
Alma 3 — The Mark and the Curse — the Amlicites Self-Marked, the Word of God Fulfilled, and Every Man Receiveth Wages of Him Whom He Listeth to Obey

Alma 3: the morning after the battle at the Sidon (c. 87 BC). The surviving Amlicites have marked themselves with red on their foreheads in the manner of the Lamanites. Mormon pauses the narrative to explain the doctrine of the mark and the curse, tracing the original Lamanite separation back to 2 Nephi 5 and naming the prophetic principle that the self-marking of the rebel fulfills the prophecy of the separation. A second battle follows: twelve thousand five hundred and thirty-two Amlicites slain, six thousand five hundred and sixty-two Nephites. The chapter closes with the master doctrine every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey.

Alma 3 is Mormon's editorial pause. Having recorded the Amlicite rebellion and the battle at the Sidon, he stops the narrative to explain a doctrine the modern reader cannot afford to miss: what the mark on the Lamanites actually meant, how the Amlicites' self-marking fulfilled a prophecy spoken five centuries earlier, and why the curse the Book of Mormon describes is always the fruit of choice, never a condition imposed apart from choice. The chapter is therefore the cleanest interpretive key the Book of Mormon offers for reading every Lamanite passage that follows. Read carelessly, the chapter has been mistaken for a teaching about race. Read carefully, it is a teaching about rebellion and repentance, with the mark functioning as a sign of the first and removable by the second.

Hebrew Word Studies

ot / *chahal* / *sakhar* (תֹּא / חָלַח / שָׂכַר) — **sign, mark / pierced, slain / hire, wages vv. 4, 14, 27.** The chapter rests on three Hebrew nouns. *Ot* — *sign, mark* — is the noun behind the mark of Cain (*the Lord set a mark upon Cain*, Gen. 4:15), the mark on the foreheads of the faithful in Ezekiel's vision (*set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry*, Ezek. 9:4), and the blood-token on the Israelite doorposts at the Passover (*the blood shall be to you for a token*, Ex. 12:13). In the Hebrew Bible the *ot* can be protective (Cain, Passover, Ezekiel 9) or identifying. Alma 3's mark is identifying — and, crucially, self-applied. *Chahal* — *pierced, slain* — is the noun behind the casualty-count formulas of the Hebrew Bible's war narratives (Num. 19:16; Jer. 51:4). Alma 3's twelve thousand five hundred and thirty-two Amlicite slain is the Book of Mormon's equivalent of the Hebrew *chahal* count. *Sakhar* — *hire, wages* — is the noun behind Issachar's name (Gen. 30:18) and the verb behind every Hebrew-Bible payment-for-labor text. Alma 3:27's *every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey* is the cleanest pre-Pauline articulation of the doctrine Paul will later compress into *the wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6:23).

From the Chapter's Architecture

Finally, the closing verse of the chapter is the doctrinal frame for everything Alma will say from here on. Every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey. The sermons of Alma 5, 7, 12, 34, 40, 41, and 42 will all rest on this principle. The chapter that began as Mormon's pause for an editorial ends by laying down the master doctrine of the whole book that follows.