
ALMA 21-28

Book of Mormon, Adult Institute Class, Monday, 4 January 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Most of this lesson follows Aaron and his missionary labors after being freed from prison by his brother, Ammon, and King Lamoni. Though Aaron had suffered early on, he then was able to convert a Lamanite king and many others. The result was an even greater expansion of the missionary work, resulting in thousands of converts. But the converts proved to be a problem for those opposed to the sons of Mosiah's efforts, leading to battles (though one-sided) and escape—yet another Exodus-like story in the Book of Mormon text.

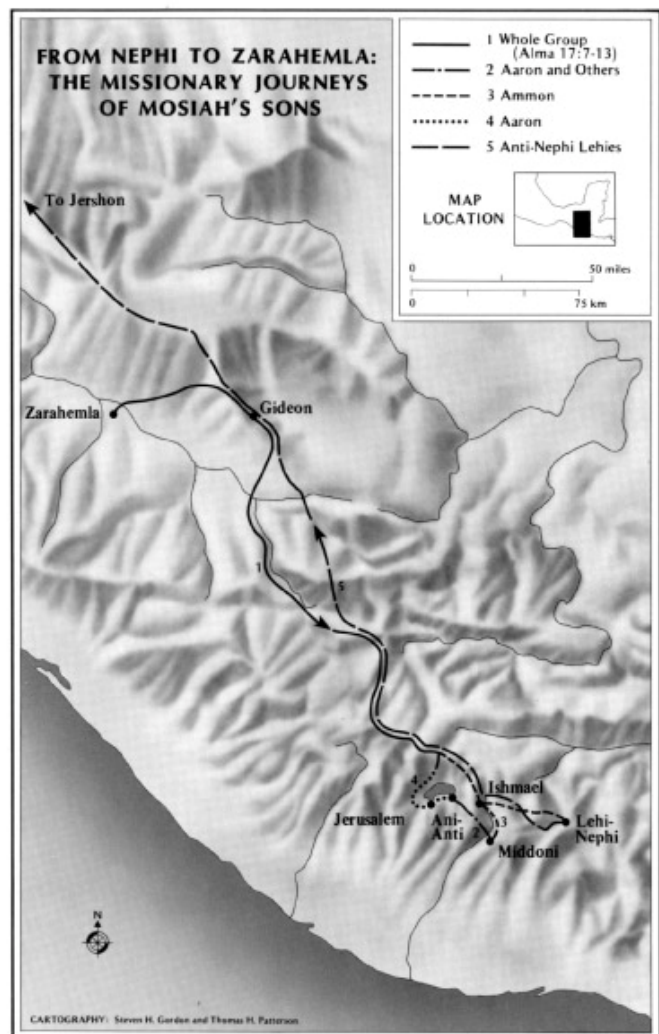
The nine chapters in this lesson were originally three in the 1830 Book of Mormon (which reflected the plates themselves). Chapters 21-22 were chapter XIII; 23-26 were chapter XIV; and 27-29 were chapter XV.

ALMA 21

Chapter 20 ended with Aaron, Muloki, and others being freed from prison by Ammon and King Lamoni. The chapter heading (the one above "Chapter 21") was from the plates and explains that the next section of material is about Aaron and those with him. This chapter discusses Aaron's initial efforts among the Lamanites, his getting cast into prison with others, and their subsequent success, as well as Ammon's success among Lamoni's people.

1 when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves. This refers back to the event discussed in Alma 17:18.

Jerusalem...joining the borders of Mormon. The people who built this city, apparently after the time of Alma₁ who was baptizing at the waters of Mormon, called it after the ancestral



home of those who first arrived in the land—Nephi, Lehi, etc.

2 Amalekites. Textual studies of the Book of Mormon manuscripts and additional studies make a strong case that the Amlicites of Alma 2-3 are the Amalekites of Alma 21-24, 27, and 43. The textual evidence (Skousen, 1605-1609) hinges on Oliver Cowdery's spelling (or mis-spelling) of the name. He uses "Amelicites", "Amaleckites", "Amelekites", "Amalickites", and "Amelickites" in Alma 24, 27, and 43 in the original manuscript. In Alma 2-3, the original manuscript is not extant, but in the printer's manuscript, it is spelled "Amlikites" and "Amlicites". What appears to have happened is that the typesetter, who had been instructed to use the first spelling of names even if they were spelled differently later (which happened frequently), used Amlicite in the early chapters, but with such a long break until chapter 21, when he came to Oliver's spelling "Amalekite" (and the other variants spellings in the next chapters), didn't realize it was the same group, so used the first instance, as instructed. The contextual evidence (Conkling) lies in the similarity of the two groups (Nephite dissenters, followers of Nehor, joined with the Lamanites, etc.) and in their appearance here in Alma 21 with no explanation, which is uncharacteristic of the text. In short, the text in Alma 21-43 should say "Amlicite" (and probably be pronounced Am-le-kite) in every place it says Amalekite today.

the people of Amulon. These are the children and followers of the priests of Noah, who joined the Lamanites and were led by Amulon, the chief priest of Noah. Thus we have two groups of Nephite dissenters—the Amlicites and the Amulonites—joined together to influence the Lamanites for evil.

built a great city...Jerusalem. The text says that the Amulonites and the Amalekites/Amlicites had built the city Jerusalem, to which Aaron went to preach. The chronology here provides a challenge. Though not explicit, the implication is that Aaron went to Jerusalem after the group split up to each go to different cities, which would be at the beginning of their 14-year mission to the Lamanites. But the Amlicites joining with the Lamanites did not happen until the fifth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 3:25), which appears to mean that they could not have built this city with the Amulonites until after that time. There are at least three possibilities to resolve this conflict:

1. Mormon made an anachronistic mistake and put the Amlicites in the area before they were really there. In other words, Mormon knew they were there later and so attributes the building of the city to them a little early. The problem with this idea is that Aaron is said to confront their Nehorite doctrines immediately, though since the Amulonites also adopted Nehorite doctrines (Alma 21:4), that may solve the issue.
2. Aaron didn't go to Jerusalem first, but went to other places first, then Jerusalem. Thus we are reading something that happened in the middle of his missionary efforts. This view is presented by Conkling (114). The problem with this idea is that the parallel history of Ammon is very clear that it happens as soon as Ammon arrives in Lamanite territory, even counting the number of days. At the end of his time converting Lamoni, Ammon went to rescue Aaron and the others from prison. So while it is possible that it was a long time (the exact period is not given after Lamoni's conversion to when Ammon left to get his brother), it seems unlikely that it was very long, because of the encounter with Lamoni's father and the mention of the feast which Lamoni had just missed.
3. The Amlicite relationship with the Lamanites and especially the Amulonites goes back much further than the fifth year of the reign of the judges. In other words, Mormon is correct that they helped build the city Jerusalem (though they may not have been known by the name Amlicite until after Alma 2) and that Aaron ran into some of them at the beginning of his

mission. But it wasn't until after the battle in Alma 2-3 that the bulk of them moved south to live among the Lamanites. This is also proposed by Conkling (114).

I favor the third option as it seems to make sense historically (major events don't happen quickly but develop over time, such as the rise of Amlici and his followers) and it fits the flow of the text well. An alliance with the Amlicites and Amulonites early in the history also makes sense, given their similarities and strong relationship in Alma 21-24, which would take time to develop, and would have facilitated the Lamanite alliance and attacks in Alma 2-3.

3 *the Amalekites [Amlicites] and the Amulonites were still harder.* The story of Alma's life is one of battling Nephite dissenters. If it was just the Lamanites, they may have still had wars and problems, but the text makes it clear that things were far worse because of groups who broke away from Nephite society and battled the Nephites using their alliance with the Lamanites. In fact, Conkling makes a strong case that the Book of Mormon portrays almost exclusively Nephite "truly vicious villains," not Lamanite. An impact of this is that after the successful missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah and their companions, when much of the Lamanite leadership was converted and joined the Nephites, the resulting power vacuum allowed these Nephite dissenters to take control, making the line between "Nephite" and "Lamanite" far more political than ethnic (if it had been very ethnic at all for the previous 300-400 years).

5 *there arose an Amalekite [Amlicite].* This man was perhaps a Nehorite 'missionary,' working among the Lamanites just as Aaron and his companions were.

Hast thou seen an angel? Aaron's testimony, like Paul's, appears to have included his experience on the road with Alma and his brothers, where they saw an angel and were turned from their persecution of the Church to being some of its greatest missionaries.

6 *We do believe that God will save all men.* This is one of the three key teachings of Nehor (Alma 1:4). The other two are that teachers ought to be "popular" and that they should be "supported by the people" (Alma 1:3).

9 *Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them.* It is important to note that Aaron had scriptures with him—perhaps not everything that we would call the Bible today, but apparently at least parts of Genesis and other scriptures that testify of Christ (Isaiah, Zenos, etc.).

11 *a village which was called Ani-Anti.* This is the only time Ani-Anti is mentioned. From the context, we can conclude that it is somewhere near Jerusalem and the waters of Mormon.

11 *Muloki...and also Ammah.* This is the second and last time these two are mentioned (the other reference is Alma 20:2). Muloki and Ammah are the only two mentioned by name out of the group that accompanied the sons of Mosiah on the Lamanite mission.

12-14 *the land of Middoni.* This ties us back to chapter 20, because Middoni is where Aaron, Muloki, Ammah, and the others were cast into prison until Ammon and Lamoni were able to rescue them (Alma 20:28-29).

16 *every synagogue of the Amalekites [Amlicites].* Aaron and his companions used a strategy similar to Paul's in the New Testament. First, they went into synagogues built by fellow Nephites. The Amlicites were not yet in the area in huge numbers (that would not come for a few years—see v. 2 above) but they had apparently sent missionaries who found the Amulonites (descendants of

the priests of Noah and their Lamanite wives) and established Nehorite places of worship among them. When Aaron came along, he took advantage of the situation and first tried to establish an audience in the Nephite places of worship. When that didn't succeed, he went to the Lamanites ("every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted").

18-23 These verses are an 'aside' that turn our attention back to Ammon and Lamoni briefly, mainly to show that the work was progressing well there, so in the next chapter, we have the background for Aaron's comment that the Spirit had called Ammon elsewhere.

20 ***synagogues built***. Lamoni constructed synagogues to teach the true gospel as he had learned it from Ammon and from God. This was in contrast to the synagogues of the Amlicites among them where false doctrines were taught. The king himself brought the people together that they might here the truth.

21-22 ***free from the oppressions of the king***. Lamoni didn't compel anyone to be baptized or associate themselves with the missionaries. Rather, he taught them they had "the liberty of worshipping the Lord their God according to their desires." He could do this because of the oath that Ammon elicited from Lamoni's father (Alma 20:26) giving Lamoni independence and autonomy, which he then extended to his own people.

ALMA 22

1 ***the land of Nephi***. The land of Nephi had changed hands many times in the Book of Mormon. It was where Nephi and his group first settled after they fled for their lives from Laman and Lemuel. Later when Mosiah¹ led people north to Zarahemla, it fell into Lamanite hands. When Zeniff and his people returned, the Lamanites gave it back to them, making it their home for three generations. After the Nephites all left and went to Zarahemla, it was again part of the Lamanite territories. By the time of Aaron in this chapter, it was the capital city of the Lamanites, the home of their chief king, Lamoni's father.

4 ***the Spirit of the Lord has called him another way***. Lamoni's father (whose name we never learn but who perhaps had the throne name of Laman, as did so many before him) had requested Ammon to come visit him and teach him more (Alma 20:27). Aaron went instead, and gave this response as to why Ammon had not come. The answer, while truthful and certainly inspired, turned out to be brilliant, because it was exactly the king's question, and it paved the way for a discussion about the Spirit and the gospel.

7 ***the Amalekites [Amlicites] say that there is a God***. Though apostate, the Lord was able to use the Amlicite teachings to pave the way for Aaron and the truths of the gospel. Lamoni's father's response was to accept the existence of God.

11 ***I will believe thy words***. No sweeter words can come to any missionary's ear. After his encounter with Ammon and the workings of the Spirit since, Lamoni's father was ready and willing.

12 ***reading the scriptures unto the king***. Why did he have to read them? Why not give them to the king and let him read? Probably because the scriptures were in Hebrew or Egyptian or some other language incomprehensible to the king but which Aaron had studied and knew well. Thus he read and translated at the same time.

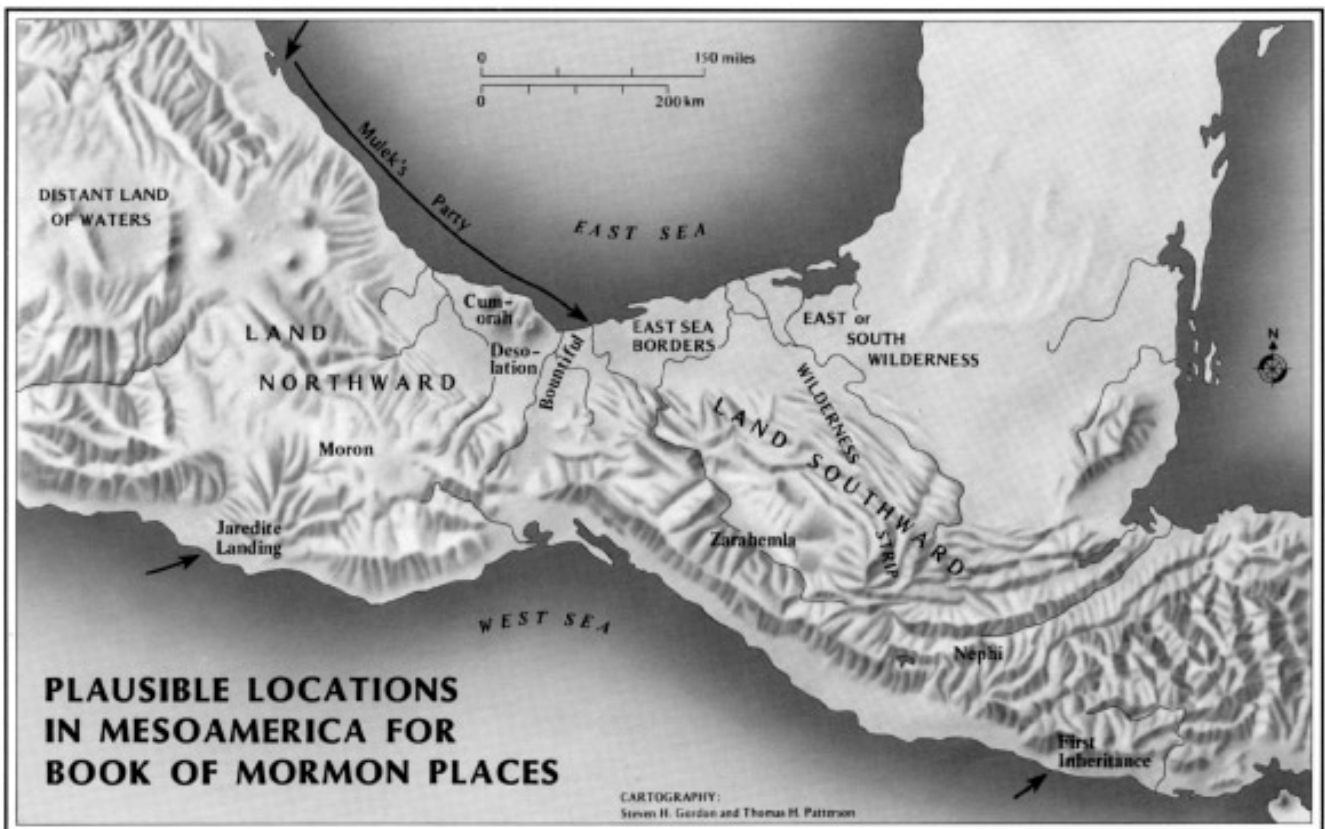
13-14 ***Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures.*** Not only did he read them, but he them explained them and made them understandable to the king. From the baseline scriptures that he read, he taught the king of the creation, the fall, and the atonement—the three key doctrines of salvation that every person needs to understand.

15-18 ***I will give away all my sins.*** There is a progression here that we should not miss. First, Lamoni’s father is willing to give up half of his kingdom to save his mortal life (Alma 20:23). Then he is willing to “forsake his kingdom” to receive the joy of eternal life. Finally, driven by true humility before God, he is willing to “give away all [his] sins” just to know God.

21 ***go and call the people, that they might slay Aaron.*** The servants did not believe they were strong enough for the task, so the queen asked them to get a small army of the people to do the job.

22 ***raised the king from the earth.*** Unlike Ammon, who patiently waited three days for Lamoni, Aaron acted immediately, fearing that they did not have time to spare.

23 ***his whole household were converted.*** This is a bit of foreshadowing. It did not happen right at this moment in time (between the queen calling the multitude and them arriving), but this was the turning point when it began, and the conversion of everyone in the king’s household was the result.



27-34 The rest of chapter 22 constitutes significant geographical information about the Book of Mormon setting. It comes as the result of a decree from the Lamanite king, with Mormon offering an explanation of the extent of his proclamation. From that explanation, we gain a large number of details not found anywhere else in the text that greatly enhance our picture of the lands of the Nephites and Lamanites. Insights include:

- Lamanite lands went from the east sea to the west sea (27).
- Lamanite and Nephite lands were divided by “a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east to the sea west” (27).
- Lamanite-controlled lands extended north of Zarahemla along both coasts, thus forming a giant U-shape around the Nephite territories (27-29).
- Manti was near the headwaters of the river Sidon (27).
- The “place of their fathers’ first inheritance (where Lehi and his family first settled) was on the western seashore (28).
- The land of Bountiful (first mentioned here) was at the northern end of the Nephite lands (29).
- Bountiful was near a land called “Desolation,” which was the land of the Jaredites (30).
- The people of Zarahemla first landed in the north on the eastern shore, then came “up” (meaning in altitude) from there to Zarahemla, driven mainly by the need for food (Bountiful had more animals to hunt) (31).
- Between Bountiful and Desolation was a narrow part (“a small neck of land”) that was the width of “a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite” (32). It is a bit hard to say exactly what that phrase means, but even a fast runner (or chain of runners) could certainly not go more than 200 miles in a day and a half, and probably much less.
- The Nephite and Lamanite territories were not islands but were “nearly surrounded by water” (32).
- The Nephites maintained possession of Bountiful in order to limit the Lamanite spread northward, helped by the small neck of land (33).
- The Nephites could flee north into Bountiful and Desolation, when needed (this comment by Mormon is perhaps reflective of his own time rather than the time he is writing about in these chapters, for that is exactly what his people did) (34).

ALMA 23

Alma 23 marks the approximate half-way point in the Book of Mormon text, in terms of pages. It also marks a key turning point in the story where we see the great success among the Lamanites and how faithful these converts are.

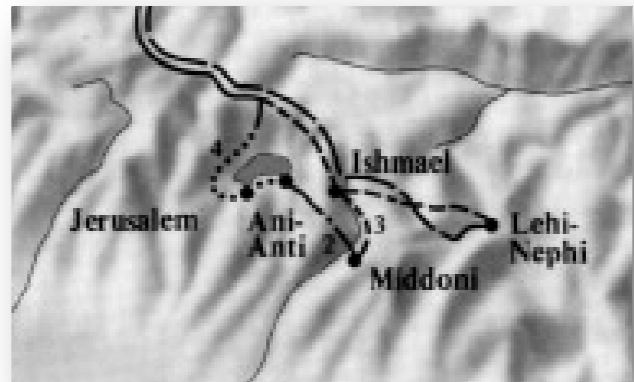
2 he sent a decree. The king’s decree listed very specific things that were **not** supposed to happen to the missionaries, including being:

- Bound
- Cast into prison
- Spit upon
- Smitten
- Cast out of synagogues
- Scourged
- Stoned

Why this list? Compare it to Alma 26:29, where Ammon declares that they have been “cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks, and we have been stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison.” The king’s list is a very real tally of what the men had already experienced, and he was saying, ‘No more.’

5-6 **thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord.** The success of the sons of Mosiah and their companions is astounding. The impact their efforts had on their society can hardly be measured. And the faithfulness of their converts is uncontested: “as many of the Lamanites as believed...never did fall away.”

8-13 These verses recite the cities and lands where the Nephite missionaries had the most success. They center around the capital city of Nephi, the former home of the Zeniffites and Alma¹. What’s critical to the story is probably that the capital city and the area around it converted, while the apostate Nephite cities remained untouched (by their own choice).



14 **save only one.** The account doesn’t relate the story of the single Amlicite convert, but that would certainly be an interesting tale!

17 **Anti-Nephi-Lehies.** The reason for choosing this name is not clear as the meaning is never explained. In the original and printer’s manuscripts, the name is written without hyphens (AntiNephiLehies), the hyphens being added by the typesetter in the 1830 edition. There are at least four potential meanings suggested by modern students of the text:

- The *Student Manual*, 207, quoting Stephen Ricks in *Largey* (67), states that it could be the joining of the descendents of Nephi with the other descendents of Lehi (the Lamanites), based on a potential Egyptian cognate.
- Cynthia Hallen, quoting Skousen (2095) submits that the word “anti” in the Book of Mormon generally doesn’t mean ‘against’ as we usually take it, but is instead a noun perhaps having to do with the territory of Nephi-Lehi (the original land of Nephi, occupied by the Lamanites at this time) or having to do with a righteous heritage from Lehi and Nephi.
- McConkie and Millet (3:165) suggest two. The first draws on the current meaning of “anti” (against) could mean that they were against being either Nephites or Lamanites, but rather wanted a new name completely different.
- Their other suggestion comes from a meaning of “anti” in the 1828 dictionary: “like” or “mirror image of.” In this sense, they could be wanting to be like Nephi and Lehi, and thus choose a name to reflect that desire.

18 **did open a correspondence with them.** This perhaps means that the Lamanite converts started trading with nearby Nephites, not just that they wrote letters to them or something (though see Alma 24:8-9, where Anti-Nephi-Lehi seems to use it to refer to interacting with the missionaries).

the curse of God did no more follow them. As we learned earlier (Alma 3), the curse of God has nothing to do with skin color or any other external marker, but is all about being cut off from the presence of God. Now the Lamanite converts were no longer cut off by their culture and history, but were being fully blessed by the Lord and the Spirit.

ALMA 24

1 Amulon...Helam...Jerusalem. The Amlicites and Amulonites in these lands determined were angered against the converted Lamanites, probably because the converts not only taught against their doctrines, but because the converts were in charge (they included the king and other leaders) so had economic and social control. The cities listed here were founded by Amulon (Noah's chief priest) and Alma¹. Jerusalem was a Lamanite city though seemingly inhabited mostly by the Nephite apostates at this time.

3 he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi. The Lamanite king had gotten old or ill and determined to confer the kingdom upon his son (he did it just in time, too—see v. 4). As was often the custom in those days, the son was given a throne name at the time of coronation (similar to what popes do today). In this case, the king broke with what appears to be the tradition of calling kings “Laman” and instead used the name they had chosen for the people of the Church. Anti-Nephi-Lehi was Lamoni's brother (v. 5).

6 there was not one soul..that would take up arms. Ammon and the missionaries seem to have advocated for self-defense, but the converts and especially the new king wouldn't even consider it.

7-16 These verses, Anti-Nephi-Lehi's speech to the people about their dire situation.

10 our many sins and murders. This is not hyperbole. The Lamanites had certainly been guilty of murdering each other and the Nephites in the many wars they had waged.

12 let us stain our swords no more. Metal swords don't stain, but wood ones will. Removing a blood stain from a wooden sword would be almost impossible as it soaks in deeply. But the king attributes the removal of their stains to God, who alone has the power to do it. It is a marvelous metaphor for the grace of God. Additionally, this verse is one of the best ones to argue for the Book of Mormon people using the traditional wood sword with obsidian blades embedded in the sides, the *macuahuitl* (shown at right, from a painting (Florentine Codex, page IX, F, 5v; <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/florentine-codex-1.htm>).



16 bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright. There is great irony here, because swords buried deep in the earth, whatever they are made of, would not stay bright, but would rust or decay. The king is making the eternal point that the only way to avoid the risk of losing the forgiveness they so magnanimously received from God was to put their swords away forever and never use them again. It was more than symbolic—it literally gave them no weapons of self-defense.

18 vouching and covenanting with God. There were three parts to their covenant. The first we also consider—burying their weapons that they might never again shed anyone's blood, even if it meant losing their own. But the other two are just as important, if overlooked. They would no longer “take away from a brother,” but rather would “give unto him.” The history of the Lamanites, at least from a Nephite perspective, is one of robbery and plunder (Mosiah 10:17). These Lamanite

converts abandoned that lifestyle in favor of one of charity. Finally, they also rejected the Lamanite reputation of idleness and determined to “labor abundantly with their hands.” So they gave up war and adopted charity and hard work as their driving forces.

19 **And thus we see.** Using one of his favorite phrases twice in this verse, Mormon is quick to point out the faithfulness of the Lamanite converts and their determination to sacrifice even their own lives for the sake of their salvation.

20 **the Lamanites, made preparations for war.** Many in the army were certainly Lamanites, but the instigators and leaders were of the Amlicites and Amulonites. Their purpose, just as it was in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 2-3) was to overthrow the existing government and take control for themselves.

21 **began to call on the name of the Lord.** It’s hard to imagine a more brutal scene. Thousands of people kneeling with their faces on the ground, praying to God, while thousands of soldiers walk through the crowd cutting them down in mid-prayer. Never raising a hand, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies died to preserve their covenant and salvation, which the book assures us happened (vv. 22, 26).

22 **a thousand and five.** The text doesn’t say how long the slaughter went on before it stopped, but the result was more than a thousand dead, and likely many more wounded. The complete lack of resistance stopped the attacking army cold. In fact, many of them felt such remorse that they converted themselves, so that “the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain” (v. 26). See Elder Perry’s comment in *Student Manual*, 208.

28 **Amalekites [Amlicites] and Amulonites.** This verse confirms that it was the apostate Nephites and their descendents who did most of the dirty work and urged the slaughter. Even as their Lamanite soldiers were overcome by the situation and began to convert to the gospel, these people hardened in their determination.

30 **thus we can plainly discern.** Mormon only used this phrase once, here in this verse, as a substitute for his more typical “And thus we see...” In this case, he commented on how those who have knowledge of the truth become even harder and worse off than those who never knew truth. See *Student Manual*, 208.

ALMA 25

2 **in the land of Ammonihah, and destroyed them.** This gives us background to what Alma described in 16:1-3, 9-11 just before we picked up the story of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites in Alma 17. The Lamanites (though see verse 3) fell upon Ammonihah because they were angry at the Nephites who had led them to kill the Lamanite converts, their own brethren. It also allows us to date the later chapters in this lesson a bit as Alma 16 says it was in the 11th year of the reign of the judges that Ammonihah was destroyed. That means it’s also 11 years into the 14 year mission of the sons of Mosiah.

3 **almost all the seed of Amulon.** This is a critical point—the Lamanites who attacked Ammonihah (and Noah and other lands, as we learn from Alma 16 and verse 3) were mostly Amulonites, who were allied with the Amlicites, and who were of the order of Nehor. The city they destroyed,

Ammonihah, was mostly followers of Nehor. So the wicked were destroying the wicked in anger over being told to destroy the righteous converts of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

5-12 This brief account of battles in the east wilderness (which, if our Mesoamerican geography is correct, would be heading into the Yucatan peninsula) is a somewhat confusing fulfillment of the words of Abinadi (from Mosiah 13) relating to the priests of Noah, in the words of Alma/Mormon. Basically, the Amulonites, who were the descendents of the priests of Noah, were killing Anti-Nephi-Lehies wherever they could, and other Lamanites decided this just wasn't right, so they began to hunt these guys down and kill them. It also includes the editorial comment, "And behold they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites" (verse 9), which probably cannot be Mormon but must instead be from Alma or Ammon who wrote the record Mormon is quoting.

13 ***did join themselves to the people of God.*** The army who had destroyed Ammonihah and captured many of the people of Noah, then went after the Amulonites, amazingly came back, remembering the words of Aaron they had heard, and joined the Church. They, too, did "bury their weapons of war" (verse 14), making the same covenants as the other Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

15-16 ***the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ.*** These Lamanite converts kept the law of Moses as Ammon, Aaron, and the other taught them, but knew that it was only temporary as it pointed them to the Savior and his coming, which was now less than 100 years away.

ALMA 26

Chapter 26 is an interesting 'pause' in the action. We have bounded through 11 years of missionary work, conversions, and wars. Now we are presented with a conversation between the sons of Mosiah, mostly Ammon speaking though with his brother Aaron chiming in a bit. In it, Ammon teaches us something about praising God.

8 ***let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks.*** I attended a church once where I heard the pastor and the congregation say multiple times, "Praise God!" Though the repetition caused it to lose something for me, I nevertheless was impressed by the attitude of thanksgiving and acknowledging God's hand in their lives. We do something like this in our fast and testimony meetings on occasion, but do we praise God enough? Do we speak openly of God's blessings in our lives, of how his influence has changed us? Do we praise him in prayer and in song in our homes, families, and wards? Sometimes a good reading of many of the psalms, many of which are 'praise literature,' is a good exercise to help us count our blessings and acknowledge God's hand.

10 ***thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.*** Aaron's mild rebuke of his brother's enthusiasm serves to focus Ammon's comments. He isn't just saying, 'We're having such a great mission! Look at all these converts! We've really worked hard and done a good job.' Rather, he's giving credit to the Lord and marveling that they got to be involved.

12 ***I am nothing.*** These men were no doubt there when Benjamin gave his final address, though perhaps as young men only. Ammon's comments, at least, echo Benjamin's (see Mosiah 2:14-22).

16 ***I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.*** It can be difficult to express the feelings of our hearts and the power the Spirit can have on our minds. The pure intelligence and pure joy that come from such moments is very real, but difficult to explain to another.

19-20 ***why did he not consign us to an awful destruction.*** The sons of Mosiah were persecuting the Church and causing all kinds of problems, with their friend Alma. When the angel appeared, he could simply have said, 'You are evil and deserve to be punished,' and taken care of them. But God mercifully called them back and gave them time to repent and serve. He knew what the impact of their converted lives would be, even if they didn't at the time. More importantly, they see his "great mercy" in bringing them back "over that everlasting gulf of death and misery."

21 ***save it be the penitent.*** The word "penitent" is not in the King James Bible. It is used seven times in the Book of Mormon, six of those times in the book of Alma. I have noted in the past that when Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade* reads his father's diary where it says, 'Only the penitent shall pass,' that the quotation must have been inspired by the Book of Mormon!

23-25 ***they laughed us to scorn.*** We didn't hear this when the sons of Mosiah were preparing to leave, but Ammon reveals that before they departed on their mission, many back home were not supportive, and even mocked them for the idea. This is not enemies, but "our brethren," other members of the Church, who thought they were at least wasting their time. In fact, they called not for missionary work among the Lamanites, but war to destroy them.

27 ***our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back.*** Another detail not given in the story of their journey (though see Alma 17:10-11 which is the Lord's voice to them during their journey).

28-30 As noted above, this is a summary of their struggles and afflictions.

37 ***God is mindful of every people.*** A great lesson for our day when billions on the Earth have never heard the gospel message or even heard of Christ at all. God loves all of his children, and we should pray for and work for opportunities to give them that message.

ALMA 27

2 ***Amalekites [Amlicites]...began to stir up the people in anger.*** Though there was about a three-year pause after the initial attacks that killed many of the converts but brought even more, now the Amlicites resumed their persecutions. They were taking out their frustration at not being able to overpower the Nephite homeland on the converts of the Nephites who had come from Zarahemla. Sadly, their persecution resulted in more deaths among the defenseless converts.

5 ***let us go down to the land of Zarahemla.*** Rather than watch the Amlicites destroy the people of God one by one, Ammon proposed to the king that it was a good time to get out of town. But the king (verse 6) feared that the Nephites would not be kind and would also want to kill them.

8 ***we will be their slaves.*** Anti-Nephi-Lehi proposed that his people would completely humble themselves and be slaves, but Ammon reminded him that slaves were not part of the Nephite society.

10 ***Inquire of the Lord.*** The king asks Ammon to do as he offered (verse 7) and that his people would obey the Lord, which might include them staying and all being killed!

14 ***departed out of the land.*** This is yet another ‘Exodus’ account in the Book of Mormon, which repeats that theme again and again. This time, thousands of people moved north to the borders of the Nephite lands, uncertain where they were going to go or what would happen to them. Their departure could not have gone unnoticed by the Amlicites, especially because the king over the whole land was leaving without any evidence that he had designated a successor.

15 ***I and my brethren will go forth.*** This now ties us back to Alma 17, where we began. Ammon and the others do not know what has transpired in the last 14 years. Sure, they’ve had reports from some of their converts who went north to fight battles, but they cannot know the political or social climate back home, so they left their converts in the wilderness to go see what the reception would be like.

17 ***he fell again to the earth.*** Ammon’s was so joyful upon finding Alma, that he fell again to the earth (the first time was in Alma 19:14), though the text wryly notes that neither Alma nor the other missionaries were overcome by their joy in the same way (verses 18-19).

22-26 ***we will give up the land of Jershon.*** East and north of Zarahemla was the land Jershon, which the people determined to give to the Lamanite converts. It was defensible from Lamanite attacks (verse 23) and must have been fertile but still sparsely populated enough to easily move out any Nephites who were there and let the thousands of converts move in. The name “Jershon” is an interesting term. Not found in the Bible, it is nevertheless a Hebrew term (*yrš*) meaning “to inherit,” which matches exactly what is said in this verse. In addition, the phrase in verse 26, “they went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession” is a common phrase in ancient Mesopotamian documents: to ‘descend’ or ‘go down’ means to take possession of it. This is also reflected in the Old Testament, 1 Kings 21:16-18, where Ahab went down to possess the vineyard of Naboth. Interestingly, the Hebrew term used there is *yrš*, the same word as Jershon in the Book of Mormon (Bokovoy).

26 ***the people of Ammon.*** For reasons not given, when the converts arrived in Jershon, the Nephites determined to call them “the people of Ammon” instead of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The title was appropriate and perhaps easier to say, but whatever the reason, it stuck and became their name.

ALMA 28

2-3 ***there was a tremendous battle.*** The Lamanites, led by the vengeful Amlicites, didn’t just let the people of Ammon leave in peace, but followed them north. The Nephite armies defended the converts from this attack, but it was the greatest battle between the two nations in their history. The Nephites were victorious, though, and drove back the Lamanites, but at a great cost, with “tens of thousands” killed.

7 ***the fifteenth year.*** The battle did not immediately take place (it was in the 14th year that the converts moved north), probably because the Lamanites had to discover where the people of Ammon had gone and muster an army sufficient to attack.

8 **this is the account of Ammon and his brethren.** This verse might have been a heading, except it is at the end of the account that started in Mosiah 28 but in detail in Alma 17.

13 **thus we see how great the inequality of man because of sin.** Alma/Mormon comment on the power of Satan to bring misery and destruction to people. Both men had known such things in their lives.

14 **thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards.** Ammon and his brethren are an amazing example of the need to carry the message of the gospel to all who will hear. Thousands of souls were saved as a result of their decision and commitment. Their efforts brought about fundamental changes to Nephite and Lamanite societies, and in large part helped set the stage for the great events of 3 Nephi and the marvelous centuries of peace that followed.

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