about, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

29 And now, as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land; 30 And he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore, he found by his spies which course the Lamanites were to take.

31 Therefore, he divided his army and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah; 32 And the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti. 33 And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them. 34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came up on the north of the hill, where a part of the army of Moroni was concealed. 35 And as the Lamanites had passed the hill Riplah, and came into the valley, and began to cross the river Sidon, the army which was concealed on the south of the hill, which was led by a man whose name was Lehi, and he led his army forth and encircled the Lamanites about on the east in their rear. 36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about and began to contend with the army of Lehi.

37 And the work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites, for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke. 38 While on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords and the loss of blood, they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breastplates, and their armshields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.

39 And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon. 40 And they were pursued by Lehi and his men; and they were driven by Lehi into the waters of Sidon, and they crossed the waters of Sidon. And Lehi retained his armies upon the bank of the river Sidon that

they should not cross. 41 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army met the Lamanites in the valley, on the other side of the river Sidon, and began to fall upon them and to slay them. 42 And the Lamanites did flee again before them, towards the land of Manti; and they were met again by the armies of Moroni.

43 Now in this case the Lamanites did fight exceedingly; yea, never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceedingly great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning. 44 And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by

Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger.

45 Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church. 46 And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. 47 And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.

48 And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts--yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage. 49 And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage. 50 And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon.

51 Now, the Lamanites were more numerous, yea, by more than double the number of the Nephites; nevertheless, they were driven insomuch that they were gathered together in one body in the valley, upon the bank by the river Sidon. 52 Therefore the armies of Moroni encircled them about, yea, even on both sides of the river, for behold, on the east were the men of Lehi. 53 Therefore when Zerahemnah saw the men of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon, and the armies of Moroni on the west of the river Sidon, that they were encircled about by the Nephites, they were struck with terror. 54 Now Moroni, when he saw their terror, commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood.

v23-54 When the invading Lamanite force retreats Moroni sends spies to follow them and also sends messengers to Alma to see if the Lord will reveal to him where they are going and what to do (v. 23). Moroni receives word from Alma that the Lamanites plan on attacking a poorly defended section of Nephite territory (v. 24). Moroni leaves a portion of his army there in Jerushon (v. 25), musters all available Nephites for the defense (v. 26), and then goes to set an ambush for the Lamanite armies (v. 27-34).

The Lamanites fall into the trap set for them (v. 35-36) with the Lamanites suffering much heavier casualties because of their poorly armored condition (v. 37-38). The Lamanites start to retreat out of fear and cross the river Sidon only to find a fresh army of Nephites on that side of the river as well (v. 39-42). The Lamanites fight bravely in the battle and are inspired by their hate-filled leaders (v. 43-44), but the Nephites are inspired by a better cause and a righteous leader who compels them to fight for it (v. 45-48). Despite being outnumbered two to one, the Nephites rally in the name of the Lord and attack the Lamanites forcing them to retreat into the river Sidon (v. 49-51).

With the armies of the Lamanites forced against the river and surrounded in the front and rear with Nephite armies they retreat into a single defensive body out of fear (v. 51-52). When Moroni sees this he calls a halt to the Nephite offensive (v. 53).

v29-30 are a parenthetical comment by Mormon explaining why it is Moroni felt it was justifiable to use spies in combat. Today using spies and whatever intelligence and whatever means are available simply goes without question, no matter how dubious or scandalous. Which, more than anything else, indicates how much moral ground we've ceded when our first reaction is "the means justify the ends".

v46-47 are a parenthetical comment on the religious position regarding war. As long as you are not guilty of offense or instigating (v. 46) then you must defend your families even if it means killing by war (v. 47). For similar statements cp. 1 Sam. 13:1-4, 3 Ne. 3:21, D&C 98:23-48 and ct. Mosiah 21:6-12.

Copyright © 2024 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.