

Alma 47 — Brought Down by Degrees — Amalickiah's Climb to a Stolen Throne

Alma 47: c. 72 BC, the early twentieth year of the reign of the judges, in the land of Nephi among the Lamanites. The fugitive of Alma 46 begins his climb. Amalickiah, having failed to seize a crown in Zarahemla, flees to the Lamanites and there sets about taking by treachery what he could not take by sedition. The Lamanite king commands his people to war against the Nephites, but a large portion of them, afraid, refuse and gather on a mountain under a captain named Lehonti. Made a chief captain over the obedient part of the army and sent to compel the rebels, Amalickiah instead conspires with the very man he was sent to subdue — luring Lehonti down from the heights by degrees, betraying his own men into Lehonti's hands on the condition that he be made second in command, and then poisoning Lehonti by degrees to take the whole army for himself. He marches back to the king, has the king murdered by his own servants while feigning loyalty, woos and marries the widowed queen, and is established king over all the Lamanites. It is the Book of Mormon's most detailed and chilling study of how an ambitious man without conscience climbs to power — by deceit, betrayal, and patient, incremental murder.

Alma 46 ended with Amalickiah alive and free, fled to the land of Nephi with a small band, the one piece of unfinished business hanging over Moroni's restored peace. Alma 47 is the chapter that shows what such a man does with such an escape. It is, in a sense, the dark mirror of everything the war chapters celebrate in Moroni. Where Moroni gains authority by the free covenant of a people he calls to remember God, Amalickiah gains authority by deceit, betrayal, and murder. Where Moroni *did not delight in the shedding of blood*, Amalickiah builds a throne on a careful sequence of corpses. Mormon slows the narrative down here and tells the story in unusual detail, and the detail is the point: he wants his readers to see, step by step, the exact method by which an ambitious man without conscience climbs to power, so that they will recognize the method when they see it again — in their own day, in any day.

Hebrew Word Studies

■**ormah** / **mirmah** (הַמְרַמֶּה / הַמְרָמָה) — craftiness, subtlety, cunning — the serpent's quality, capable of prudence but here turned to evil / deceit, treachery, fraud, the guile of the betrayer vv. 4, 8, 18 (the by-degrees stratagem) / vv. 13, 35 (the betrayal and the fraud). Two Hebrew words name the two faces of Amalickiah's character. The first is ■**ormah**, craftiness or subtlety. It is famously the quality of the serpent in Eden — *now the serpent was more subtle (■arum) than any beast of the field* (Gen. 3:1) — and the serpent's method there is precisely Amalickiah's method here: not a frontal assault but a patient, incremental seduction, drawing the victim down step by step with a question, then a half-truth, then the fatal offer. Tellingly, ■**ormah** is not in itself an evil word; the same root gives the *prudence* the wise are urged to have (Prov. 1:4; 8:5, where ■**ormah** is a virtue, the shrewdness to see consequences). This is the chapter's quiet warning: the very faculty that makes a person capable of wise foresight — the ability to plan, to anticipate, to act by stages — becomes, when severed from conscience, the engine of the most patient evil. Amalickiah is not stupid; he is brilliantly ■**arum**, and his brilliance is exactly what makes him deadly. The serpent's subtlety and the betrayer's strategy are the same gift turned to opposite ends. The second word is **mirmah**, deceit or treachery — the guile of the man who uses trust as a weapon. The Psalter abhors precisely this man: *the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful (mirmah) man* (Ps. 5:6); *he that worketh deceit (mirmah) shall not dwell within my house* (Ps. 101:7). And **mirmah** is the word for how Jacob took the blessing — his brother complains, *thy brother came with subtlety (mirmah)* (Gen. 27:35) — and how Laban then repaid Jacob, beguiling him with Leah (Gen. 29:25). Mormon's Amalickiah is the **mirmah** man drawn to the full: bloody and deceitful together, a murderer whose chief instrument is not the sword but the lie. He kills Lehonti with poison and the king with a bow, but the real weapon in every case is **mirmah** — the betrayal of someone who had no reason to expect it. The chapter sets the two words against the covenant of the previous chapter: where the title of liberty gathered a people by open *zikkaron*, by remembering in the light, Amalickiah gathers a kingdom by ■**ormah** and **mirmah**, by cunning in the dark. The contrast is the whole moral architecture of the Amalickiah arc — power won by covenant and remembrance against power won by subtlety and fraud.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Gen. 3:1–6 (the serpent more subtle / **■**arum than any beast, seducing by degrees — the type of Amalickiah's incremental method, vv. 10–18); Gen. 27:35 (Jacob took the blessing with subtlety / mirmah — the deceit-word behind Amalickiah's fraud); Gen. 29:25 (Laban beguiled Jacob — treachery repaid); Judg. 9:1–6, 56–57 (Abimelech murders his seventy brethren to seize the kingship, and the treachery returns on his own head — the closest Hebrew Bible parallel to Amalickiah's bloody climb and its later end at Alma 51:34); 2 Sam. 3:27 (Joab takes Abner aside in the gate to speak quietly with him, and smites him there — murder under the cover of private friendship, like the king's death at the bow, v. 22); 2 Sam. 13:28; 20:9–10 (Absalom's and Joab's murders disguised as feast and greeting — the corrupted gesture as the cover for the knife); 2 Kgs. 8:15 (Hazeal smothers Ben-hadad and reigns in his stead — the servant who murders his king to take the throne, vv. 18, 22); Ps. 5:6 (the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful / mirmah man — Mormon's verdict on Amalickiah); Ps. 55:21 (the words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart — the flatterer's method, vv. 26–27); Prov. 1:4; 8:5 (**■**ormah as the wise prudence that Amalickiah perverts into cunning); Prov. 26:24–26 (he that hateth dissembleth with his lips... when he speaketh fair, believe him not... his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation — the dissembler unmasked); Alma 46:3–10 (Amalickiah's first, failed bid for the kingship among the Nephites — the sedition that drove him here); Alma 48:1–7 (Amalickiah, now king, stirs the Lamanites to hatred and war — the use he makes of the throne he stole); Alma 51:33–34 (Teancum slays Amalickiah in his tent on the eve of the new year — the treachery returning on the traitor's own head); Hel. 1:1–12; 2:1–11 (Kishkumen and Gadianton: assassination and secret combination for power — the method of Amalickiah institutionalized into the secret oaths that destroy the nation); Ether 8:15–26 (the origin and warning of the secret combinations which are most abominable — Moroni's editorial alarm at exactly the ambition-by-murder Amalickiah embodies); 3 Ne. 6:27–30 (the latter Nephite judges and lawyers entering a secret covenant to combine against... liberty — the same **■**ormah that ends the nation); D&C 121:34–37 (when men aspire to the honors of men and exercise control by unrighteous dominion, the heavens withdraw — the spiritual law Amalickiah violates at every rung). ```