
Alma 50 — The Happiest Time, and the Quarrel over a Border — Moroni's Peace and Morianton's Greed

Alma 50: c. 72–66 BC, spanning the twentieth through the twenty-fourth years of the reign of the judges. The victory of Alma 49 does not make Moroni rest; it makes him build. He spends the twentieth year raising the Nephite fortifications to a new height — ridges of earth crowned with timber works the height of a man, walls of pickets, towers with places of security — around every city in the land, and then pushes the frontier itself outward, driving the Lamanites out of the east wilderness and planting new Nephite cities (Moroni, Nephihah, Lehi) along the secured borders. Mormon pauses to draw the moral: the covenant promise to Lehi is being fulfilled before our eyes — the obedient prosper, the wicked are cut off — and he renders his famous verdict that there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi... than in the days of Moroni. But the chapter's second half shows how quickly that happiness can be threatened, not by Lamanites this time but by a quarrel between brethren over a border. The people of Morianton claim part of the land of Lehi; their leader Morianton, a man of much passion, beats one of his own maidservants, who flees to Moroni's camp and betrays his plan to seize the land northward; Teancum is sent, slays Morianton, and brings his people back to covenant peace. The chapter closes with the death of the upright chief judge Nephihah and the succession of his son Pahoran. It sets the peace that consecrated strength makes against the contention that ungoverned passion breeds, and shows a whole nation's destiny turning on the flight of one beaten servant girl.

Alma 49 proved that Moroni's preparations worked; Alma 50 shows what a man like Moroni does with a victory. He does not celebrate and relax. He builds higher. The chapter opens with the line that sets its whole temper — *Moroni did not stop making preparations for war* (v. 1) — and Mormon spends the first movement describing fortifications that have grown from the dug ridges of the last chapter into something formidable: banks of earth crowned with timber works the height of a man, topped with a frame of pickets, overlooked by towers with sheltered platforms from which defenders could cast stones (vv. 2–6). And then Moroni does something even a careful defender might not think to do: he goes on the offensive against the *wilderness* itself, driving the Lamanites out of the east wilderness, securing the frontier from sea to sea, and planting new cities along the line he has cleared. The man who fortified the weak cities now extends the very borders of the land and fills them with people. Preparation, in Moroni, is not anxiety; it is a kind of creative, expansive confidence.

Hebrew Word Studies

shalom / *gevul* (שָׁלוֹם / גְּבוּל) — **peace, wholeness, completeness, welfare, the soundness of a thing that is unbroken / border, boundary, landmark, territory — the line that marks what is one's own vv. 23, 36 (the happiest time, the union, covenanting to keep the peace) / vv. 25–26, 34 (the border dispute, the lands of Lehi and Morianton, the narrow pass).** The two halves of Alma 50 turn on two Hebrew words that the chapter sets against each other. The first is *shalom*, the great Hebrew word for *peace* — but a word far richer than the mere absence of fighting. *Shalom* means *wholeness, completeness, soundness*; a thing is *shalom* when it is unbroken, when every part is in its right relation to every other and to God. It is the welfare you wish a person (*Is it well / shalom with thee?* — 2 Kgs. 4:26), the prosperity of the city you are told to seek (Jer. 29:7), the peace that is the gift of the messianic *Prince of Peace / Sar-Shalom* (Isa. 9:6). This is exactly the peace Mormon means when he calls the days of Moroni the *happiest time* (v. 23): not a quiet without war — there was no quiet without war — but a *wholeness*, a people sound and unbroken in their covenant with God even in the midst of battle. *Shalom* is the right name for a happiness that can coexist with conflict, because it describes an inner and communal integrity rather than outward ease. And it is the word behind the chapter's resolution: the people of Morianton are restored *upon their covenanting to keep the peace*, and *a union took place* (v. 36) — the broken thing made whole again, *shalom* restored not by victory but by covenant. The second word is *gevul*, the *border* or *boundary* — the line that says *this is mine and that is yours*. The whole second half of the chapter is a *gevul* dispute: the people of Morianton *claim a part of the land of Lehi* (v. 26), coveting across the line. And here the Hebrew Bible's sharpest law about borders bears directly: *Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark / gevul, which they of old time have set* (Deut. 19:14), repeated as a curse — *Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark* (Deut. 27:17) — and as proverb: *Remove not the ancient landmark / gevul... for their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause* (Prov. 22:28; 23:10–11). To covet across a *gevul* is not a small thing in the law of Israel; it is to take what God has apportioned to another, and the proverb warns that God himself becomes the *redeemer* who pleads the wronged party's cause. That is precisely the shape of Alma 50: the people of Lehi, wronged across the *gevul*, flee to Moroni and *appeal unto him for assistance, for they were not in the wrong* (v. 27) — and Moroni, with Teancum as his hand, becomes the redeemer who pleads the cause of those whose landmark was assailed. The chapter holds the two words in tension and shows which produces which: where the *gevul* is honored, *shalom* reigns and the people are whole; where a man of *much passion* covets across the border, *shalom* shatters into contention. The happiest time is the time when every man keeps within his own *gevul* — and the danger to it is always the one who reaches across.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Deut. 19:14 (thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark / *gevul* — the law Morianton's people break in coveting the land of Lehi, vv. 25–26); Deut. 27:17 (cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark — the curse on the border-grab); Prov. 22:28; 23:10–11 (remove not the ancient landmark... their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause — God as the redeemer of the wronged, the role Moroni fills in v. 27); 2 Ne. 1:20 / Alma 9:13 (the foundational covenant Mormon quotes — inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land, v. 20); Isa. 9:6–7 (the Prince of Peace / Sar-Shalom of whose increase there shall be no end — the source of the *shalom* of v. 23); Jer. 29:7 (seek the peace / *shalom* of the city... for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace — the welfare Moroni's works secure); Lev. 26:3–6 (if ye walk in my statutes... I will give peace in the land — the covenant logic of the prospering, vv. 19–22); Ps. 1:1–3 (the man whose delight is in the law shall prosper — the prosperity-promise in lyric form); Prov. 16:32 (he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city — the self-government Morianton lacks, v. 30); Prov. 15:18 (a wrathful man stirreth up strife — the man of much passion); 1 Cor. 14:33 (God is not the author of confusion, but of peace — the order Moroni's government embodies); Alma 37:6–7 (by small and simple things are great things brought to pass — the theology of the maidservant's deliverance, v. 31); Alma 48:7–10 (the preparation and fortification doctrine continued and raised here, vv. 1–6); Alma 49:28 (the people thanking God for deliverance — the *shalom* this chapter names); Alma 51:1–7 (the king-men contention that breaks the peace of the very next year — internal threat again, the pattern of vv. 25–32 enlarged); Alma 60–61 (Moroni and Pahoran — the son introduced in v. 40 proven upright under far greater pressure); 4 Ne. 1:2–3, 15–18 (the later, fuller *shalom* of a wholly converted people, and its eventual loss to contention — the long arc of which Alma 50 is an early, fragile foretaste). ``