
Alma 51 — The King-Men and the Javelin — Liberty Assailed from Within and the Death of the Usurper

Alma 51: c. 67–66 BC, the twenty-fifth year of the reign of the judges. Peace has barely been restored when the gravest internal crisis of the war arc erupts — not on the border but in the heart of the government. A faction desires that the law be altered toward monarchy; the chief judge Pahoran refuses to alter it; and the nation divides into king-men (those of high birth who would overthrow the free government and set a king over the land) and freemen (those covenanted to maintain their rights and their religion under a free government). The matter is settled the way Mosiah established that such matters should be settled: by the voice of the people, which comes down for the freemen and silences the king-men. But the timing could not be worse. At that very moment Amalickiah — who has again stirred the Lamanites and sworn to drink Moroni's blood — comes down himself at the head of a great army; and the king-men, still bitter, refuse to take up arms to defend their country. Moroni, exceedingly wroth, petitions the governor with the voice of the people for power to compel the dissenters; it is granted; four thousand who lift their weapons against the standard of liberty are hewn down, their leaders imprisoned, and the rest brought to hoist the title of liberty and fight. But the internal division has cost the nation dearly: while Moroni puts down the king-men, Amalickiah seizes a string of strongly fortified east-coast cities — Moroni, Nephihah, Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek. Driving for Bountiful and the land northward, Amalickiah is met and repulsed by Teancum; and that night Teancum and his servant steal into the king's tent and Teancum drives a javelin into Amalickiah's heart. The usurper who climbed to a throne over a ladder of corpses dies in his sleep on the last night of the year, the treachery of Alma 47 returned upon his own head. The chapter is the climax of the Amalickiah arc — where the internal threat (the king-men who would dismantle liberty from within) and the external threat (the would-be king invading from without) converge, and where the man who never won an honest contest meets the javelin of a man he never bought.

This is the chapter the whole Amalickiah arc has been building toward, and Mormon constructs it as a convergence. Two dangers that have run in parallel since Alma 46 finally meet here. The first is the external danger — Amalickiah, the dissenter who stole the Lamanite throne by treachery and swore to drink Moroni's blood, now coming down himself at the head of a great army. The second is the internal danger — the ambition for kingship that Amalickiah himself first embodied back in Alma 46, now resurfacing inside Nephite society as the *king-men*, a faction of the high-born who want to dismantle the free government and set a king over the land. Alma 51 brings the two together with terrible timing: the constitutional crisis erupts at the exact moment the invasion arrives, and the one cripples the defense against the other. The chapter is Mormon's most pointed lesson on a theme he returns to again and again — that a nation is most vulnerable to its enemies precisely when it is divided against itself, and that the ambition for unrighteous power is one disease whether it wears a Lamanite crown or a Nephite pedigree.

Hebrew Word Studies

melek / deror (מֶלֶךְ / דֶּרֹר) — **king, sovereign — the one who rules over others / liberty, release, freedom — the proclaimed emancipation of the Jubilee, the unbinding of those held vv. 5, 8 (the king-men, those of high birth who sought to be kings) / vv. 6, 17, 20 (the freemen, the cause and standard of liberty).** The division of Alma 51 is the division of two Hebrew words that the Old Testament itself sets in tension. The first is *melek, king* — and the Book of Mormon's anxiety about the *melek* is the anxiety of 1 Samuel 8, the chapter that hovers over this whole episode. When Israel demanded a *melek* like the nations, the Lord told Samuel, *they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them* (1 Sam. 8:7), and Samuel warned them exactly what a *melek* would do: *he will take your sons... and your daughters... and your fields... and ye shall be his servants* (1 Sam. 8:11–17). The *melek* the king-men crave is the very thing Samuel warned against and the very thing King Mosiah dismantled when he ended the Nephite monarchy (Mosiah 29) — precisely because, as Mosiah taught, an unrighteous *melek* doth pervert the ways of all righteousness and causeth much iniquity (Mosiah 29:23). The king-men are *those of high birth who sought to be kings* (v. 8): the desire for a *melek* is, as Samuel saw, finally the desire of certain men to *be* the *melek* and to make the rest *his servants*. Against the *melek* stands the second word: *deror, liberty* — the great word of release. *Deror* is the word of the Jubilee: *ye shall... proclaim liberty (deror) throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof* (Lev. 25:10) — the inscription on the Liberty Bell, the word for the unbinding of slaves and the restoration of every man to his own inheritance. It is the *deror* the Servant is anointed to proclaim — *to proclaim liberty (deror) to the captives* (Isa. 61:1, the text the Lord will read of himself in Luke 4). *Deror* is not merely the absence of a king; it is the positive, covenantal freedom of a people each restored to his own and none made another's servant — exactly what the freemen *covenanted to maintain* (v. 6). The whole chapter is the contest of *melek* against *deror*: the high-born who would bind the nation under a *melek* against the covenanted who would keep it in *deror*. And Mormon's resolution is the deepest possible answer to 1 Samuel 8: where Israel's *voice* once demanded a *melek* and got the bondage Samuel foretold, the Nephites' *voice of the people* rejects the *melek* and keeps the *deror* — the same instrument, the voice of a people, choosing this time the liberty that the earlier people threw away. The Nephite republic is, in a sense, Israel's second chance at 1 Samuel 8, and in Alma 51 it chooses rightly.

qol (ha-■am) (קוֹל (הָעָם)) — **voice, sound — and idiomatically the expressed will or verdict of a body; qol ha-■am, the voice of the people vv. 7, 15, 16 (the matter settled by the voice of the people; Moroni's petition sent with the voice of the people; the grant made according to the voice of the people).** Three times in this chapter the decisive thing is *the voice of the people*, and the Hebrew *qol* opens up just how weighty that phrase is. *Qol* is *voice* or *sound* — but in Hebrew a *qol* is never merely a noise; it is an expressed will that demands a response. It is the *qol* of God walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8), the *qol* of Abel's blood crying from the ground (Gen. 4:10), the *qol* from Sinai the people could not bear (Ex. 20:18–19). To *hearken to the qol* of someone (*shama■ b'qol*) is the standard Hebrew idiom for *obeying* — and here is the pointed thing: in 1 Samuel 8, the Lord tells Samuel three times to *hearken unto the voice (qol) of the people* in their demand for a king (1 Sam. 8:7, 9, 22). The very phrase that governs Alma 51 — the *voice of the people* — is the phrase of Israel's tragic demand. There, the *qol ha-■am* asked for a *melek* and was granted its ruin. Here, the *qol ha-■am* rejects the *melek* and preserves its freedom. Mormon's use of the phrase is therefore not accidental; it is a deliberate redemption of a loaded Old Testament term. King Mosiah had built the whole Nephite constitution on the *qol ha-■am*, teaching that *it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right* (Mosiah 29:26) — a startling inversion of the 1 Samuel 8 verdict, where the people's voice desired exactly what was wrong. Alma 51 is the test of Mosiah's confidence, and the *qol ha-■am* passes: faced with the choice between a king and freedom, the people's voice comes down *in favor of the freemen* (v. 7). And Mormon shows the *qol* doing double duty — it is not only how the people decide (v. 7), it is how lawful force is authorized (vv. 15–16): Moroni will not compel the dissenters except *according to the voice of the people*. The *qol ha-■am* is thus both the people's shield against the would-be king and the lawful warrant for the nation's defense. It is the sound of a free people governing itself — the *qol* that, rightly exercised, becomes the earthly echo of the *qol* of God, *not common* to desire what is wrong because a covenant people's collective conscience tends, under God, toward what is right.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references 1 Sam. 8:4–22 (Israel demands a king / *melek* and the Lord bids Samuel hearken unto the voice / *qol* of the people — the loaded Old Testament background that Alma 51 deliberately redeems, vv. 5–8); Lev. 25:10 (proclaim liberty / *deror* throughout all the land — the Jubilee freedom the freemen covenant to keep, v. 6); Isa. 61:1 (to proclaim liberty / *deror* to the captives — the Servant's *deror*, the deepest form of the freemen's cause); Deut. 17:14–20 (the law of the king — even a permitted *melek* hedged about so he lift not up his heart above his brethren — the exact danger the king-men of high birth pose, v. 8); Judg. 8:22–23 (Gideon refuses the crown: I will not rule over you... the Lord shall rule over you — the freeman's instinct against the *melek*); Judg. 9:1–6, 56–57 (Abimelech seizes kingship by murdering his brethren and the treachery returns on his head — the type of Amalickiah's bloody climb and javelin-end); Mosiah 29:13–27 (King Mosiah ends the monarchy and establishes the voice of the people, teaching it is not common that the voice of the people desireth... that which is wrong — the constitution Alma 51 tests and vindicates); Alma 2:1–7 (the voice of the people rejects Amlici's bid for kingship — the precedent for v. 7); Alma 46:3–13 (Amalickiah's first bid for a Nephite crown and the title of liberty raised against it — the standard the king-men are compelled to hoist, v. 20); Alma 47:1–35 (Amalickiah's treachery by night and stealth — the method returned upon him in vv. 33–34); Alma 49:27 (Amalickiah's rash oath to drink the blood of Moroni — flagged rash in 51:10 and left forever unfulfilled at his death); Alma 60:16 (Moroni later names internal contentions and dissensions the cause that has been the means of their suffering — the doctrine of v. 16 stated outright); Hel. 1:1–9 (the contention over the judgment-seat and Kishkumen's assassination — the king-men's spirit institutionalized into the secret combinations); 3 Ne. 6:30 (the judges and lawyers covenant to destroy the governor and set up a king — the king-men returned, and this time fatal to the republic); D&C 98:5–10 (the law and constitution that supports... freedom upheld of God, and when the wicked rule the people mourn — the modern doctrine of the freemen's cause); Matt. 22:21 (render unto Caesar and unto God — the ordered submission to lawful authority that Moroni models in vv. 15–16). ```