

Alma 59 — The Doubt of Good Men — Nephiah Falls and Moroni's Anger Is Kindled

Alma 59: the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges. Moroni reads Helaman's epistle (Alma 56–58) and rejoices at the recovery of the lost cities in the west, sending word to Pahoran to reinforce Helaman so the won ground can be held with ease. Then he turns back to his own front to plan the recovery of the remaining cities the Lamanites still hold. But while he prepares, Ammoron's swollen army — fed by the refugees driven out of Manti — falls upon the city of Nephiahah with great slaughter, and the people who cannot flee join Moroni's camp. Moroni had assumed Nephiahah would hold, reasoning that a held city is far easier to keep than to retake; on that assumption he had committed no extra force to it, and the assumption proved wrong. When he sees that Nephiahah is lost he is 'exceedingly sorrowful, and began to doubt' — and his chief captains doubt with him, marveling that wickedness should let the Lamanites prevail. Out of that sorrow and doubt comes anger: 'Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country.' The chapter is the short, dark hinge that turns the triumphant stripling-warrior epistle into the governmental crisis of Alma 60–62 — and the anger that ends it is the anger that writes the furious letter of the next chapter, an anger right in its cause and, as Pahoran will reveal, aimed at the wrong men.

After three chapters of Helaman's epistle — the decoy at Antiparah, the desperate night battle, the kept sons, the bloodless taking of Manti — Alma 59 is a hard turn. It is short, only thirteen verses, and it is the chapter where the war record stops winning. Moroni reads Helaman's letter and rejoices; the western cities are back in Nephite hands. And then, almost in the same breath, the city of Nephiahah falls, and Moroni — the man whose name has stood for unbendable confidence through twenty chapters — is *exceedingly sorrowful, and began to doubt*. That phrase is worth stopping on before we go any further. We are so used to Moroni as the rock that it is easy to skim past the moment the rock cracks. But Mormon does not let us. He tells us plainly: Moroni doubted. His captains doubted. The best men in the book hit the wall every honest believer eventually hits — the wall where you have done everything right and it is still going wrong, and you cannot understand why God is letting it.

Hebrew Word Studies

■**arah aph** (אֵפֶה אֶפֶה) — "the nose/anger burned" — ■**arah**, to grow hot, kindle, burn; **aph**, the nose or nostril, and by extension anger (from the flaring or heavy breathing of a furious person). The standard Hebrew idiom for anger is literally "his nose burned hot." To say Moroni's anger was kindled is to use the exact biblical image v. 13 (Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference). When the text says Moroni was *angry*, it is reaching for the most physical anger-word the Hebrew Bible has: ■**arah aph**, "the nose burned." The ancient picture of anger is heat in the face, the flush and flare of a man whose breath has gone hot and short — anger as a fire that *kindles*. And the striking thing about this idiom in scripture is that it is used both ways: it is overwhelmingly God's anger that *burns* against sin (Ex. 32:10, *let my wrath wax hot*), but it is also the anger of righteous men provoked by real wrong — Moses' anger burning when he sees the golden calf (Ex. 32:19), the very man whose anger was, in that case, *justified by the offense and yet still had to be governed*. That double edge is exactly Moroni's situation. His anger is the ■**arah aph** of a leader watching his people die — not petty, not selfish, a genuinely kindled fire over a genuine evil. The cause is righteous. But fire, once kindled, does not check whether its target deserves it; it burns whatever is in front of it. And what is in front of Moroni is his *assumption* about the government, not the truth about it. The Hebrew wisdom tradition knew this danger precisely: *he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city* (Prov. 16:32) — a line that lands with some irony on a man who is, at this very moment, both taking cities and failing to rule his anger's aim. And *be ye angry, and sin not* (Ps. 4:4, quoted in Eph. 4:26) names the narrow path Moroni is walking: the anger itself is not the sin; the danger is what the kindled anger *does* before it knows the facts. Moroni's **aph** burns hot and true over the death of his men — and then, in the next chapter, pours its heat on the one man in Zarahemla who least deserved it. The fire was real and right. Its aim was guesswork. That gap is the whole tragedy and the whole lesson: a kindled anger, however righteous in its source, must still wait on the truth before it strikes — and Moroni, for once, did not wait.

pos■**a**■ *al shte ha-seippim* (וְאֵל שְׁתֵּי הַסֵּיפִים) — "limping between two opinions" — pos■**a**■, to limp, hobble, hesitate, waver (the same root as the name "Passover," to pass/skip over); *seippim*, divided branches, forks, two opinions. The phrase pictures doubt not as disbelief but as a hobbling back and forth between two convictions, unable to come down on either v. 11 (Moroni... began to doubt); v. 12 (they doubted and marveled also). When the text says

Moroni *began to doubt* and his captains *doubted and marveled*, it is naming something the Hebrew Bible understood with unusual precision — and the precision matters, because it keeps us from misreading what happened to these men. The Hebrew imagination has no single word that means "to stop believing." Its picture of doubt is bodily: a man *limping between two opinions*. Elijah confronts Israel on Carmel with exactly this image — *how long halt ye between two opinions?* (1 Kgs. 18:21), where "halt" is *posad*, to limp, to hobble: the people are not unbelievers, they are *waverers*, hopping back and forth between the Lord and Baal, unable to plant both feet on either. That is doubt in the scriptural sense — not the denial of God but the *divided* heart, the soul caught between two convictions and limping. And it is precisely Moroni's condition in verse 11. He has not stopped believing in God or in the cause. He is caught between two readings of his catastrophe: *God is with us* and *God has given us up* — and for one terrible chapter he limps between them, *began to doubt... whether they should not fall into the hands of their brethren*. The same divided heart afflicts the captains, who *doubted and marveled* — the marveling (Hebrew *tamah*, to be astonished, stunned) is the bewilderment of men who cannot reconcile their faith with what they are seeing. The New Testament keeps the same diagnosis. James calls the doubter *dipsychos*, "double-souled," *a double minded man... unstable in all his ways* (James 1:8), and says he is *like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed* (James 1:6) — the very picture of *posad*, a soul with no firm footing, swaying between two stances. And when Peter sinks on the water, Jesus asks, *wherefore didst thou doubt?* — *why didst thou waver?* (Matt. 14:31) — naming the same hobble between trust and fear. Here is why the Hebrew picture is such a mercy to the doubter: if doubt were unbelief, the doubting captains would be apostates. But doubt is *limping* — and a man who limps is still walking, still on the road, still headed somewhere. Moroni and his captains *doubted and stayed at their posts*. They limped between two opinions and kept marching. That is the whole difference between the doubt that destroys and the doubt that is simply faith under unbearable pressure: the first sits down on the road; the second limps forward. Elijah's question — *how long halt ye?* — is an invitation to stop limping and plant both feet on the Lord, and three chapters of war later that is exactly what Moroni does. But Mormon lets us see the limp first, because most of us know that gait from the inside, and it is a great comfort to find it in the strongest man in the book.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references 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 wisdom standing just behind a city-taking commander who does not rule his anger's aim*, v. 13); Prov. 18:13 (*he that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him — the hasty judgment Moroni makes before hearing Pahoran*); Prov. 25:8 (*go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame — Moroni's coming shame at Pahoran's reply*); Ex. 32:19 (*Moses' anger waxed hot at a real evil — righteous arah aph, the same kindled anger, justified in cause yet needing governance*); Ps. 4:4; Eph. 4:26 (*be ye angry, and sin not — the narrow path of anger that is right in source but must not strike blindly*, v. 13); James 1:19–20 (*slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God — the New Testament naming of Moroni's exact danger*); Alma 60:1–7 (*the epistle this anger writes — Moroni's condemnation of Pahoran, the fruit of v. 13*); Alma 61:9 (*Pahoran's reply: in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry — the revelation that Moroni's anger was aimed wrong*); Alma 48:11–17 (*the portrait of Moroni as a man who did not delight in bloodshed — the standard against which his misaimed anger here is measured, and survives*); Alma 58:36 (*Helaman's earlier fear of some faction in the government — the suspicion Moroni now feels as anger, both of them right that something is wrong and unable to see what*); Hel. 1:1–9 (*the political fracture that the king-man crisis foreshadows — division from within as the deeper Nephite danger*). ``