
Alma 2 — Amlici Rejected by the Voice of the People — the First Civil War of the Judges, the Self-Crowned King, and the Battle at the Sidon

Alma 2: in the fifth year of the reign of the judges (c. 87 BC) a cunning man named Amlici, of the order of Nehor, seeks to be king and to overthrow the new order. The people contend by the voice, and the voice of the people goes against him. Amlici is rejected but his followers crown him king nonetheless. The Amlicites unite with the Lamanites at the hill Amnihu and march against the Nephites. Alma — both chief judge and prophet — leads the Nephite armies. He prays and is strengthened. He slays Amlici in personal combat at the river Sidon. The bodies are cast into the river. The Lamanite host is driven westward and the war ends in deliverance.

Alma 2 is the first stress-test of the constitutional experiment Mosiah laid out four years earlier in Mosiah 29. The same political system that Mosiah II articulated is now confronted with its first attempted coup — a cunning man of the order of Nehor wants to restore the kingship and displace the judges. The chapter is therefore the moment when the constitutional language of *the voice of the people* (Mosiah 29:26) becomes the living discipline of *the voice of the people*. Word becomes practice, and the practice holds.

Hebrew Word Studies

qol ha-am / melek / shofet (קול הָעָם / מֶלֶךְ / שׁוֹפֵט) — **voice of the people / king / judge vv. 1–11.** The chapter's constitutional triad in its native Hebrew. *Qol ha-am* — *voice of the people* — is the noun-phrase behind the corporate vote in the Hebrew Bible. It is the language of Sinai itself (*all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do*, Ex. 19:8) and of the appeal in 1 Sam. 8:7 (*hearken unto the voice of the people*). Alma 2 is the Book of Mormon's fullest deployment of *qol ha-am* as a constitutional instrument. *Melek* — *king* — is the same noun Samuel reluctantly anointed, that Mosiah II abolished, and that Amlici now seeks to restore. The Book of Mormon's clearest articulation of the *melek* rejected by the *qol ha-am* sits in this chapter. *Shofet* — *judge* — is the noun behind the reign of the judges, and the same noun behind the Book of Judges (Shoftim) in which the voice of the people raises up judges from the tribes. Alma 2 is therefore a pre-Davidic *shoftim* resonance: the *qol ha-am* raises *shoftim*, exactly as in Israel's pre-monarchic period.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, Alma 2 is the Book of Mormon's foundational text for the doctrine of the defensive war. The five elements of the better cause — homes, liberties, families, all, rites of worship — will become a Nephite refrain, canonized in the Title of Liberty fifteen chapters later, and the seed of the Latter-day Saint just-war tradition is planted here. The Nephites do not fight for monarchy or power; they fight for the things a free people is obligated to defend. That distinction, kept clear, is what makes the difference between a defense and a conquest.