
MOSIAH 26 – ALMA 4

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INTRODUCTION

This lesson covers a dramatic time of change over a period of many years. As the population grew in Zarahemla with the merging of the many cultures—Nephites, people of Zarahemla, people of Zeniff—challenges arose. Intervention from an angel solved a big problem, and kicked off a huge missionary effort to the Lamanites, which left the Nephites with a next generation king. That triggered a change in government, and the torch passed from the previous generation of leadership to a new one, who had to deal with internal dissent and challenges to the new system.

MOSIAH 26 ADMINISTERING THE CHURCH IN ZARAHEMLA

MOSIAH 26:1-14 TROUBLE WITH THE RISING GENERATION

1 **rising generation.** This phrase is not found in the Bible, but is in the Book of Mormon three times (here; Alma 5:49; and 3 Nephi 1:30). It is also used twice in the Doctrine & Covenants (69:8 and 123:11). It is an apt phrase to represent the youth who are coming into their own.

1-4 **They did not believe.** See comments by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, *Institute Manual*, 163. They did not believe in “the resurrection of the dead” or “the coming of Christ.” Without the Spirit to teach them, they “could not understand the word of God.” All this meant that they refused baptism and joining the Church, and were instead “carnal and sinful.”

4 **they would not call upon the Lord.** The most important roadblock to any conversion among this rising generation was their inability to pray. See President Henry B. Eyring, *Institute Manual*, 163.

5 **they became more numerous.** Mormon noted that at first they were less than half as many as the members of the Church, but soon they were joined by others, dissenters from among the Church members, causing their numbers to grow. Dissension is often a cause of much trouble for the Church, whether in the days of the New Testament church, the early days of our dispensation, or even today. Too often, dissenters cannot just leave the Church, but have to come back and work against it. This proved to be the greatest threat to the Church and Nephite society in general during this time—something Mormon is prefiguring here.

6 **expedient that those who committed sin...should be admonished.** All members of the Church commit sin, but certain sins cannot be simply permitted without action. In this case, the dissenters were first “admonished.”

7 **brought them before Alma.** In the hierarchy of the Nephite church, the teachers (perhaps equivalent to our bishops) first talked to them, then it escalated to the priests (stake presidents?), then finally to Alma, the high priest and head of the Church, as noted in verse 8.

9 **Alma did not know concerning them.** Due to his not having been raised in Zarahemla, Alma was not acquainted with these dissenters. But he relied on the testimony of witnesses to verify the problems these dissenters were causing.

10 **not any such thing happened before.** It may seem hard to believe, but Mormon is clear that this is a new experience not just for Alma but in the Nephite culture in general. There were certainly unfaithful people before, but this appears to be the first time that dissenters came out against the Church.

10-11 **brought before the king.** Uncertain of what to do, Alma looked to Mosiah. After all, these were his people, and Mosiah was the king, responsible for the laws of the land before and after Alma's arrival, so Alma expected Mosiah to solve the problem.

12 **I judge them not.** Mosiah was working hard to keep his responsibilities as king separate from Alma's as head of the Church. Recognizing that these sins were spiritual matters, that no laws had been broken, he left dealing with them in Alma's hands.

13 **he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God.** Humble and prayerful, Alma went to the Lord for guidance. He was in uncharted territory and wanted it handled according to God's will.

14 **after he had poured out his whole soul.** No casual prayer was this, but Alma had to pray until there was nothing left. The image of pouring out your whole soul—not half, not most, but all—is a striking one to show the effort sometimes required to get answers. The answer Alma got was a long one, and in some ways must have been a surprise (verses 15-32).

MOSIAH 26:15-32 THE LORD'S RESPONSE

15 **thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi.** Alma was proclaimed blessed by the Lord because he believed the words of Abinadi with no other witness.

16 **the words alone which thou hast spoken.** The people who followed Alma and were baptized by him at Mormon were blessed because they believed Alma's words. Some of them may have heard Abinadi's testimony also, making Alma a second witness, but many only believed because of Alma.

17 **thou hast established a church.** The Lord confirmed that Alma's efforts to create church, first in the wilderness, then at Helam, and now at Zarahemla, were inspired of God and the Lord's will.

they shall be my people. The people who joined the Church led by Alma would become the people of God, the children of Christ, in fulfillment of Abinadi's words.

18 **willing to bear my name.** The followers of Christ, who through the covenant of baptism have taken upon themselves the name of Christ and become his sons and daughters are confirmed by the Lord to be his, "for in my name shall they be called."

19 **because thou hast inquired...thou art blessed.** Finally, Alma is pronounced blessed because of his prayer, which was sincere, earnest, and offered with all his might.

20 ***thou shalt have eternal life.*** To use Joseph Smith's language, Alma had his calling and election made sure. See Joseph Smith, *Institute Manual*, 164.

thou shalt serve me. More a prophecy than a commandment (McConkie & Millett, 2:296), Alma is told that his days will be spent in the Lord's service, teaching and leading the people like a shepherd leads and cares for his sheep.

21 ***he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep.*** The qualification to enter into the Lord's sheepfold is to hear his voice when he calls. Someone who hears the Lord's voice becomes a member of the Church. This is the Lord beginning to answer Alma's question about what to do with those who are sinning.

22 ***baptized unto repentance.*** Forgiveness comes to those who willingly repent and make sacred covenants.

23 ***it is I.*** The Lord reminds Alma and us that he atoned for our sins, he created us and everything around us, and it is by his grace that we are saved.

24 ***if they know me they shall come forth.*** See Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Institute Manual*, 164.

25 ***when the second trump shall sound.*** Alma learned from Abinadi about the first resurrection (Mosiah 15:21-24). Now the Lord instructed him about a second resurrection, which is the fate of those "that never knew" God. The second trump is a call to judgment, not a call to triumph and celebration as with the first trump. Compare D&C 88:98-106, which speaks of seven trumps at the time of judgment.

26 ***but they would not be redeemed.*** Though offered freely and completely necessary, there will be people who will refuse Christ's redemptive power. But at some point they will realize how wrong they were—but it sadly will be too late.

27 ***I never knew them.*** Jesus reiterates this saying in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:23) and the Sermon at the Temple (3 Nephi 14:23). Interestingly, in the Joseph Smith Translation, the prophet edited the Matthew phrase to say instead, "Ye never knew me." We get the sense that both are correct in the Lord's words here to Abinadi—the people do not know him but choose to reject his redemption, leading him to declare that he never knew them.

28 ***shall ye not receive into my church.*** Alma's question is answered in terms of a higher doctrine: those who will not hear the voice of God—which declares faith, repentance, baptism of water, and baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost—shall not be part of the Church.

29 ***him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also.*** The pattern for Church discipline was laid out clearly for Alma: if a person sins but confesses and repents sincerely, he can be forgiven by the Church and by God. The Lord doesn't give the details about when that will happen, how long it takes, etc., here, just that it can happen.

30 ***as often as my people repent, I will forgive.*** What a marvelous statement of grace and love. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, the Lord gave a reply that was so beyond the teachings of the Jews of the day ("seventy times seven," Matthew 18:22) that the number could just as easily have been infinite, which is exactly what he stated here. God's love and patience is such that no matter how many sins we commit, if we sincerely repent, he will forgive.

31 ***ye shall also forgive one another.*** Just as the Lord forgives us, so we must forgive each other. See 3 Nephi 13:14-15 (Matthew 8:14-15). In D&C 64:8-11, the Lord explains that he that does not forgive another suffers, because “there remaineth in him the greater sin.” This has proved to be true in life after life, where someone chooses not to forgive and it ruins their life, whereas the person who committed the sin and repented can again achieve good standing and peace with the Lord.

32 ***whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people.*** The definitive answer to Alma’s question about how to handle these people that were causing so many problems—they were to be put out of the Church or excommunicated, to use our language today.

MOSIAH 26:33-39 ALMA FOLLOWS THE LORD’S INSTRUCTIONS

33 ***he wrote them down.*** Alma faithfully and immediately wrote down the revelation the Lord had given him, Most of it was concerning how he should administer the Church, but some of it was very personal. Yet all was written down and included in the official record, and thus in our book as well.

34-36 Alma implemented the Lord’s instructions: those who repented were forgiven, and those who refused and remained in sin had their names “blotted out.”

37 ***receiving many, and baptizing many.*** Amazingly, the result of Alma’s labors to remove those who refused to repent was even greater growth in the Church.

38 ***suffering all manner of afflictions, being persecuted.*** The members of the Church were a minority (26:5) and suffered under those who were intolerant of their beliefs.

39 ***they did admonish their brethren; and they were also admonished.*** With humility, they are worked together and taught and supported each other. Most importantly, they acknowledged God in all things and gave thanks for all his blessings.

MOSIAH 27 A VOICE OF THUNDER

1 ***Alma laid the case before their king.*** Under the intense persecutions Church members were experiencing, they plead for help from their leaders, who went to Alma, who went to the king. This verse is an interesting example of the use of the word “priests,” for here, it refers to Mosiah’s advisors.

2-3 ***not any unbeliever persecute any of...the church.*** Mosiah passed a law that said it was illegal to persecute members of the Church, and illegal for one church member to persecute another, and that all people were equal before the law, a law inspired by the Lord’s treatment of each of us.

4 ***esteem his neighbor as himself.*** Inappropriate judgment of others and pride are often the signs of the beginning of more serious sins.

5 ***labor with their own hands.*** As Alma had done at Helam with his group, so Mosiah codified that Church leaders should not be paid for their efforts, but receive the grace of God.

6-7 ***very numerous...scatter abroad.*** The implication is that the Lord blessed the Nephites with prosperity when they treated each other well, or at least when most of them did so. The next verses show that persecution still continued, and from an unexpected source.

8-9 ***the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also...Alma.*** The king's own sons and the son of the high priest were not only unbelievers, but actively preached against the Church, become "a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God."

10 ***seeking to destroy the church.*** We don't know when Alma was born, but it was certainly before they got to Zarahemla, so he had probably grown up at the waters of Mormon and/or Helam, where hundreds of people prospered and were happy because they kept the commandments. How did Alma turn away from all of that? How did the sons of Mosiah, with a father like Mosiah and a grandfather like Benjamin, partner with him in this effort to destroy the very thing their two fathers had built up? Righteous parents sometimes feel great personal guilt for wayward children, but if Alma and Mosiah struggled with children who left the Church, we should not castigate ourselves too much.

11-12 ***the angel of the Lord appeared unto them.*** He came "as it were in a cloud," perhaps symbolizing the presence and power of God, as in the Exodus story (Exodus 14:19). Later, John saw an angel descend from heaven, "clothed with a cloud" (Revelation 10:1). They were so fearful that they fell to the earth (like Saul and his companions, Acts 9:4; 26:14) and did not at first understand the angel's words, just that he spoke "with a voice of thunder."

MOSIAH 27:13-16 THE ANGEL'S WORDS

The angel's words were directed at Alma specifically. He was told to stand up, then asked why he was persecuting the Church? The angel was sent because of faithful prayers and to stop the persecution. He tells Alma to "remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam," when they were slaves to the Lamanites and the priests of Noah, and how the Lord had freed them from bondage and brought them to Zarahemla. Finally, Alma is warned that if he did not stop his actions, he would "be cast off."

14 ***heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma.*** See *Institute Manual*, 165-166.

17-18 How astonishing would it be to discover that everything you believed was completely wrong? That a God you did not believe in was very real? That the work you were doing was actually evil and contrary to God's rule?

19 ***he became weak, even that he could not move his hands.*** Not that he could *only* not move his hands—he couldn't move anything, *even* his hands.

20-22 The sons of Mosiah were not overcome like Alma, though they saw the angel and heard his message. Somehow they carried him back to his father, who seemed quite excited about the whole thing and even "rejoiced," calling everyone to come and see "what the Lord had done for his son." Soon he also asked for others to fast with him, that Alma might revive, and that the people might "know of the goodness and glory of God."

23 ***fasted and prayed for...two days and two nights.*** They didn't know how long it was going to take when they started. It only took two days but they were clearly committed to whatever it took. Though not clear here, we can see from Alma 36:16 that the fast didn't start until the second day of his condition, because he was in this state for a total of three days and three nights.

24-31 ALMA'S DECLARATION OF REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Alma's poetic declaration of conversion after his two-day coma-like experience is itself full of doctrinal teachings. It is a statement of contrasts, as illustrated in the *Institute Manual*, 167.

24-25 ***I am born of the Spirit...born of God, changed.*** Alma's language is fairly unique in scripture. For example, in the New Testament, the phrase "born of God" is only found in 1 John, though it is in that book six times (3:9 (twice); 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). In the Book of Mormon, Alma is the only person to use it (Mosiah 27:25, 28; Alma 5:14; 22:15; 36:5, 23, 24, 26; 38:6). This shows how profoundly this experience impacted Alma, that he used the phrase throughout his life in a variety of teaching opportunities. "Born of the Spirit" is also used only by John in the Bible (John 3:6, 8) and only used here in the Book of Mormon, though it is also found once in the Pearl of Great Price (Moses 6:65).

Alma offers a definition here of the phrase "born of God," which is to be changed from a carnal condition to one of righteousness—in other words, to be redeemed (forgiven and freed from the prison of our sins) and to become sons and daughters of God.

26 ***unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.*** Alma's experience would make us think this dramatic event must happen to each of us, but Church leaders have clarified the nature of the experience for most of us is quite different from Alma; see *Institute Manual*, 166-167.

28-29 ***I am snatched.*** As the footnote says, a Hebrew word, *našal*, could be behind or similar to the word translated "snatched" here. It has the meaning of snatched away, delivered, rescued, or saved.

31 ***all-searching eye.*** Jacob used this phrase in 2 Nephi 9:44, which is the only other place the phrase is found. It relates to God's omniscience.

32 ***being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers.*** In a sad irony, once Alma and the sons of Mosiah were converted and went about trying to right some of their wrongs, they suffered the same illegal persecution they were trying to impose on the believers before their change of heart.

34 We finally learn the names of the sons of Mosiah: Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni. These four men will all play significant roles in the coming chapters.

35-36 ***striving to repair all the injuries.*** After their conversions, these men worked hard to make amends for their sins, revisiting and trying to undo to their former efforts.

37 ***they did publish peace...good tidings.*** Harking back to a response prompted by the question of one of Noah's priests (Mosiah 15:14), Alma and the sons of Mosiah now are the fulfillment of Abinadi's words.

MOSIAH 28:1-9 MISSION TO THE LAMANITES LAUNCHED

1 ***the sons of Mosiah...a small number with them.*** Sometimes we think just the four of them went on the mission to the Lamanites, but the scriptures are clear that there was a group of them that went to try and convert their brethren to the south. We don't know all their names, but two of them are mentioned in Alma 19:2 and 21:11 – Muloki and Ammah. How many of this "small number" were sons of those who came from the land of Nephi with either Alma or Limhi, we do not know,

but perhaps some of them would have been motivated to return to their ancestral home and try to convert their former enemies.

3 could not bear that any human soul should perish. See *Institute Manual*, 168.

6 Mosiah went and inquired of the Lord. This was a complex decision, not just a missionary one, for there were political and social issues involved. Would this effort trigger a war? Would the Lamanites kill the sons of the Nephite king, regardless of their reason for being there? Were they just wasting their time?

7 many shall believe on their words. The Lord's promise was huge—Lamanites had not been converted in the past, in spite of multiple attempts to teach them over the last 500 years. Yet now God said that this missionary effort would indeed be successful. Mosiah could not have know just what the result of his sons' efforts would be—thousands of thousands of lives impacted for many generations surely was not expected by anyone.

they shall have eternal life. The chapter heading indicates that this comment applies to the sons of Mosiah. But there are two potential antecedents to "they": the sons of Mosiah and their converts among the Lamanites. From the context, it sounds more like a promise relating to the converts: 'many will believe and have eternal life.' The next phrase deliberately focuses back on the sons.

I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites. This promise was fulfilled many times on the mission, though they had to exhibit faith in it when it wasn't always done instantly (as when Aaron and others were cast into prison).

8 Mosiah granted...their request. With the Lord's assurances, Mosiah gave his blessing for his sons to go.

9 an account of their proceedings hereafter. The record of the 14-year missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah is given in Alma 17-26.

MOSIAH 28:10 – MOSIAH 29:47 KINGS AND JUDGES

MOSIAH 28:11-19 MOSIAH TRANSLATED THE RECORD OF ETHER

28:11 **plates of brass../plates of Nephi.** Mormon began to tell us something about the plates, but paused to insert a parenthetical remark that goes from verse 11 to 19.

plates of gold. What we today call the plates of Ether, which were found by the group that Limhi sent in search of the land of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 8:7-11; 21:25-27). Mosiah translated these because everyone was so anxious to know what the records contained.

28:13 **two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow.** The Urim and Thummim of the Nephites, called by them Interpreters (Mosiah 8:13).

28:14 **handed down from generation to generation.** We do not know where Mosiah got his Interpreters, but they were evidently of ancient origin.

28:16 **whosoever has these things is called seer.** See *Institute Manual*, 168.

28:17-18 The account on the records was of the Jaredites, an ancient people starting at the tower of Babel.

28:19 **this account shall be written hereafter.** Mormon wrote this but never actually delivered the account. Instead, it fell to his son, Moroni, to abridge the Jaredite record and include it with the plates that were eventually delivered to Joseph Smith to translate. Moroni did not seem to have Mosiah's translation available to him, but instead translated afresh the plates of Ether (Ether 1:1-3).

28:20 **as I said unto you.** This marks the end of the parenthetical remark started in verse 11.

conferred them upon Alma. Having no sons available now, Mosiah gave all the records of the Nephites, the Interpreters, and the responsibility to keep the official records of the people to Alma.

29:1-4 **Mosiah...sent throughout all the land.** Wanting guidance from the people, he asked who should be the new king. Apparently most didn't know that Mosiah's sons had left, and the people selected his sons, Aaron. Pondering that results, Mosiah instead responded with a letter that completely changed the Nephite system of government.

MOSIAH 29:5-36 MOSIAH IMPLEMENTS A SYSTEM OF JUDGES

Mosiah's letter lays out the case for abandoning a government based on a single king and argues for a system of judges that serve as more of a check and balance. It was perhaps based on a reading of the brass plates and the time of the judges, but the details of its implementation had to be worked out, since nothing like that described in the Book of Mormon is documented in the Old Testament.

There were at least 12 chief judges (though some very briefly) from this time to just prior to the coming of Christ, when the government system collapsed, as follows (adapted from Largey, 474):

- Alma (91-83 BC), retired to preach
- Nephiah (83-68 BC)
- Pahoran₁ (68-52 BC)
- Pahoran₂ (52 BC), murdered
- Pacumoni (52-51 BC), killed by Lamanites
- *Vacant, due to war* (51-50 BC)
- Helaman (50-39 BC)
- Nephi (39-30 BC), retired to preach
- Cezoram (30-26 BC), murdered
- Son of Cezoram (26 BC), murdered
- Seezoram (26-23 BC), murdered
- *Unknown* (23 BC – AD 1)
- Lachoneus₁ (AD 1-30)
- Lachoneus₂ (AD 30), murdered, government collapsed

29:7 **I fear there would rise contentions.** Unfortunately, even with the system of judges, contentions arose very soon after this change, challenging the new system of government. But with the power of kings, it surely would have been worse.

29:9 ***if my son should turn again to his pride***. Not a theoretical question, probably, since Aaron and the other sons had been full of pride and sin before their encounter with the angel.

29:13 ***if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings***. Benjamin was the example given here, but Mosiah also humbly calls upon his own record in the next verses. Ultimately, we look forward to Christ being our king, the ultimate just man. In the meantime, we muddle through with imperfect men. Mosiah's point will be, let's put in a system where, when just men are not in charge, something can be done about it.

29:18 ***remember king Noah***. Though only some of the people under Mosiah's rule had lived under Noah, the story had evidently become legendary, after being read to the people (Mosiah 25:4-6) about 30 years previously and passed on to their children.

29:21-23 Mosiah describes how hard it is to depose an unrighteous king. These are words of warning for our day.

29:25 ***choose you by the voice of this people, judges***. Mosiah's proposal was the first radical change in Nephite government in 500 years.

29:26-27 ***it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right***. In general, this is true, but in some times of society, it has not been true. It is predicted that in the last days, it will not be the case (for example, 2 Timothy 3:1-7). See *Institute Manual*, 169.

29:28-29 Mosiah outlined how judges would check each other, with the voice of the people being the ultimate check.

29:32 ***a land of liberty...rights and privileges***. Mosiah's grand view of the rights of people was unprecedented in his age.

29:33-36 ***many more things did king Mosiah write***. Mormon ended his direct quotation of the long letter with verse 32. The next four verses are a summary of the remainder of the letter.

29:37 ***they were convinced of the truth of his words***. Broad support was immediately achieved.

29:38 ***every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins***. A hallmark of this government was personal responsibility.

29:39 ***cast in their voices***. The details of the assemblies are not given, but we must be cautious with our own voting system in mind. This was more likely local gatherings of community leaders, land-owners, and other influential people, rather than a popular election. Nevertheless, "the liberty which had been granted unto them" far exceeded anything in Nephite history, or in much of the history of the ancient world.

29:40 ***they did esteem him, yeah, exceedingly, beyond measure***. Mosiah's popularity was off the charts as the people recognized his perfect motives for these changes, since he had nothing to gain.

29:42 ***Alma was appointed the first chief judge***. This is Alma₂, who had become the high priest of the Church under the hand of his father, Alma₁.

29:45 ***his father died, being eighty and two years old***. Alma₁ died in 91 BC. From this verse we can determine his age during his conversion, etc.

29:46 **Mosiah died also.** Mosiah was sixty three years old when he died, making him nearly 20 years younger than Alma¹. Is it any wonder that when Alma came into the kingdom some thirty years earlier that his views would be so influential on Mosiah? Mosiah must have looked to him as a great teacher and personal tutor.

sixty and three years old...five hundred and nine years. This verse is the 'hook date' that allows us to date most of the book of Mosiah, including Benjamin's address and the story of Zeniff and his people.

ALMA 1 NEHOR AND PRIESTCRAFTS

The Book of Alma is named after Alma², who was the first chief judge and the high priest of the people, as the heading (which was translated from the plates) describes.

The first three chapters document an immediate problem that came up shortly after the beginning of the judges—internal dissent from an anti-Christ and a man who would be king. Dealing with these problems marked the beginning and the end of Alma's leadership, and were a constant challenge all through his time.

One important textual note pertains to the group of people called "Amlicites" in these opening chapters and another group called "Amalekites" in later chapters (starting in Alma 24:1). Careful analysis of the Book of Mormon manuscripts (see Skousen, 1605-1609) and the context of both groups (see Conkling) demonstrate that these are really the same people. Thus Alma and Mormon's introduction of them here in the opening chapters of Alma are not a mention of a problem that is raised and quickly addressed, but laying the groundwork for a persistent problem among the Nephites until the time of Christ but especially in the book of Alma—the destructive role of dissension and apostasy.

1-4 **there was a man.** We don't learn his name until verse 15: Nehor. This man was "large, and was noted for his much strength," so he was physically appealing. He also taught several doctrines that appealed to people but were contrary and even put down the Church, and which are relevant for our day, including:

- "Every priest and teacher ought to become popular."
- "They ought not to labor with their hands, but...be supported by the people."
- "All mankind should be saved...all men should have eternal life."

These doctrines are the essence of priestcraft. See *Institute Manual*, 170-171.

5-6 Nehor practiced what he preached, and soon he was so popular that people were giving him money and he was spending it on "very costly apparel." As his following grew, he established a church.

7-8 **the man was Gideon.** We run into our friend, Gideon, again, who has been a major player in many stories with king Noah, king Limhi, and now down to the time of Alma. At the time of this incident, Gideon is at least 75 years old and perhaps older, and is serving as a teacher (perhaps a bishop-like position) in the Church.

9 **he was wrath with Gideon.** Nehor slew Gideon with a sword because Gideon had defeated him with words. The big, strong, younger Nehor was too much for the older Gideon.

10 **was taken by the people.** There must have been at least one witness, because Nehor was captured by members of the Church and brought to Alma for judgment.

12 **the first that priestcraft has been introduced.** Though Nephi defined and warned about it back in 2 Nephi 26:29-30, this is apparently the first time the practice had surfaced among the Nephites.

13 **shed the blood of a righteous man.** There was no question of Nehor's guilt.

14 **condemned to die, according to the law.** Mosiah's laws were still used by the judges and were considered just and valid, and supported by the people.

15 **top of the hill Manti...between the heavens and the earth...ignominious death.** Several aspects of Nehor's death match ancient Jewish customs in legal cases (see Tvedtnes). Taking a person to the top of a hill that they might be "between the heavens and the earth" is a known practice, and relates to his condemnation being acknowledged by both realms. He was invited to confess his false teachings, which he did—a tradition before dying so that forgiveness might be had in the world to come. Finally, he suffered an "ignominious death." What that is, we cannot be sure, but stoning would have been such a death, and that was traditionally done at a high place so the man could be pushed off and fall a height at least twice his own.

16 **many who loved the vain things of the world.** Nehor's death did not stop the movement. The people who had flocked to his message and his church continued promoting the same concepts for their own power and gain.

17 **the law could have no power on any man for his belief.** Nephites had freedom of speech. They could be punished for lying, but could not be brought to trial for stating something they believed in. This protected both the righteous and the sinner.

18-20 **began to persecute those that did belong to the church.** Even though Mosiah had firmly established anti-persecution laws, they were able to achieve this because they carefully kept their persecution within the boundaries of those laws—no lying, stealing, or murdering—but could persecute them with words.

21-22 **smite one another with their fists.** Though the Church clearly and consistently taught to ignore such persecutions, some in the Church contented with the followers of Nehor's teachings, and even came to blows.

23 **in the second year.** Only the second year after Alma became chief judge, or about 90 BC.

24 **their names were blotted out.** Those who went contrary to the Church and contended with their enemies were excommunicated.

26-27 All worked to support themselves, stayed humble, and cared for each other. What a marvelous picture of the peaceful members of the Church in Alma's day!

28 **continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.** "One of the great lessons in the Book of Mormon is that one can be righteous in the face of gross wickedness. Thus one can stand in holy places and be not moved, can be at peace in a world of turmoil" (McConkie and Millet, 3:10).

29-31 The Lord blessed the faithful members of the Church and prospered them with “flocks and herds,” “grain, and of gold, and of silver.” But as Jacob had taught (Jacob 2:19), the people used their wealth not for personal enjoyment but to help those in need.

32-33 There was much wickedness outside of the Church, but when they broke laws, they were punished, and thus there was mostly peace for three more years.

ALMA 2 AMLICI SEEKS TO BE KING

1-2 ***fifth year...Amlici***. Four years after Nehor’s execution for murder, one of his followers, Amlici, came forward and convinced many that he should be the king. While we are not given his background, it makes sense that Amlici was of the people of Zarahemla and perhaps a descendent of that ancient king, and thus could make an ancient claim to the throne contrary to that of the Nephite leaders. It could also be how he raised so many followers in a short time—descendents of the people of Zarahemla united under this leader (Sorenson, 195-196).

3-4 ***this was alarming to the people of the church***. This was the first test, just five years after the system of judges was established, to one of its founding principles: that “it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right.” The Church, being a minority, feared that the majority would take away their rights and freedoms and even destroy the Church.

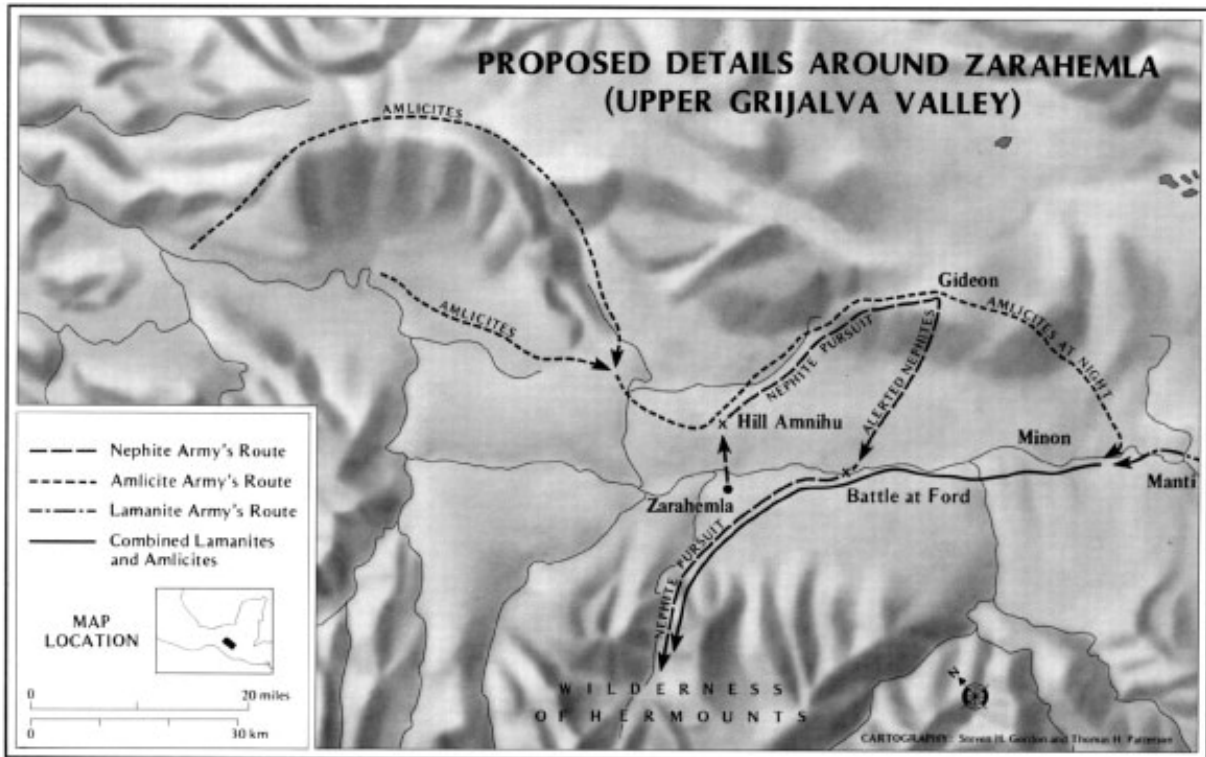
5-7 ***the voice of the people came against Amlici***. After “much dispute and wonderful contentions,” the people decided they did not want this man as their king. Unfortunately, that was not the end of it. Amlici tried legal means to achieve his goal first, but determined not to stop there.

8-10 Amlici rallied his followers who crowned him their king, then he commanded them to attack those who stood against him in a brutal civil war.

11 ***being called Amlicites***. As stated in the introduction, this group is introduced here but continue to play a role throughout the book of Alma but under a different spelling of their name: Amalekites. The argument as to why they are the same group is long and complex and based on analysis of Oliver Cowdery’s spelling and numerous similarities between the groups. Suffice it to say here that the argument is convincing and we can be very sure that this is an introduction, not a conclusion, to the influence of this group of dissidents.

12-14 Both sides armed themselves and prepared for battle.

12 ***cimeters***. Cimeters were previously mentioned in Enos 1:20, Mosiah 9:16, and 10:8, and were noted to be among the weapons that Zeniff and his people “could invent.” It is interesting that they were used early on (Enos’ time) but then not mentioned again until the time of Zeniff. Once the people of Zeniff joined the Nephites in Zarahemla, their whole army used them. A cimeter (generally today spelled scimitar) is a sword with a curved blade.



15 **the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon.** This is the first mention of the major river that ran near Zarahemla, and the only mention of this hill on the east side of the river. The fact that the battle is mentioned on the east side of the river shows that the city was probably on the west, since later they cross the river to get to the city. See the map above for details of the potential battle routes.

16 **Alma...at the head of the armies.** Alma's military training is never mentioned. Nevertheless, as the chief judge, he led the people into battle, standing at the traditional place at the head of the army.

17-18 Giving credit to the Lord, the Nephites began to prevail over the dissenters, and the Amlicites fled in defeat.

19 **slay them with much slaughter.** The result of the battle was 12,532 dead Amlicites and 6,562 dead Nephites. Of course, they were all "Nephites" in the sense that none of them were Lamanites. Using these numbers, one scholar has estimated that the total Nephite population at this time was thus about 200,000 (Sorenson, 193).

20 **in the valley of Gideon.** Showing Gideon's influence again, a valley (and a city—Alma 6:7) was named after him, which is where the Nephite army camped for the night.

21-22 **Alma sent spies.** While the army slept, four leaders and their soldiers went to discover the Amlicites plans. The men's names are preserved—Zeram, Amnor, Manti, and Limher. Zeram and Limher are never mentioned again. Amnor is not mentioned as a person's name but is a unit of measurement in Alma 11. Manti is not mentioned again as a personal name but is the name of a hill, a land, and a city.

24 **a numerous host of the Lamanites.** The spies followed the Amlicites to the land of Minon (a one-time mention of this place), which was higher than (“above”) and south/west (“in the course of the land of Nephi”) of Zarahemla. A Lamanite army had come up from the land of Nephi to join the Amlicites. Note the timing: this is five years into the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanite lands.

25 **they are upon our brethren.** The combined Lamanite and Amlicite army was heading toward Zarahemla to attack that city.

27 **they were crossing the river Sidon.** The Nephite army had to cross the river to get to the city. There must have only been a few places where they could cross, and the Lamanite/Amlicite army was waiting for them.

29-31 **Alma fought with Amlici.** In a classic battle, the two leaders meet in hand-to-hand combat. Alma, perhaps inexperienced in warfare, prays mightily for God’s assistance, and armed with that faith, is able to defeat Amlici and kill him.

32 **he also contended with the king of the Lamanites.** Having dealt with Amlici, Alma next turned to the Lamanite king, but this man was too afraid to take on Alma alone, perhaps having seen how he defeated Amlici, and he sent his personal guards in against Alma instead. We do not know the name of this king but he was probably not the head king of the Lamanites at this time, who was Lamoni’s father. Instead, he may have been a regional king, perhaps of the more northern Lamanite territories, closest to the Nephite lands.

33 **Alma, with his guards.** Since the Lamanite king had turned tail and chosen not to fight ‘fairly,’ Alma, too, took his personal guards and fought the Lamanite guards back.

34-35 **The Lamanites and the Amlicites began to flee.** The Nephite army pushed across the river with such force that the opposing forces fled.

37-38 **the wilderness, which was called Hermounts.** This is the only mention of this place name as well, which appears to be west and north of Zarahemla, and a place of many wild beasts.

ALMA 3 THE LAMANITES RETURN

1-3 The Nephites buried those who were slain inland, but those killed in the battle at the shore of the river were tossed into the river to float to the sea. Returning home, they discovered that the Lamanite army had attacked and killed many of their families and destroyed many of their crops.

4-12 **they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark.** Mormon gave an explanation of the marks the Amlicites made on themselves to distinguish their beliefs. He also explained the dark skin of the Lamanites, and the curse of the Lamanites, which are not the same thing. See *Institute Manual*, 173-174.

13-19 **mark of red upon their foreheads.** This was used by the Amlicites to distinguish themselves, but Mormon saw it as a fulfillment of a prophesy of Nephi (2 Nephi 5:21-24).

20-24 **another army.** Another Lamanite army (or the same one refortified?) attacked in the same place, to which the Nephites responded and drove them out.

22 **afflicted with a wound.** We learn that in the previous battle Alma was severely enough injured that he could not lead the troops the second time.

25 **in the fifth year.** These two major battles both happened in the same year.

26-27 **thousands of souls sent to the eternal world.** They did not count the dead after the first battle with the Amlicites, but the numbers in that one alone were 19,094. The battle by the river and the second battle with the Lamanites must have added thousands more.

ALMA 4 THE CHURCH GROWS BUT STRUGGLES

1 **in the sixth year.** We're now down to 86 BC, following the footnote dating. It was a year of peace.

2-3 **they believed that it was the judgments of God.** The wars, death, and destruction of their crops and fields and flocks humbled the people, who self-reflectively saw it as a judgment against them.

4 **many were baptized.** With this increased humility, Alma was able to teach and baptize many in the sixth year.

5 **in the seventh year.** Though a number is not given for the sixth year, in the seventh year saw "about three thousand five hundred souls" join the Church.

6 **in the eighth year...began to wax proud.** It doesn't take long for humility to evaporate after some prosperity. Just three years after the great battles with the Amlicites, the people are already proud and sinful. The typical Nephite manifestation of pride was the wearing of "very costly apparel." In our day, it might be other manifestations, but the principle is the same.

7-8 **the cause of much affliction to Alma.** Alma and the other leaders of the Church were sorrowful because so many people rejected God's commandments and focused instead on "their own will and pleasure."

9 **great contentions.** Because of their pride, Church members began to contend with each other—why wait for the Lamanites to come and attack?

10 **a great stumbling-block.** Convert baptisms were dramatically impacted by the bad examples of Church members. Those on the outside looking in could not see a reason to join this bickering group of hypocrites. See *Institute Manual*, 175.

11-20 **in the commencement of the ninth year.** Seeing all of this, Alma determined to resign as chief judge and just focus on the ministry, so he appointed and the people approved a man named Nephiah as the second chief judge.

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