

Alma 48 — If All Men Had Been Like unto Moroni — The Portrait of a Man of God in Power

Alma 48: c. 72 BC, the early twentieth year of the reign of the judges. Amalickiah, having stolen the Lamanite throne by the treachery of the previous chapter, now turns his stolen power outward — appointing dissenter captains and inflaming the Lamanites to hatred so that he may make himself king over the Nephites as well. While the new king prepares for conquest, Moroni prepares for defense: fortifying the weakest cities, raising banks of earth and walls of stone, and above all preparing the minds of his people to be faithful to God. At the center of the chapter Mormon lays down his pen as narrator and speaks as eulogist, giving the fullest portrait of Captain Moroni anywhere in the record — a strong man who did not delight in bloodshed, a man of perfect understanding firm in the faith of Christ, of whom Mormon makes his most famous declaration: that if all men had been like unto Moroni, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever. The chapter sets the conscienceless usurper of Alma 47 against the consecrated captain of Alma 48, and asks what righteous strength looks like when it holds a sword.

Alma 47 showed us how Amalickiah climbed to the Lamanite throne — by betrayal, poison, and fraud, every rung a corpse. Alma 48 shows us what he does with the throne once he has it, and against whom. The chapter opens with the new king turning his stolen power outward: Amalickiah is not content to rule the Lamanites; he means to *reign over the whole land*, Nephites included (v. 2), and so he sets about manufacturing the hatred he needs for a war of conquest. But Mormon does not dwell long on Amalickiah here. He has used the previous chapter to anatomize the ambitious dissenter in full; now he turns, with evident relief and love, to the opposite man. The bulk of Alma 48 is given to Captain Moroni — first to what he was *doing* while Amalickiah schemed (fortifying, strengthening, preparing his people in body and soul), and then to what he *was*, in the most extended character portrait Mormon ever pauses to give of anyone. This is the chapter where the editor steps out from behind the narrative and tells us, plainly, that this is the kind of man a society's survival depends on.

Hebrew Word Studies

***tamim* / *damim* (טָמִים / דָּמִים) — whole, complete, sound, of integrity, blameless — not flawless but undivided / bloods (plural) — bloodshed, bloodguilt; the "man of bloods" is the violent man stained by killing vv. 11–13, 17–18 (Moroni's perfect understanding and integrated character) / vv. 11, 14, 23 (the bloodshed he did not delight in).** Two Hebrew words illuminate the portrait, and they pull in opposite directions — which is exactly the tension the chapter resolves in Moroni. The first is *tamim*, the word behind Mormon's *a man of a perfect understanding*. *Tamim* does not mean flawless or sinless; it means *whole, complete, sound, of integrity* — undivided, all of a piece. It is the word for an unblemished sacrificial animal (Ex. 12:5), and the word for the great men who walked rightly: Noah was *tamim* in his generations (Gen. 6:9); the Lord told Abram, *walk before me, and be thou perfect / tamim* (Gen. 17:1); the blameless man of the Psalms walks in *integrity / tom* (Ps. 26:1; 101:2). To call Moroni's understanding *tamim* is not to say he never erred but to say he was *integrated* — his strength and his gentleness, his command and his worship, his sword and his bowed head were all one undivided character, with no gap between what he believed and what he did. This is precisely why Mormon can say that if all men were *like unto Moroni* the powers of hell would be shaken (v. 17): the devil works in the *divisions* of a soul, the gap between the public face and the private hunger, and a *tamim* man gives him no seam to enter. Integrity, not invincibility, is what shakes hell. The second word is *damim*, the plural of *dam*, blood — and in its plural form it carries the specific sense of *bloodshed* and *bloodguilt*. The *ish damim*, the *man of bloods*, is the violent man stained by killing: *the Lord will abhor the bloody man / ish damim* (Ps. 5:6, the same verse that condemns Amalickiah's *mirmah*). Most pointedly, it is the reason David was forbidden to build the temple: *thou hast shed blood abundantly... thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood / damim* (1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3). David was a man after God's own heart and yet a *man of bloods*, and the blood disqualified him from the holiest work. This is the shadow over every righteous warrior, and Mormon's portrait is built to lift Moroni out from under it: Moroni sheds blood — he is a captain in a brutal war — but he *did not delight* in it (vv. 11, 14), and he grieves even for the unprepared souls of his enemies (v. 23). He is a man who must handle *damim* without becoming an *ish damim* in his heart. The whole moral achievement of the chapter is the holding of these two words together in one man: a warrior whose hands touch blood and whose soul stays *tamim*, whole and undivided before God. That is the rarest and highest thing a man of war can be, and it is what Mormon saw in the captain he named his son for.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Gen. 6:9 (Noah perfect / tamim in his generations — the integrity-word behind v. 11); Gen. 17:1 (walk before me, and be thou perfect / tamim — the wholeness God asks, embodied in Moroni); 1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3 (David forbidden to build the temple because he was a man of blood / damim — the shadow over the righteous warrior that Moroni's did not delight in bloodshed answers, v. 11); Ps. 5:6 (the Lord will abhor the bloody / damim and deceitful man — the verdict on Amalickiah, the inverse of Moroni); Ps. 26:1; 101:2 (the man who walks in integrity / tom — the tamim character of v. 11); Deut. 18:13 (thou shalt be perfect / tamim with the Lord thy God — the standard); 1 Sam. 16:7 (the Lord looketh on the heart — why Moroni's inner consecration, not his prowess, is what Mormon praises); Prov. 16:32 (he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city — the self-mastery that makes Moroni tamim in power); Matt. 5:9 (blessed are the peacemakers — the soul that joys in liberty and grieves to shed blood, vv. 11, 23); Matt. 5:48 (be ye therefore perfect / teleios — the New Testament heir of tamim); Eph. 6:11–17 (the whole armor of God — the moral reading of Moroni's literal fortifications, vv. 8–9); Alma 43:45–47 (the ethic of defense the portrait embodies — did not delight in the shedding of blood); Alma 46:11–13 (Moroni rending his coat and bowing to pray — the armored man who kneels, the same character here described); Alma 47:1–35 (Amalickiah's rise by fraud — the frame against which this portrait is set); Alma 60–61 (Moroni's angry epistle to Pahoran and Pahoran's reply — the tamim man tested by misunderstanding, his integrity proven even in error); Alma 53:10–22; 56–58 (Helaman and the stripling warriors — the no less serviceable preacher of v. 19 leading in his own right); 3 Ne. 12:9, 48 (the risen Christ blesses the peacemakers and commands perfection — the source of the character Moroni foreshadowed); Moro. 9:6 (Mormon to his own son Moroni, let us labor diligently — the namesake bearing the captain's spirit into the final darkness); D&C 121:34–46 (the rights of the priesthood inseparable from the powers of heaven, controlled only by persuasion, love, and integrity — the doctrine of consecrated power that the portrait of Moroni dramatizes). ```