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# ALMA 43-49

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Book of Mormon, Adult Institute Class, Monday, 25 January 2010

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## INTRODUCTION

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This group of chapters begins a long section focused on war and conflict. As we have seen before, driving the conflicts are Nephite dissenters who want power and kingship and will use any

resources at their disposal to achieve their means, including the Lamanites. We encounter two such dissenters here: Zerahemnah and Amalickiah. Fortunately, we also encounter some new righteous leaders to counter these men, most notably Moroni, clearly one of Mormon's favorite people. Helaman<sup>1</sup> also takes over the leadership of the Church when his father, Alma<sup>2</sup> leaves the scene. Everything in these chapters take place two years—the eighteenth and nineteenth years of the reign of the judges (or 18-19 RoJ).

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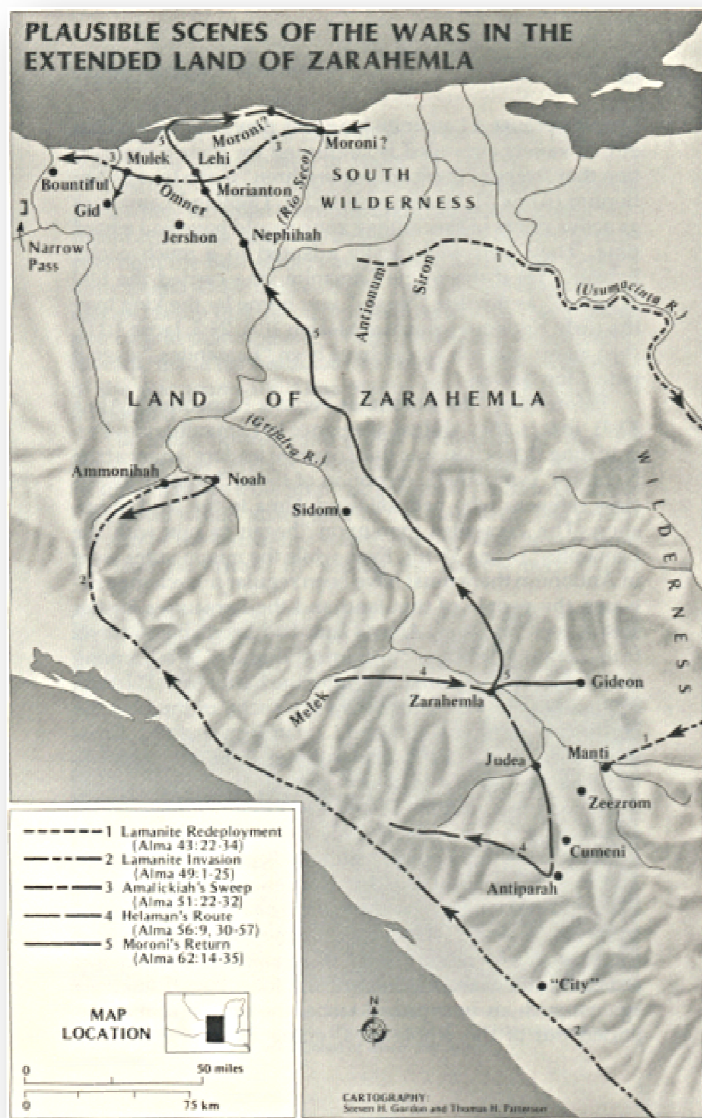
### ALMA 43 ENCOUNTER WITH ZERAHEMNAH

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**1 sons of Alma did go forth.** This certainly included all three sons mentioned in the previous chapters, including the repentant Corianton.

**3 I return to account of the wars.** Mormon took a break from the narrative back in Alma 35:13 to give us Alma's counsel to his sons. With this comment, the narrative resumed, with this particular section of warfare going until Alma 62—about 15 years.

**eighteenth year.** The date for this encounter is 18 RoJ, or about 74 BC on our calendar, which is four years after the



sons of Mosiah had returned from their successful mission to the Lamanites.

**4 *Zoramites became Lamanites.*** This was what Alma and others feared and the reason for their mission to the Zormanites in Alma 31-34. They did convert many but the majority of the Zormanites in the city of Antionum remained in their beliefs, which led to an alliance with the Lamanites such that they “became Lamanites” (meaning joined with them politically and socially).

***in the land of Jershon.*** Jershon was originally where the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (the people of Ammon) settled but because of the threat from a Zoramite alliance with the Lamanites, the Nephites had moved them south to Melek (Alma 35:13), which was more in the heart of the Nephite lands, just northwest of Zarahemla.

**5 *Zerahemnah was their leader.*** Zerahemnah was apparently an Amlicite (Amalekite), who had joined the Lamanites several years earlier. His name is reminiscent of the people of Zarahemla so he was, perhaps, of that culture originally, as it is likely were many of the Amlicites. He appointed other Amlicite leaders because they were “more wicked and murderous” than the Lamanites generally (v. 6). Thus we have a Lamanite army led by and consisting of many Nephite dissenters joining a Nephite dissenter army in Antionum.

**8 *gain power over the Nephites.*** Zerahemnah’s goal, as it was with Amlici before him, was to get control over the Nephites and bring them into servitude to him. War is often about power.

**9 *preserve their rights and their privileges.*** In contrast, the Nephites fought not for conquest or power but simply to preserve their families, their lands, their rights, their liberty, and their religion.

**11 *the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.*** The Nephites also fought to preserve the freedom of the Lamanite converts who had come north with Ammon and who had made a covenant not to take up arms any more.

**13 *a large portion of their substance.*** In exchange for this protection, the people of Ammon gave of their means to support the Nephite armies. Note that they were not taxed or compelled to do this, but did it out of gratitude for the protection and safe haven the Nephites afforded them.

**16 *his name was Moroni.*** Here we are introduced to a great Book of Mormon figure, Moroni. Mormon admires him so much that he praised him many times and committed a large portion of the work to his life. He even named his son after him. Like Mormon, Moroni received command of the armies of the Nephites at a young age—twenty five (v. 17).

**17 *chief captain.*** Though it agrees with the use of this term in verse 16, in verse 17 in the original manuscript, Moroni is called the “chief Commander” (Skousen, 4:2467; this title is also used in our text in Alma 46:11). This makes it sound like “chief captain” was his title before verses 16-17, and at that time, he was then promoted to “chief commander.” This is borne out in other verses where the men under Moroni’s command are commonly called “chief captains” (see Alma 49:16; 52:19). The Lamanites also referred to their group leaders as “chief captains” (Alma 49:11, 13; 52:38). So our common title which comes from these verses, calling him ‘Captain Moroni,’ (not a phrase ever used in the scriptures) should probably be updated to ‘Commander Moroni.’

**19 *breastplates and with arm-shields.*** They also had head-shields (helmets of some kind) and wore thick clothing. It was probably hot and perhaps even difficult to move around in such clothing,

which is why the Lamanites had not adopted them, but they gave the Nephites a distinct advantage in hand-to-hand combat.

**22 *the departed out of the land of Antionum.*** The Lamanite/Amlicite/Amulonite/Zoramite army took one look at Moroni's troops and, even though they greatly outnumbered the Nephites, turned tail and headed south for Manti. Their strategy appears to have been to go to the south end of the Nephite territories, then attack Zarahemla from the south, thinking that the Nephite armies would either remain in the north in Jershon or at least not know where they went.

**23-24 *sent spies...sent certain men unto [Alma].*** Moroni used two methods to track the Lamanite army. First, he sent spies to follow them and discern their intent. Second, he send men to Zarahemla to confer with Alma, the high priest. Both were helpful—the spies providing some critical details, and Alma getting from the Lord their intention—to “come over into the land of Manti” and attack “the weaker part of the people.”

**27 *on the west of the river Sidon.*** The river generally runs north-south. Moroni placed his troops on the west side, opposite of the direction the Lamanites were coming. He put another army, led by Lehi (v. 35) on the east side, hidden behind the hill Riplah (v. 31). This was his strategy to surround the Lamanites and force a surrender.

**29 *Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites.*** A stake president recently spoke of this chapter, comparing Moroni's preparations and actions to our ability to combat sin and evil. Moroni first armed his people with shields (v. 19), which is similar to putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17). Then he listened to the prophet (v. 23), even seeking his counsel in his life. Then he gathered everyone together (v. 26), for there is strength in righteous numbers. Finally, he knew the enemies plan (v. 29). Knowing Satan's plans for us today helps us recognize his temptations and be prepared to stand against them.

**30 *no sin that he should defend them by stratagem.*** Moroni employed good strategy on many occasions, not only to help his armies win battles, but to preserve life on both sides of the conflict. His goal was always to preserve Nephite liberties.

**35 *Lehi.*** There are four Lehis mentioned in the Book of Mormon. This one, a military chief captain during this time, played a key role in the Nephite victory over the Lamanites during this extended conflict. He and Teancum appear to be Moroni's top leaders.

**38 *the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.*** Lehi's army attacked the Lamanites when they came around the hill toward the river Sidon. The armor of the Nephites protected them well, and the number of dead among the Lamanites was much higher.

**41 *Moroni and his army met the Lamanites.*** Crossing the river to escape Lehi, the Lamanites encountered Moroni's army hidden in the valley. Realizing the precariousness of their situation, they fought harder but the Nephites still overcame them.

**46-47** These verses quote the Lord twice, citing them as well-known and ancient statements, yet we have no record of the source of these statements. The first says that you must tolerate at least two offenses, but you do not need to “suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.” This is similar to the Lord's instructions to those suffering in Missouri (D&C 98:33-37). The second is a command to “defend your families even unto bloodshed.” A similar statement, though more broad, is given in D&C 134:11.

50 **for their freedom.** The battle was so fierce, with the Lamanite forces outnumbering the Nephites two to one (v. 51) that some Nephites began to fall back. But Moroni rallied them with the call of liberty, and he drove the Lamanites back into the river.

54 **stop shedding their blood.** Moroni had the Lamanite army surrounded, standing in the middle of the river. He could have finished them off and been done with them. But it shows the greatness of the man that as soon as he realized they were “struck with terror” (v. 53) and ready to stop fighting, that he immediately ceased and started negotiations.

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## ALMA 44 ZERAHEMNAH DEFEATED

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This chapter records a series of conversations and actions after the first battle between the Nephites and Lamanites had ceased at Commander Moroni’s direction. There is much ritual underlying the events described here.

1-7 Moroni called for the surrender of the Lamanites, their giving up their weapons, and their taking an oath to never come to battle again. He attributed their success to the Lord.

8-9 Zerahemnah’s response was that he would lay down his weapons but could not make a promise not to fight again. He attributed the Nephite success to their shielding.

10-11 Moroni responded that he would “end the conflict” right there because the terms of surrender were fixed and he would not change them.

12 **rushed forward that he might slay Moroni.** In his anger, Zerahemnah tried to kill Moroni, but one of his soldiers hit Zerahemnah’s sword so hard that it broke, then he took a swipe at Zerahemnah and cut off his scalp.

14 **so shall ye fall to the earth.** The soldier raised Zerahemnah’s scalp that he had cut off on his sword and shouted loudly to the other army that just as the scalp had fallen to the earth, so would they all fall if they didn’t surrender and make a peace covenant. This act is called a “simile curse” and is very common in the Old Testament (compare Isaiah 20:2-4; Ezekiel 5:1-17; and others cited in Parry). A conditional curse is pronounced and attested by an action. So seriously was this curse taken that many of the Lamanites “were struck with fear” and agreed to make a peace covenant and depart (v 15).

16 **Zerahemnah was exceedingly wrath.** With a cloth probably wrapped around his head to stem the bleeding, he returned to battle, rallying his remaining soldiers to even more might. But the Nephite army continued to have the advantage, especially now with the numbers more even.

19 **Zerahemnah...cried mightily unto Moroni.** Only when he could see that all was lost did Zerahemnah agree to Moroni’s surrender terms.

20 **the work of death should cease again.** Once more, Moroni halted the battle, sparing many Lamanite lives, and allowed them to depart after making the covenant of peace.

22 **cast their dead into the waters of Sidon.** Manti was upriver from all the other Nephite lands, such as Zarahemla, along the river. With so many dead that they couldn’t count them all, it would be fascinating to know how that impacted the water supply downstream in the coming weeks.

24 **thus ended the record of Alma.** Mormon lets us know that Alma’s record ended at this point, even though the book of Alma has many chapters left.

## ALMA 45 FAREWELL TO ALMA

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Heading: **the record of Helaman.** Starting with chapter 45, the record keeper is Helaman<sub>1</sub>, Alma’s son. He keeps the plates for the rest of the book of Alma, turning them over to his son, Helaman<sub>2</sub>, who is the author of the book of Helaman. There is an interesting pattern in his record keeping:

Record Keeper	Book	
Mosiah <sub>1</sub>	Mosiah	The books are named after its first author, but with Alma, Helaman, and 3 Nephi, the person it is named after is not the first person with that name. In other words, Mormon seems to decide to start a new book with the second person with the name each time in the case of Alma, Helaman, and Nephi.
Benjamin		
Mosiah <sub>2</sub> (Alma <sub>1</sub> ) <sup>1</sup>		
Alma <sub>2</sub>	Alma	
Helaman <sub>1</sub>		2 <b>nineteenth year.</b> This is 19 RoJ or about 73 BC, according to the footnote calendar system. The rest of the events in this lesson all take place in this year.
Helaman <sub>2</sub>	Helaman	
Nephi <sub>2</sub>		
Nephi <sub>3</sub>	3 Nephi	

2-8 It has been noted that this is a great pattern for an interview, by a bishop, parent, or otherwise. Alma’s pattern with Helaman is to: 1) Inquire as to his testimony; 2) Check his commitment to righteousness; and, 3) Offer a blessing.

9-14 **I have somewhat to prophesy.** Though not stated, it is often the pattern for prophets to study the words of other prophets and seek for greater understanding. Alma’s words are so similar to Nephi’s (1 Nephi 12:11-15) that he was probably pondering Nephi’s words.

10 **in four hundred years.** In fact, it was less than 400 years (which is “in” 400 years). The final battle between the Nephites and Lamanites occurred in the year 384, which was about 350 years after the coming of Christ among the Nephites.

12 **the fourth generation.** Matches the languages in 1 Nephi 12:12, where Nephi said that “many” of that generation would pass away in righteousness. Alma makes the point slightly differently: “not all” will pass away “before this great iniquity shall come.”

15 **he blessed him.** Alma blessed Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton, then interestingly “blessed the earth for their righteous’ sake,” which blessing is given in verse 16. Finally, he “blessed the church.”

18 **he was never heard of more.** Alma was a fairly old man at this point, yet he left on what appeared to be another missionary journey alone (at least, no mention is made of a companion). He was traveling to see the people of Ammon and others in Melek. Several, including Elder Bruce R. McConkie have concluded from these verses that Alma was translated (*Student Manual*, 251-252).

19 **even as Moses.** The Old Testament as we have it says “Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab,” but that “no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day” (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). The Joseph Smith Translation clarifies: “For the Lord took him unto his fathers...therefore, no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day.” Other translated beings include those Elijah (2 Kings

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<sup>1</sup> Though Alma<sub>1</sub> was never the record keeper, his life and history is recorded in great detail by Mosiah<sub>2</sub>.

2:11-12) of the city of Enoch (Moses 7:69) and many people at the time of Melchizedek (JST Genesis 15:32). The Bible Dictionary (p. 735) points out that we know Moses was translated because of the Mount of Transfiguration experience (see Matthew 17:3-4).

21 **little dissensions and disturbances.** They may have started little but ended up being huge, causing the longest string of warfare in Nephite history up to this point.

22 This verse has the distinction of being the only verse where Joseph Smith himself wrote in the original manuscript. Only 28 words, his handwriting starts and ends in the middle of the verse: "...yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers..." Why he wrote these words is unknown—perhaps Oliver Cowdery had to step away for a few minutes and he didn't want to lose the translation that came to him while waiting?

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## ALMA 46 AMALICKIAH COMES ON THE SCENE

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3 **Amalickiah.** From the variant spellings Oliver Cowdery used for this name, it appears that Joseph Smith pronounced it differently than we do today, putting the accent on the first syllable (A'-mal-i-ki-ah instead of our A-mal'-i-ki'-ah). He was a descendent of Zoram (Alma 54:23).

4 **desirous to be a king.** This pattern keeps coming up over and over during the reign of the judges. People either wanted to be king or gathered others around them who wanted them to be king. It shows how difficult it is to eliminate a system that was around for hundreds of years, and how hard it can be for some to give up the idea of absolute power and authority. In this case, we see both—a man who wants to be king and who is supported by others (in many cases, "lower judges") who were also "seeking for power" and will to support him to gain it.

7 **many in the church who believed in the flattering words.** Amalickiah's tactic was to flatter others, telling them what they wanted to hear and making promises he likely could not (or would not) keep. This made "the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous."

8-10 **Thus we see.** Three "we see"s in each of these verses draws our attention to the key messages of the war chapters:

- How quickly we forget God and are led away to sin.
- What great wickedness can be caused by one man.
- Cunning and flattering words can lead away many to do wickedness.

11 **Moroni, who was the chief commander.** This is the verse that calls Moroni by that title, which is what he should be called in Alma 43:17.

12 **rent his coat.** As with the soldier putting Zerahemnah's scalp on his sword and proclaiming a curse to those who did not obey, so Moroni's act in the following verses is very culturally symbolic. Rending his coat (tearing it) was symbolic of mourning—he was angry with Amalickiah and saddened by the numbers of people following after him. Moroni wanted to call everyone to repentance.

12 **wrote upon it.** Moroni's writing was a call to remember (which was a call to action) God, religion, freedom, peace, and families.

13 ***title of liberty***. Unlike a number of names used in the Church today for Book of Mormon things, this is one that is used in the text itself—given by Moroni to his rent coat with writing.

***Christians***. This is the first time this word appears in the Book of Mormon, and it is only used three other times (Alma 46:15, 16; 48:10), all very close to this. Notice that it is a name given to the believers by “those who did not belong to the church.” Alma 48:10 explains that it was a name created “by their enemies.” Likewise, the early Christians in the old world received that name from those who looked down on them. So it was also with “Mormons” in the early days of the Church. The term was applied by the Church’s enemies because of belief in the Book of Mormon. Eventually the name stuck and is a commonly-used nickname today.

19-21 ***he went forth among the people***. Moroni didn’t stop with a private commitment. He took his title of liberty and went around to many Nephite cities, waving it in the air and calling on them to “enter into a covenant. The people’s response was symbolic—they tore their own garments and said that if they should forsake their covenants, that the Lord would rend them like the garments (Parry).

23 ***whose coat was rent***. Joseph coat taken by his brothers and dipped in blood to convince their father he was dead. It doesn’t say they tore it, but that would surely add to the credibility of their lie. This is demonstrated by Jacob’s conclusion that Joseph was killed by a wild beast, and “is without doubt rent in pieces” (Genesis 37:31-33).

23 ***cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain***. The things that befell Joseph (or were supposed to have befallen him by his father—being slain) are the potential simile curses called out by Moroni in his symbolic act for those who do not keep the covenants associated with the title of liberty.

24 ***the words of Jacob***. We do not have these words of Jacob in our Old Testament nor in the Joseph Smith Translation. According to Moroni who was surely quoting from the plates of brass, Jacob said that even as a piece of Joseph’s coat had been preserved (presumably until he saw Joseph again in Egypt), so would a remnant of Joseph’s see be preserved. (Joseph’s seed being preserved is found in 2 Nephi 3:5-11, though it is Joseph speaking, not Jacob; in the Joseph Smith Translation, a prophecy of Jacob is added that talks about Joseph’s seed being preserved [JST Genesis 48:6-11], but not in this language at all.) Jacob also said that some of Joseph’s seed would perish, like the parts of the garment that perished.

27 ***the remnant...are those who have dissented***. Moroni wonders if the dissenters led by Amalickiah are not those who will perish like most of Joseph’s garment because of their wickedness.

29 ***departed into the land of Nephi***. Amalickiah realizes that Helaman’s preaching and Moroni’s title of liberty had rallied the people to the point that he could not succeed, so he took his followers and left to go join the Lamanites—or more precisely, the other Nephite dissenters in the land of Nephi who had become Lamanites.

33 ***Amalickiah fled with a small number of his men***. Like the priests of Noah, these men abandoned whatever families they had among the Nephites and left to join the Lamanites, though most of Amalickiah’s followers were captured by Moroni and agreed to the covenant of liberty. Those who would not agree were killed for treason.

36 **upon every tower.** Moroni had copies of his title of liberty made and sent to all Nephite cities, then hoisted upon every tower so that all would see this call to remembrance and action.

38 **the space of four years.** This is a bit of a backward reference. The peace spoken of is the *last* four years, not the next (see Alma 48:20-21). The Nephites mostly enjoyed peace during 16-19 RoJ, thanks to the preaching of Alma and his sons. The story continues in this chapter and the next three during 19 RoJ.

40 **fevers...plants and roots...diseases...climate.** Several interesting side points were made here about the climate, diseases, and plant life used to combat the diseases. These things point to a tropical climate (like Mesoamerica) more than a temperate one (like North America).

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## ALMA 47 THE WICKEDNESS OF AMALICKIAH

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1 **the king of the Lamanites.** It is unknown who the king was after the departure of Anti-Nephi-Lehi four years previously. It could be that he was a Amlicite, but from the context of the story, he was more likely a Lamanite.

3 **he gave Amalickiah the command.** The Lamanite king took a liking to Amalickiah and placed him in command of his armies. His first mission was to go deal with Lamanite dissenters who refused to go to war against the Nephites. But Amalickiah had other plans, desiring to overthrow the king himself. He set a complicated plan in motion to do just that.

5 **to Onidah, to the place of arms.** Sorenson (252) suggests that this mean that Onidah was a location to gather obsidian, which was a key component of Nephite and Lamanite weapons.

8-19 This is a well-cited example of how Satan can lure us to do his will. Amalickiah was persistent and patient. When Lehonti wouldn't come down to him, he went up to Lehonti. After four attempts to communicate, Lehonti finally gave in and decided to hear what Amalickiah had to say. The deal was too good to pass up—Lehonti wins the battle in exchange for making Amalickiah second in command. But Amalichkiah convinced a servant to put “poison by degrees” in Lehonti's food or something, and eventually he died, leaving Amalickiah in charge. This allowed him to take the now combined army and march back to the king.

20-30 Seeing Amalickiah return, the king went out to meet him, but one of the soldiers murdered the king when he got close. The king's servants fled and were thus accused of the crime—they went to live with the people of Ammon in Melek.

31-36 Convincing the queen that the servants had indeed killed her husband, Amalickiah married her and secured his position as king of the Lamanites.

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## ALMA 48 THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MORONI

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This chapter stands in stark contrast to chapter 47—one showing the conniving, scheming wickedness of Amalickiah, one showing the righteous leadership of Moroni.

1-6 With his position secured, Amalickiah organized his armies and marched against the Nephites.



**7 Moroni...had been preparing the kinds of the people to be faithful.** Moroni was very involved with physical preparations, as we shall see. But he started by preparing their minds to keep God's commandments.

**8 forts...banks of earth...walls of stone.** Moroni invested in fortifications such as had not been seen before in the land. Using heaped up earth and stone walls, he protected the people and his armies from attack. Likewise, we must fortify ourselves, our families, and our homes against the evils of world.

**9 in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men.** Addressing your strongest weaknesses is a key to overcoming vulnerabilities not only from enemy attack, but from Satan attacks.

10-18 Mormon's praise of Moroni is without precedent in his other writings. He has written about men like King Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, and the sons of Mosiah, but not until Moroni has he been unable to contain his praise. Moroni:

- Was strong and mighty.
- Was of a perfect understanding.
- Did not delight in bloodshed.
- Did joy in liberty and freedom.
- Had a heart that swelled with thanksgiving to God.
- Was firm in his faith in Christ.
- Gloried in preserving his people.
- Was a man of God.

**17 if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni.** A marvelous concluding remark—the very powers of hell would be shaken if everyone was like Moroni.

**19 Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable.** See *Student Manual*, 254.

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## ALMA 49 THE WAR BEGINS

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**1 in the eleventh month.** At nearly the end of 19 RoJ, the Lamanites began their attack. As they had done many years previously, they thought to start by coming up the west coast, bypassing the Nephite center at Zarahemla and Melek, and attacking the border town of Ammonihah.

**4 how great was their disappointment.** Arriving at Ammonihah, the Lamanites were surprised to find that Moroni had prepared the city with strong defenses and a large army.

**6 with shields, and with breastplates.** Having learned the lesson at Manti, this time the Lamanite army came with protection. But Moroni had upped the ante with the fortifications of the cities.

**9 Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites.** Such was his ego that Amalickiah even got the Lamanites to perhaps not change their long-standing name, but at least consider it as an alternative.

**12 marched towards the land of Noah.** The last time Lamanites had been in this area, they had destroyed Ammonihah and easily captured the town of Noah. Disappointed at their inability to do anything at Ammonihah, they determined to move to Noah, thinking it would surely be weaker. But

when they arrived, they were shocked to discover that it was even more strongly fortified than Ammonihah.

16 **Moroni had appointed Lehi.** The same victorious captain at Manti the year before was in charge of the army in this part of the land. Somehow the Lamanites discovered that piece of information, and it caused even more fear among them, because of his reputation.

17 **captains had sworn with an oath.** Since the Lamanite leaders had already sworn to attack Noah before seeing it, they determined they had to keep their oath, so ordered an attack.

21 **before the place of the entrance.** The first attack was an attempt to get into the city by the gate, but the entrance was so well fortified and protected by soldiers with stones and arrows that they made no progress.

22 **dig down their banks.** The next attempt was to tear down the earthen banks protecting the city, but again, the soldiers in the city could easily pick them off, and many Lamanites died.

23 **their chief captains were all slain.** The results were disastrous—all the Lamanite leaders were killed along with more than 1,000 men. On the Nephite side, there were no deaths, though fifty were wounded (v. 24).

25 **they fled into the wilderness.** With no leadership, the army broke apart and worked its way home, informing Amalickiah when they arrived.

27 **he did curse God, and also Moroni.** Amalickiah was so angry that he cursed both God and Moroni, even swearing an oath (never fulfilled) to drink Moroni's blood.

28 **did thank the Lord their God.** In contrast, the Nephites humbly thanked God for delivering them again from their enemies.

30 **Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren.** As mentioned in the last lesson, Corianton repented and resumed his missionary and church leadership efforts, being included in the list with Helaman and the others.

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