

August 19-25, 2024

Alma 53–63

“PRESERVED BY HIS MARVELOUS POWER”

Summary:

Alma 53. The Lamanite prisoners are used to fortify the city Bountiful—Dissensions among the Nephites give rise to Lamanite victories—Helaman takes command of the two thousand stripling sons of the people of Ammon. [About 64 B.C.]

Alma 54. Ammoron and Moroni negotiate for the exchange of prisoners—Moroni demands that the Lamanites withdraw and cease their murderous attacks—Ammoron demands that the Nephites lay down their arms and become subject to the Lamanites. [About 63 B.C.]

Alma 55. Moroni refuses to exchange prisoners—The Lamanite guards are enticed to become drunk, and the Nephite prisoners are freed—The city of Gid is taken without bloodshed. [About 63 B.C.]

Alma 56. Helaman sends an epistle to Moroni recounting the state of the war with the Lamanites—Antipus and Helaman gain a great victory over the Lamanites—Helaman’s two thousand stripling sons fight with miraculous power and none of them are slain. [Verse 1, about 62 B.C.; verses 2–19, about 66 B.C.; and verses 20–57, about 65–64 B.C.]

Alma 57. Helaman recounts the taking of Antiparah and the surrender and later the defense of Cumeni—His Ammonite striplings fight valiantly and all are wounded, but none are slain—Gid reports the slaying and the escape of the Lamanite prisoners. [About 63 B.C.]

Alma 58. Helaman, Gid, and Teomner take the city of Manti by a stratagem—The Lamanites withdraw—The sons of the people of Ammon are preserved as they stand fast in defense of their liberty and faith. [About 63–62 B.C.]

Alma 58. Moroni asks Paboran to strengthen the forces of Helaman—The Lamanites take the city of Nephibah—Moroni is angry with the government. [About 62 B.C.]

Alma 59. Moroni complains to Paboran of the government’s neglect of the armies—The Lord suffers the righteous to be slain—The Nephites must use all of their power and means to deliver themselves from their enemies—Moroni threatens to fight against the government unless help is supplied to his armies. [About 62 B.C.]

Alma 60. Paboran tells Moroni of the insurrection and rebellion against the government—The king-men take Zarabemla and are in league with the Lamanites—Paboran asks for military aid against the rebels. [About 62 B.C.]

Alma 61. Moroni marches to the aid of Paboran in the land of Gideon—The king-men who refuse to defend their country are put to death—Paboran and Moroni retake Nephibah—Many Lamanites join the people of Ammon—Teancum slays Ammoron and is in turn slain—The Lamanites are driven from the land, and peace is established—Helaman returns to the ministry and builds up the Church. [About 62 B.C.]

Alma 62. Shiblon and later Helaman take possession of the sacred records—Many Nephites travel to the land

*northward—Hagoth builds ships, which sail forth in the west sea—Moronihab defeats the Lamanites in battle.
[About 62-57 B.C.]*

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How valuable is holding the “high ground?”

The fortification that Moroni had the captive Lamanites build sound very familiar to an archaeological term “Tel,” like many in the Land of Israel. These fortifications had sloping walls that were difficult to climb and exposed the enemy who had to fight “uphill” while the defense of the city was from the top downward. The spiritual connection to this physical description is to always stay on the high ground, a natural defense from below.

What is the Lord’s way of dealing with enemies?

One thing that comes through the various battle accounts is the Nephite humanitarian concern of their captive enemies. Regarding treating our enemies, let us review some concepts from the Old Testament Supplements. Through the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls we find the motivation of those many call the Essenes, was to move away from wickedness and establish a singular community of righteousness. Their organization had a shadow of biblical organization. Their leader was called the “Teacher of Righteousness” and he had two assistants. There was also a council of “Twelve Overseers.” They had an order following the ‘righteous king’ which is said in Hebrew, “Melech Zedek.” The Dead Sea sect shunned others, and probably evoked one of the Savior’s comments in the Sermon on the Mount. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to

them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” **(Matthew 5:43-46)**

How important are our oaths and covenants?

“The earliest ethical teachings are commandments in the Bible: to do justice, to avoid bribery, gossip, robbery, oppression, to protect the weak --- the widow, the orphan, the slave, the stranger; to be kind to animals. Man is obliged to overcome his normal feelings and to obey these commands --- even with respect to his enemy.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)** The covenant made by the fathers of the “two-thousand stripling warriors” was so binding and sacred that, even in peril, Moroni did not let them assist in defense of their people. The concept of oaths and covenants reaches back to the Land of Israel and even before that to our very pre-existence. “Our very presence in this world is the result of a covenant we have made and a promise of and the result of faithfulness. Our baptism is a covenant in which the Lord promises us celestial life if we live celestial laws. To fail to do so we are cheating both him and us, but more especially ourselves. This is true also of other ordinances. We receive the higher priesthood with an oath and a covenant with the Father, which covenant ‘He cannot break neither can it be moved,’ but we may break it and fail, and in so doing we break a vow and are dishonest with ourselves and him. Our free agency

permits our doing what we wish to do, but it does not immunize us from the results of our failures.” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.504)

What is the difference between an oath and a vow?

“In Jewish law, ‘oaths’ and ‘vows’ serve as distinct terms, each representing a different class of ‘sworn statement.’ The oath, which in Hebrew is called *shevuah*, is limited to sworn statements made during the course of judicial proceedings, while the vow, called in Hebrew *neder*, has a much broader application and refers to all types of sworn statements made outside the courtroom. Both are treated at great length in the *Talmud* (written interpretations of Biblical law), in separate tractates entitled, respectively, *Shevuot* and *Nedarim*.” “Today in courts in most countries, it is common practice to ‘swear in’ all witnesses. Jewish law never adopted this custom, preferring to accept testimony without the administration of an oath, as long as there were at least two witnesses who corroborated each other’s testimony, as well as other supportive evidence.” “Testimony given under oath was, in fact, considered to be a particularly weak form of evidence, and it was only accepted when there was a complete lack of something better. When the judicial oath was administered, it was only used in civil cases and then not to the witnesses but to the defendant, or less often, to the plaintiff. In capital cases, a judicial oath was never administered, since it was assumed that no one charged with a capital crime could be believed, even under oath.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How great are the consequences of making a vow?

In contrast to the judicial oath, the ‘vow’ has very wide application. It consists of a fully verbalized statement made by an adult (not a minor) that he (or she) takes upon himself a specified obligation (such as giving a definite sum of money to charity) or that he denies to himself the

enjoyment of a given object, person or experience (such as eating a particular type of food). If the vow is made voluntarily, without any compulsion from anyone else, it is fully binding, and only with great difficulty can it be declared void.” “Vows were regarded by the rabbis with great seriousness. They attempted to discourage indiscriminate making of vows, for they realized that most people made them without fully realizing the consequences. It is reported in the *Talmud* that the sage Samuel even declared that ‘he who makes a vow, even though he fulfills it, commits a sin.’ The rabbis tolerated vows only when they were taken in order to get rid of bad habits and encourage one to do good; otherwise they emphasized that one should strive for the desired ends without the aid of vows.” “Because of the strict binding nature of vows, and the great difficulties involved in having them annulled, even today many people have the habit of saying *beli neder* (‘without it being a vow’) whenever they make statements about acts which they plan to undertake in the future.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How should I be led in negotiating?

As I read about the negotiations Moroni had with other Nephite and Lamanite leaders, I am struck with questions. When it comes time for negotiations, how much do we compromise? Where do we draw the line? Again, recent Israeli negotiations have drawn an entire nation (as well as other nations) into the same debate. It is clear to see that Moroni had the powerful gift of God, a prophetic gift that was used in righteousness to lead the people.

Where did many of the Polynesians originate?

The brief mention of Hagoth leading an entourage to another land brings a memory of my visit to a conference of

ethnic Hawaiian members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hawaii. I had the opportunity of presenting a bridge between Judah and Joseph as I showed Jewish culture and tradition with Latter-day Saint's similarities. The meeting was emotional and spiritually fired as the Hawaiians connected their traditional heritage to Hagoth. They showed their culture and tradition which reflected similarities to Jewish marriage, burial practices, greetings and dietary customs. The line seemed to connect to Hagoth, his Nephite and Lamanite connection and the history reaching back to the land of Israel. "The belief that Polynesian ancestry includes Book of Mormon people can be traced back at least to 1851, when George Q. Cannon taught it as a missionary in Hawaii (he was later a counselor in the First

Presidency). President Brigham Young detailed the belief in a letter to King Kamehameha V in 1865. Other Church leaders have since affirmed the belief, some indicating that among Polynesian ancestors were the people of Hagoth, who set sail from Nephite lands in approximately 54 B.C. (cf. **Alma 63:5-8**). In a statement to the Maoris of New Zealand, for instance, President Joseph F. Smith said, 'I would like to say to you brethren and sisters . . . you are some of Hagoth's people, and there is NO PERHAPS about it!' (**Cole and Jensen, p. 388.**) In the prayer offered at the dedication of the Hawaii Temple, President Heber J. Grant referred to the 'descendants of Lehi' in Hawaii (**IE 23 [Feb. 1920]:283.**) (**Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Vol.3, POLYNESIANS**)