

Alma 46 — In Memory of Our God — Moroni and the Title of Liberty

Alma 46: c. 73 BC, the close of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, in Zarahemla. The pride that crept into the church at the end of Alma 45 now finds its man. Amalickiah — ambitious, eloquent, and willing to flatter — gathers the discontented and the lower judges who covet power, and works to overthrow the free government and make himself king. Against this rising sedition stands Captain Moroni, who does something no general before him in the record has done: he turns a war of swords into a war of covenant. He rends his coat, writes upon the torn cloth a creed of the things worth living and dying for — God, religion, freedom, peace, wives, and children — fastens it to a pole, and lifts it over the land as the title of liberty. The people come running, rending their own garments and casting them at his feet in a covenant that binds their fidelity to God with the fate of the nation. Moroni invokes the ancient remnant of Joseph and the prophecy hidden in Joseph's preserved coat; he scatters the Amalickiahites; and Amalickiah, with a small band, flees to the land of Nephi to begin the long, dark climb that the next chapter will narrate. It is the chapter in which Nephite liberty receives its banner and its oath.

Alma 45 ended on a crack — pride risen within the church, contention bred of riches, the first sign of the dwindling Alma had foreseen. Alma 46 is the chapter in which that crack becomes a fault line, and a single ambitious man tries to pry the nation open along it. His name is Amalickiah, and Mormon introduces him as the type of the dangerous Nephite — not an enemy from outside but a leader of the people who *was desirous to be a king* (v. 4) and who knew exactly how to use the discontent of the proud. The lower judges, hungry for power themselves, flock to him; he flatters them with promises of office; and the free government of the judges, barely a generation old, stands suddenly in danger of collapsing from within into a monarchy. This is the gravest internal threat the Nephites have yet faced, graver than any Lamanite army, because it strikes at the very thing the war chapters exist to defend — liberty itself.

Hebrew Word Studies

nes / zakhar (נֶס / זָכָר) — a standard, ensign, banner, signal-pole; the raised thing that gathers and rallies a people / to remember, to keep in memory, to call to mind — and its noun zikkaron, a memorial vv. 12–13, 19, 36 / vv. 8, 12, 24.

Two Hebrew words stand behind the chapter's central act. The first is *nes*, the word for a raised standard or ensign. A *nes* in the Hebrew Bible is not merely a flag but a signal lifted high to gather a scattered people to a rallying point. Moses raised the bronze serpent upon a pole — *al-nes* (Num. 21:8–9) — and all who looked, lived; Isaiah foresaw the day the Lord would set up an ensign (*nes*) for the nations and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:12); and Isaiah's lift up a standard (*nes*) for the people (Isa. 62:10) is the summons to the redeemed. When Moroni fastened his rent coat upon the end of a pole and lifted it over the land so that all might see (vv. 12, 19), he was raising a *nes* — and the resonance is deliberate. Like the serpent on the pole, the title of liberty is a thing lifted up that the people must look to and rally around to be saved; like Isaiah's ensign, it gathers a scattered, endangered people back to their covenant identity. The standard heals by gathering the faithful to the cause it names. The second word is *zakhar*, to remember, with its noun *zikkaron*, a memorial. The very first words on the banner are *In memory of* — a *zikkaron* — and the things to be remembered are God, religion, freedom, peace, family. This is the exact counterweight to the chapter's diagnosis of the sickness: *thus we see how quick the children of men do forget (the opposite of zakhar) the Lord their God* (v. 8). Amalickiah's whole power feeds on a people's forgetting — forgetting what they owe God, forgetting what their liberty is for, forgetting that they are a covenant people. Moroni's answer is a *zikkaron*, a memorial raised on a pole: *remember*. In Hebrew thought, to remember is never merely to recall a fact; it is to act on a bound obligation, the way God remembers His covenant and therefore delivers (Ex. 2:24). To make the people remember their God is to make them faithful again — and that is precisely what the raised memorial of the title of liberty accomplishes. The chapter turns on the war between *zakhar* and forgetting, with the *nes* of the rent coat as the instrument of remembrance.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Gen. 37:3, 23, 31–33 (Joseph's coat of many colors, stripped and rent by his brethren — the type Moroni invokes at vv. 23–24); Gen. 15:9–18 (Abraham passes between the divided pieces, the covenant enacted as a self-invoked curse — the form of the rent-garment oath, vv. 21–22); Ex. 2:24 (God remembered His covenant — the active force of zakhar behind the memorial, v. 12); Num. 21:8–9 (the serpent set upon a pole / al-nes, lifted up that all who look may live — the nes behind the raised title, vv. 12–13); Deut. 8:11–14 (beware that thou forget not the Lord in prosperity — the forgetting Amalickiah exploits, v. 8); Josh. 24:14–25 (Joshua calls the people to choose this day and they covenant to serve the Lord — the freely-sworn national covenant Moroni gathers, vv. 19–22); Ps. 60:4 (thou hast given a banner / nes to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth — the standard raised for the faithful); Isa. 11:11–12 (the Lord sets up an ensign / nes and gathers the remnant of His people — both the rallying standard and the preserved remnant of the chapter); Isa. 62:10 (lift up a standard / nes for the people — v. 19); 2 Ne. 3:4–16 (Joseph of Egypt's prophecy of a preserved remnant of his seed — the brass-plate background to Jacob's words at vv. 24–27); Jacob 2:25 (the Lord brought Lehi's people out that he might raise up... a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph — the remnant theology); Alma 43:45–47 (the cause of righteous defense the title of liberty puts into words, homes... liberties... wives... children... church); Alma 45:21–24 (the pride and dissension that produced Amalickiah's faction, the immediate setup); Alma 47:1–35 (Amalickiah's flight to the Lamanites bears fruit — the next chapter's account of how the fugitive becomes a king); Alma 48:10–17 (Moroni's preparation and Mormon's portrait — the man who raised this banner described in full); Alma 51:13–20 (the king-men who would not take up arms to defend the title — the covenant of ch. 46 tested in a later crisis); 3 Ne. 5:21–26 (the Lord's covenant to gather the remnant of the seed of Jacob / Joseph — the fulfillment of Jacob's preserved-coat prophecy); Ether 13:6–8 (the remnant of Joseph and the building of a New Jerusalem — the remnant promise carried forward); D&C 45:9 (the latter-day gospel set up as a standard / ensign for the people — the nes in Restoration terms). ```