
Alma 43 — For Their Homes and Their Liberties — Moroni and the Ethic of Righteous Defense

Alma 43: c. 74 BC, the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges. With the charge to his sons complete, the record turns from the preaching of the word to the wars of the Nephites — and Mormon, himself a battle-captain, takes up the story he most understood. The Zoramites and Amalekites, Nephite dissenters now reckoned among the Lamanites, stir up a vast army under the dissenter Zerahemnah to bring the Nephites into bondage. Against them stands Captain Moroni, twenty-five years old, who has armed and armored his people and who fights for a cause Mormon is at pains to define: not for power, not for conquest, not for the love of blood, but for homes, families, freedom, and the right to worship God. The chapter introduces the Book of Mormon's sustained meditation on righteous warfare — when it is justified, how it must be waged, and how a people can carry arms without losing their souls — and it shows the prophet Alma still guiding the armies by revelation even after he has laid down the judgment seat.

Alma 43 marks a great turn in the Book of Mormon. For chapters the record has been preaching — Alma's sermons, the Zoramite mission, the charge to Corianton. Now Mormon, the editor, sets the sermons down and picks up the sword: *I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites* (v. 3). This is not a detour from the spiritual record but a deepening of it, for Mormon was a soldier his whole life, and through these war chapters he will teach what he learned in the field about righteousness under arms. The immediate occasion is an invasion. Nephite dissenters — Zoramites and Amalekites — have inflamed the Lamanites and raised a great army under a dissenter named Zerahemnah, whose aim is to subjugate the Nephites and reclaim power for himself. Against this stands a young chief captain, Moroni, whom Mormon clearly reveres and after whom he will name his own son. The chapter introduces the man, the threat, and above all the *cause* — and Mormon spends his most careful prose not on the tactics but on why the Nephites fought, drawing the line between a war of defense and a war of conquest with a precision that has guided readers ever since.

Hebrew Word Studies

deror / milchamah (דֶּרוֹר / מִלְחָמָה) — **liberty, release, the freedom proclaimed in the Jubilee / war, battle, the waging of armed conflict** vv. 9, 26, 45, 48–49 / vv. 3–4, 18, 37. Two Hebrew words frame the chapter. *Deror* is liberty — but a specific and sacred kind. It is the word of the Jubilee, the freedom proclaimed *throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof* when slaves were released and lands returned (Lev. 25:10, the verse inscribed on the American Liberty Bell). *Deror* is liberation from bondage, the undoing of servitude; it is also the word Isaiah uses for the *liberty to the captives* that the Anointed proclaims (Isa. 61:1). When the Nephites fight for their *liberty* (v. 9) and rally to the cry of freedom (v. 48), the underlying idea is *deror* — they are resisting precisely the *subjection* and *bondage* that Zerahemnah designed (vv. 7–8). The war is righteous because it defends *deror*, the God-given freedom of a people not to be enslaved. This is why Mormon insists they fight *not for monarchy nor power* (v. 45): a war for power seeks to impose bondage, a war for *deror* seeks to prevent it, and the two are moral opposites though both use the sword. The second word is *milchamah*, war — the ordinary Hebrew word for armed conflict, built (by folk-association in the tradition) near the word for bread/sustenance, a reminder that war in the ancient world was bound up with survival itself. The Hebrew Bible knows the Lord as a *man of milchamah* (Ex. 15:3) who fights for His people's deliverance, and it is exactly this conviction — that righteous defensive war can be *the duty which they owed to their God* (v. 46) — that lets Mormon narrate these battles as sacred history rather than mere slaughter. The *milchamah* is holy only when it serves *deror*; the moment it serves power, it becomes the very bondage it pretends to fight.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Ex. 15:3 (the Lord is a man of war — the holy-war background of vv. 46–48); Lev. 25:10 (proclaim liberty / deror throughout all the land — the Jubilee freedom behind v. 9); Deut. 20:1–4 (the law of war: be not afraid... for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you — vv. 46–48); Neh. 4:14 (fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses — almost verbatim with v. 9); Ps. 144:1 (who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight — the inspired captain); Prov. 21:31 (the horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord — Moroni's preparation joined to reliance on God, vv. 18–24); Isa. 61:1 (proclaim liberty / deror to the captives — v. 9); Lk. 22:36 (the disciples permitted to carry a sword — the bounded legitimacy of defense); Rom. 13:4 (the magistrate bears the sword as God's minister against evil — the just-defense principle of vv. 46–47); Eph. 6:11–17 (put on the whole armour of God... the breastplate... the shield — the moral echo of Moroni's literal armor, vv. 18–19); Alma 31:8–25 (the Zoramites and the Rameumptom — the apostasy that becomes this war, v. 4); Alma 44:1–11 (Moroni's terms to Zerahemnah — the immediate continuation, where the ethic of this chapter is tested in victory); Alma 46:11–13 (the title of liberty — Moroni's banner naming the same cause as v. 9); Alma 48:11–17 (Mormon's great portrait of Moroni — if all men had been like unto Moroni); Alma 60–61 (Moroni and Pahoran — power held righteously even in anger); 3 Ne. 3:20–21 (Gidgiddoni: the Lord forbids going up against enemies, permitting only defense in one's own lands — the first offense principle of v. 46); D&C 98:23–48 (the Lord's law of war to the latter-day Saints: bear injury patiently, and only after the third or fourth offense is defense justified — the fullest Restoration statement of the first offense ethic of v. 46); D&C 134:11 (men justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property where the law affords no protection — v. 47). ```