
Alma 1 — Nehor the Anti-Christ — Priestcraft Named, Gideon Slain, and the First Capital Trial under the Reign of the Judges

Alma 1: in the first year of the reign of the judges over the Nephites (c. 91 BC) a large, strong, eloquent man named Nehor emerges preaching universal salvation and a paid priesthood. He encounters Gideon — the same elder who had once delivered Limhi's people — and slays him in argument. Nehor is brought before Alma the chief judge, condemned for priestcraft and for murder, and suffers an ignominious death. His disciples persist and persecute the Church; the believers respond with patient charity. The chapter closes with what becomes the Book of Mormon's signature paradox: peace in the Church, notwithstanding all their persecutions.

Alma 1 is the opening chapter of the Book of Alma and the inaugural chapter of the reign of the judges. The new political and religious order is tested almost immediately. In its first year, a large and eloquent man with a doctrine arrives in Zarahemla, and the new system has to do the hardest thing any new system can do: judge a charismatic religious leader who has killed an old man of the Church. The chapter is therefore the trial-text of the reign of the judges. Mosiah's reform passes its first test, but only because the test is met by three things together — the rule of law, the separation of jurisdictions, and doctrinal clarity about what priestcraft is.

Hebrew Word Studies

nehor / kohen / mashiach (נְהוֹר / כֹּהֵן / מָשִׁיחַ) — **light, shining** (Aramaic of Dan. 2:22) / **priest / anointed vv. 2–15**. The chapter's anti-Christ has a name worth pausing on. *Nehor* is Aramaic for *light, brightness* — the noun behind Dan. 2:22's *and the light dwelleth with him*. The irony is sharp: the false light bears the name of light. Paul names the same pattern — *Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light* (2 Cor. 11:14). *Kohen* is the Hebrew Bible's standard word for *priest*, the root behind modern Hebrew *kahuna*; Nehor's claim to be a *kohen* without ordination is the chapter's priestcraft charge. *Mashiach* — *anointed* — is the Hebrew noun behind *Christ*. Nehor is therefore an *anti-mashiach* by precise definition: a false anointed bearing the name of light, claiming a priesthood he has not received.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the chapter is the foundational text for the Nephite economic doctrine. The arc is precise: the steady Church prospers (v. 29), the prosperous Church shares (v. 30), the sharing Church becomes far richer than the non-Church (v. 31). The Church's prosperity is therefore not a Nehor-style accumulation but a fruit of righteousness held in trust for the poor. The chapter ends with this picture; the next several chapters will tell what happens when the picture begins to fade.