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— DID CAPTAIN MORONI LACK THE TYPICAL RELIGIOUS VIRTUES? —

Duane Boyce

Abstract: *In his well-known volume about the Book of Mormon, Grant Hardy focuses primarily on the book's main narrators. However, he also makes a number of observations about other figures in the book that are of particular interest, including some about Captain Moroni. In addition to those I address elsewhere, these observations include the claim that Moroni lacked the typical religious virtues — which Hardy identifies as “humility, self-sacrifice, kindness, and relying upon the Lord.” They also include the assertion that Helaman, in his manifest reliance upon God, serves as a counterexample to Moroni's military leadership. A close look at the text, however, indicates that both these claims are mistaken.*

Grant Hardy's influential volume, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*,¹ focuses on the text's main narrators. Other figures in the book naturally receive attention along the way, however. One of these is Captain Moroni. Among Hardy's remarks regarding Captain Moroni are these seven: (1) Moroni's divine communication (reported in Alma 60:33) was an “off-the-mark revelation”;² (2) Moroni “slaughters” his political opponents;³ (3) he is not portrayed in the text as “a particularly religious man”;⁴ (4) he was not comparable to the sons of Mosiah in spiritual matters

1. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2. Hardy refers to this revelation at various points and calls it — and/or Moroni's report of it — “mistaken” and, as mentioned, an “off-the-mark revelation.” Indeed, Hardy reports that the revelation was a “claim” made by Moroni. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176, 177, and 309n32.

3. *Ibid.*, 176.

4. *Ibid.*, 174.

— despite Mormon’s claim to the contrary;⁵ (5) he can be described as being “hot-blooded” and as having an “aggressive posture,” a “quick temper,” a “blunt manner,” and “hasty suspicions;”⁶ (6) he did not possess the “typical religious virtues;”⁷ and (7) he serves as a contrast to Helaman, who, unlike Moroni, put his trust in God more than in his own expertise.⁸

I have addressed the first five of these claims elsewhere in two separate papers.⁹ In this article I will consider the final two assertions, namely, that Captain Moroni lacked “the typical religious virtues” — by which Hardy specifically means “humility, self-sacrifice, kindness, and relying upon the Lord”¹⁰ — and the claim that Helaman serves as a counterexample to Moroni.¹¹

Now, the idea that Moroni lacked the usual religious virtues might well be a common view, since what stands out in the record are his wartime leadership and his immersion in circumstances of violence. When we think of Moroni, we tend to think of his military engagements rather than his religious virtues. Surprisingly, however, when we read closely — and when we think carefully about these religious virtues themselves — we find that the text provides far more information about Moroni’s character than we might suppose. To examine Hardy’s conclusions about Moroni’s character, I will consider the several virtues in sequence. All this will be relevant to the subsequent major topic — i.e., the comparison of Captain Moroni to Helaman.

“Self-Sacrifice”

Consider, first, the matter of self-sacrifice. Hardy does not provide any evidence for his remark that Moroni lacks this virtue, but the claim seems implausible on its face. If self-sacrifice includes a willingness to sacrifice one’s own interests in the service of a larger cause, then we have no problem identifying that trait in Moroni’s life of service. It is clear in the record that his efforts to defend the Nephites from destruction

5. Ibid., 175.

6. Ibid., 31 (regarding being “hot-blooded”) and 177.

7. Ibid., 177.

8. Ibid., 177–78.

9. See Duane Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (2019), 155–59 regarding claim 1 and Boyce, “Beloved by All the People: A Fresh Look at Captain Moroni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021), 179–201, regarding claims 2–5.

10. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 177.

11. Ibid., 177–78.

over nearly one-and-a-half decades¹² came at no small cost to himself. We see him not only risk his life in waging defense against repeated aggressive attacks, but we see him do so against an enemy that appears to have outnumbered the Nephites nearly four to one¹³ — increasing the personal danger and effort such defense entailed.

In addition to leading under these already overwhelming circumstances, we also see Moroni dealing with Nephites who required reminding of the commandments¹⁴ as well as with influential traitors within Nephite ranks who only added to the continual threats from without (see, e.g., Alma 51:1–22, 53:8–9, 60, 61). We are also told that Moroni “did labor exceedingly” for the welfare of the Nephites and that he swore with an oath to defend the Nephites “even to the loss of his blood” (Alma 48:12–13) — which we know he suffered in battle (e.g., Alma 52:35). Moreover, Moroni personally reports experiencing “exceedingly great sufferings” with his men, including “hunger, thirst, fatigue, and all manner

12. It is in the beginning of the eighteenth year of the judges that the long conflict in the Book of Alma begins and that Captain Moroni has charge over all the Nephite armies (Alma 35:13, 43:4, 16–17). The long series of conflicts finally ceases at the end of the thirty-first year of the judges (Alma 62:39), making fourteen years in all.

13. We are told that the Nephite population was less than half the size of the Lamanite population in about 120 BC (Mosiah 25:2–3). Roughly thirty years later, the text begins reporting major dissensions from the Nephites to the Lamanites (Alma 2), and by the time of Captain Moroni (more than ten years after that), the text tells us that dissenters who had joined the Lamanites were nearly as numerous as the entire remaining Nephite population (Alma 43:13–14). By the time the war begins in Alma 43, therefore, the Nephite population — which, apparently, had long been less than half the size of the Lamanites — had been reduced by nearly half again. Under these extraordinary circumstances we first meet Moroni, and he takes command of the Nephite armies. Although it is not possible to be certain of this four-to-one ratio — since we do not know all of the population fluctuations that might have occurred during the stretch from 120 BC to Moroni’s time (about 74 BC) — it is nevertheless clear that the Nephites were vastly outnumbered, whatever the exact ratio might have been. (I am indebted to Royal Skousen for pointing out to me in personal correspondence the textual correction — changing “descendants” to read “dissenters” in verse 14 — that brings this passage into conformity with the earliest texts. See also Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009], 428–29.)

14. The Nephites’ inconsistency in keeping the commandments is a virtual truism of the Book of Mormon record. The need for reminding is prefigured by the Lord in an early revelation to Nephi₁ (1 Nephi 2:19–24), and evidence of the need exists throughout. See, for example (just from the Book of Alma): Alma 4:19, 45:20–24, 46:1–10, 48:7, and 48:19–20.

of afflictions of every kind” (Alma 60:3). For close to fifteen years, the text shows Moroni’s life to be a continuous series of sacrifices.¹⁵

“Reliance on the Lord”

Although we tend to think of Moroni primarily in terms of his wartime engagements, his reliance on the Lord is also evident in the text. We are told, for instance, that at the time he created the title of liberty, Moroni “bowed himself to the earth,” “prayed mightily unto his God,” and “poured out his soul to God” (Alma 46:13, 16, 17). We see Moroni not only pray, but we see him pray “mightily.”

Moreover, as he speaks to the people at this time, Moroni tells them explicitly that God will not allow them to be destroyed if they do not fall into transgression (Alma 46:18), and he specifically invites the people to rally around the symbolism of the title of liberty “in the strength of the Lord” (Alma 46:20). In the same discourse, he invites the people to enter a covenant so “the Lord God may bless them” and similarly ties the prospects of success to the Nephites’ remembering to “keep the commandments of God” and to their standing “fast in the faith of Christ” (Alma 46:20, 23, 27).

Later, when Amalickiah was positioned as the head of the Lamanites and was preparing to assault the Nephites, Moroni himself was “preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God”

15. It might be thought that Moroni could have actually enjoyed war or that he might have held onto his post as the preeminent general of the Nephite armies even though it would have been more fitting to renounce the post at some point. In either case, according to this view Moroni wouldn’t really have been displaying self-sacrifice in his wartime efforts despite how it might appear on the surface. Hardy doesn’t propose these possibilities (indeed, he doesn’t propose any reason for denying Moroni’s self-sacrifice), but they are at least explanations one might try to float to justify the claim. Unfortunately, there is no suggestion in the record that either of these was true. If Moroni had actually enjoyed war, for example, then, as we will see in upcoming sections (“Moroni’s Generosity of Spirit” and “Moroni’s Restriction to Defensive War”), it is hard to imagine (1) why he would spare so many enemy lives that he could have taken, (2) why he never sought to conquer a single Lamanite city, much less any of its territory in general — indeed, why he never even *left* Nephite territory, and (3) why Mormon goes out of his way to describe Moroni as someone who “did not delight in bloodshed” but who merely sought “liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery” (Alma 48:11). And as for renouncing his position, this would have been an act of self-sacrifice only in certain circumstances — for instance, if someone else were legally and morally entitled to the position instead. But nothing in the record suggests this. Captain Moroni was “appointed” to be general of all the Nephite armies (Alma 43:16), and the record simply depicts him as seeing his appointment through to the end.

(Alma 48:7). As general of the armies, he was busily creating defensive fortifications to protect the Nephites from attack, but the first defensive initiative mentioned in the text is his effort to fortify the Nephites' faithfulness to God. In these same circumstances, Mormon tells us Moroni's faith specifically was that *the Lord* would deliver the Nephites from destruction if they were "faithful in keeping the commandments of God" (Alma 48:15–16). In each of these cases, Moroni explicitly acknowledges the Lord and expresses an earnest reliance on him.

Earlier, when Moroni exulted in the Nephites' success in their defense against Zerahemnah, he also attributed the victory to "our faith in Christ" and reported that "the Lord is with us" (Alma 44:3). He told Zerahemnah that the Nephites' faith in Christ was "the true faith" and that God would continue to support and preserve the Nephites as long as they were "faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion" (Alma 44:4). He further reported that "we owe all our happiness" to "the sacred word of God" (Alma 44:5).

Much later in the war, when Moroni left his army to attend to an insurrection in the capital, he left "the strength and the blessings of God" upon the soldiers who remained (Alma 60:25).

All these features of the text show Captain Moroni to be a man who relied explicitly and heavily on the Lord and who attributed the Nephites' success in defending themselves specifically *to* him.¹⁶

"Kindness"

The idea that Captain Moroni lacked "kindness" is a particularly important claim, since it requires us to think more deeply about this virtue than we otherwise might. The assertion invites several observations, all of which are important in reaching a cogent view of this matter.

The first thing we notice in looking at the text is that Moroni was kind to the *Nephites* — a citizenry under assault and fighting for their lives. In reflecting on kindness, we think of acts of support and help and solicitousness toward others. Certainly, Moroni's valiant service over the years in waging defense demonstrates that he acted in this way toward the Nephites.

The claim that Moroni "lacks kindness" may refer to his criticism of Pahoran or to his treatment of the Lamanites as well as to his treatment of the Lamanites' confederates in the Nephite population.¹⁷ Regarding

16. This becomes more obvious when we appreciate just how spiritually earnest Moroni was in general. I cover this feature of his character in "Beloved by All the People," 184–89.

17. Confederates include Amalickiah (beginning in Alma 46), the king-men (Alma 51), and the treasonous Nephite governors (Alma 60, 61).

Pahoran and the governors of the Nephites who were putting the nation at risk, we see that Moroni's words and threatened actions were justified, as shown elsewhere.¹⁸ Once Pahoran's faithfulness to the Nephite nation was established, Moroni worked to aid Pahoran. Strong words and swift action are needed in such times of emergency, and no genuine charge of unkindness can be levied against Captain Moroni in this episode.

As for defending the Nephites against their enemies, God had commanded Moroni to do this, and his duty to his people was to defend them. Such actions, though necessarily military in nature, cannot be painted as indicators of a lack of kindness or compassion in Moroni's heart. Indeed, as we will see in upcoming sections, Moroni consistently sought to minimize bloodshed, fully recognizing the humanity of the soldiers opposing him.

It must be remembered that the Lord gives us many examples of using strong words or taking strong measures against opponents, such as publicly chastising the Pharisees (Matthew 23:13–33), casting out the moneychangers and others in the temple (John 2:14–17; see also Matthew 21:12–16; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46), the destruction of the wicked at the time of Noah (Genesis 7:13; Moses 7:34), his slaying of Pharaoh and “the host of the Egyptians” as they pursued the children of Israel at the Red Sea (Exodus 14), his command that the Nephites take up the sword against the Lamanites to defend themselves (Alma 43:46–47, 48:14–16, 60:28), his destruction of numerous Nephite cities and their inhabitants in the aftermath of his crucifixion (3 Nephi 9:1–12), and his assignment of the wicked to suffering and anguish in the spirit world, prior to their resurrection.¹⁹

None of these episodes tempt us to conclude that the Lord lacks “kindness.” Indeed, since all of them concern the Savior's own actions — and since “everlasting kindness” is explicitly identified as one of his attributes²⁰ — the moral we should draw is that the way we normally

18. See Boyce, “Beloved by All the People,” 198–99 and Boyce, “Captain Moroni's Revelation,” 155–59.

19. References in scripture to such suffering following mortality are numerous. For just three examples, see 2 Nephi 28:23; Doctrine and Covenants 76:84, 106, and 19:15–18. The fate of sons of perdition is even more harrowing (Doctrine and Covenants 76:44–48). That the Savior is the one who judges and commits the wicked to their fate is made clear in numerous passages. See, for example, John 5:22, Moroni 8:21, and Doctrine and Covenants 135:5. As for other examples of the Lord's strong measures (including future acts), see Exodus 9–12; Isaiah 11:4, 66:15–16; Malachi 4:1; Jacob 7:15–20; Alma 19:21–23; Doctrine and Covenants 29:17–21; 45:50, 133:50–51.

20. Numerous passages speak of the Lord's love, compassion, and mercy, of course, and he describes his mercy as flowing from his “everlasting kindness” (Isaiah 54:8 and 3 Nephi 22:8).

think about kindness is probably inadequate. Our understanding of what constitutes this attribute might stand some examination — and the result might lead to a more refined view of Captain Moroni. Here are some matters to consider in rounding out our view of kindness.

Aggressors Impose Their Own Restrictions on Kindness

One reality to appreciate about kindness is this: individuals often impose limits on what acts of kindness are *possible* to show them. The people at the time of Noah had created an environment of violence and debauchery, and the Egyptians refused multiple times to free the enslaved Israelites. In each case, prophetic calls to repentance were ignored, and wickedness persisted. While the Lord’s arm and his “voice of mercy” are lengthened out “all the day long” toward his children,²¹ when they persist in depravity and rebellion, there might be no option but to end the evil. This, it would seem, is why the Lord can speak in one verse about his fury and vengeance in destroying the wicked at his Second Coming and in the very next verse report that his redeemed shall speak of his “loving kindness” and his “goodness” (D&C 133:51–52). It would seem that the Lord does for everyone the best they will permit him to do. However, he can’t do for them what they *won’t* permit him to do. The kindness he can show them faces limits they themselves impose.

This is not unlike the circumstance Captain Moroni faced with the Lamanites. They were assailants seeking to destroy Nephite lives and Nephite society.²² Such circumstances make it difficult to see what “kind” options were available to Moroni in how to treat them. Morality does not require individuals to help assailants commit their wrongs. (Should a bystander provide transportation and food to a tired and hungry aggressor who is hunting a person he intends to harm?) Morality requires individuals, in the best way they can, to *prevent* assailants’ wrongs. This was precisely the case with Moroni. By their aggression, the Lamanites themselves precluded Moroni’s ability to display conventional forms of kindness toward them. That was their doing, not his.

Kindness Does Not Entail Capitulation

Some might believe that capitulating to one’s assailants would be a way to show kindness toward them and that this, therefore, is actually the proper course to follow when faced with conflict. Hugh Nibley, for

21. See, for example: 2 Nephi 28:32; Jacob 5:47; Alma 5:37; 3 Nephi 10:4–6; D&C 43:24–26; Matthew 23:37.

22. See the upcoming section “Moroni’s Restriction to Defensive War.”

example, believed that the Ammonites' refusal to take up arms was "the perfect example of what to do when faced with a conflict."²³ This view overlooks significant features of the scriptural record, however. Standing firmly against evil goes back to the pre-earth life when the Son led many of us in a "war" against the rebel Satan.²⁴ Moreover, the Lord not only commanded the Nephites to defend themselves against their aggressors but routinely helped them execute their defense.²⁵ It is true, of course, that Christ voluntarily assented to his crucifixion, but this does not establish a precedent for capitulating to aggression. The Savior was *ordained* to die at that time and in that way, and his behavior in his ultimate sacrifice simply does not generalize to other circumstances. The case of the Ammonites in Alma 24 is *sui generis* as well and also does not generalize to others. In fact, it did not even generalize to later situations with the Ammonites themselves. Although the Ammonites' assailants repented and were converted the first time they attacked their brethren (Alma 24:23–27), this did not happen the second time they did so (Alma 27:2–4). Indeed, following this second attack, the Lord directed the Ammonites to emigrate because he knew that future aggressors would *not* repent — and in fact that they would destroy the Ammonites (Alma 27:12). In addition, the Ammonites later faced circumstances in which they could have prostrated themselves before their enemies, just as they had in Alma 24 and 27, but they did not do so. In one case, they were protected by a large Nephite army that had moved into the land of Jershon after the Ammonites moved out for safety reasons (Alma 35:13, 43:4–22), and in another, they first desired to take up weapons of their own and then, when dissuaded, allowed their sons to go to war in their place (Alma 53:10–18). In neither case did the Ammonites prostrate

23. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002), 221.

24. Relevant passages on the war in heaven include Revelation 12:7–9; D&C 29:36–37, 76:25–28; Moses 4:1–3.

25. The Lord told the Nephites, for instance, that "inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" and also that "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47). He also explicitly commanded Captain Moroni to go to battle against the Nephite governors if they did not repent (Alma 60:33). The Book of Mormon also frequently depicts the Lord as helping the Nephites defend themselves and of Nephites being "strengthened," "delivered," or "preserved" by the Lord. See Alma 2:16–19, 27–31, 16:5–8, 43:22–24, 44:3–5, 57:25–26, 35, 36, 58:33, 61:13, 21; Words of Mormon 1:14; Helaman 4:24–25, 7:22, 12:2; 3 Nephi 4:10, 31, 33. I cover this topic at length in *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2015), chapter 7.

themselves as an alternative to battle. It is evident, then, that *they* did not believe their experience in Alma 24 and 27 set the precedent for what people should do generally, *including themselves*. Since they did not believe this, it is unclear on what principle others should believe it.²⁶

Finally, even if by some logic it *were* kind to let attackers freely commit murder, it is hard to see how doing so would be kind to those they murder — say, women, children, and other innocents we are defending. If (1) we are to be as kind as possible, and (2) if we can't simultaneously be kind to two groups — to aggressors by giving them free rein to commit murder and to victims by *not* giving their aggressors free rein to murder them — then (3) it would seem that we are morally obligated to be kind to the group that is not murdering others rather than to the group that is.

These considerations render the idea of capitulation unpersuasive. It is not a genuine option for showing kindness when a nation is facing unjust attack and murder.²⁷

26. A detailed treatment of the Ammonites appears in Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War*, Chapters 4 and 5. One can, of course, point to instances in which the Lord does not command self-defense — e.g., the story of Abinadi in Mosiah 12–17. (The account of the women and children suffering death in Alma 14 may also come to mind, though this is more accurately described as a case in which a prophet was not commanded to call upon the powers of heaven to miraculously spare victims of violence, victims whose families may have, unknown to us, resisted as much as possible.) This indicates that the Lord doesn't always want us to defend ourselves with violence. However, he does indicate what he considers the correct *default* position — namely, that victims of aggression are justified in defending themselves. We've seen some of the evidence for this in the Book of Mormon, and it is corroborated in D&C 134:11, as well as in D&C 98:33–36 where the Lord speaks of appropriate defense as “the law” he has given over the earth's history.

27. It is also useful to note that aggressors typically *entail* harm to themselves. The only way to defend against their violence is to take up arms against them. This results in their harm, of course, but it is a harm of their own making. Captain Moroni's purpose was not to harm the Lamanites, for example; that was simply the natural consequence of defending against their invasions of Nephite territory in an effort to destroy Nephite lives and society. We see one case, of course, in which the Lord caused a “deep sleep” to come upon the captors of Alma and his people and thus made it possible for them to escape without any military engagement (Mosiah 24). This is similar to Limhi's experience in which the drunkenness of Lamanite guards permitted the Nephites to escape captivity without having to take up arms (Mosiah 22). In neither of these cases, however, were the Nephites defending themselves from being invaded, overthrown, and killed. They were simply captives of the Lamanites, looking for a way to escape their captivity. In other Book of Mormon incidents, the situation is far different, and

Moroni's Generosity of Spirit

Now, it is not that the Lord shows *no* kindness to the wicked, of course — to the people at the time of the flood, to the Nephites he destroyed, and so forth. As we have seen, his arm is stretched out “all the day long” to reach God’s children and save them. His efforts to reach people, to help them repent, and to embrace them when they do repent is repeatedly manifest in scripture. His patience and long-suffering in extending such mercy for so long is unfathomable. This generosity of spirit is the form kindness takes toward those who by their actions preclude any other form of kindness.

As mortals go, Captain Moroni himself is impressive in possessing such generosity of spirit. In his rebuke of the Nephite governors in Alma 60, for example — despite their huge and costly betrayal of the Nephite people — Moroni still managed to call them “my beloved brethren” (Alma 60:10) and reported a revelation that held out the possibility of their repentance (Alma 60:33). In a more famous example, Moroni gave Zerahemnah and his army every chance to repent and cease their aggression, and he allowed them to leave in peace when they did so (Alma 44:1, 19–20). He behaved similarly when a group of Nephites later become rebellious and sought to kill other Nephites in order to obtain lands for themselves. Under Moroni, Teancum eventually thwarted their plans, and — despite the intrigue, threat, and loss of life these dissidents had caused — when they entered a covenant to keep the peace, they were permitted to return to their original lands and settle there once again. All, apparently, was forgiven (Alma 50: 25–36).

On a later occasion, the record shows Moroni refusing to attack defenseless Lamanite soldiers when he could have easily assaulted them because “he did not delight in murder or bloodshed” and thus “would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them” (Alma 55:18–19). In this same episode, he managed to surround a whole army of Lamanites whom he could have slain easily. Yet he spared their lives and permitted them to surrender (Alma 55:20–24). This followed Captain Moroni’s famous epistle to Ammoron in which he declared, “I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth” (Alma 54:12). Moroni said this in the heat of his exchange with Ammoron, but when he actually had the chance to destroy an army “from off the face of the earth,” he didn’t.

Moroni behaved the same way when he and Lehi₂ were able to surround an army of Lamanites and overpower them in battle, and

those incidents do call for active defense against invasion, overthrow, and murder — active defenses which obviously entail harm to the aggressors.

yet, rather than continue to fight and substantially reduce the army's numbers through injury or death, he immediately gave them a chance to surrender and save their lives by throwing down their weapons of war. Many did so, and those who refused were only taken as prisoners; they were not attacked further (Alma 52:32–39). This was in stark contrast to the Lamanites who, in one theater of the war, spared only the chief captains of the Nephites whom they took prisoner and killed all their other prisoners of war (Alma 56:10–15).

Perhaps most significantly, in the epistle in which Moroni tells Ammoron that “hell” and the “wrath of God” await him and that he is “a child of hell,” Moroni still holds out the possibility of repentance for Ammoron — that there will be no more war if Ammoron withdraws his aggression and returns to his own lands (Alma 54:6–11).

Moroni did not tire in his generosity as the war dragged on. In its final year, at the end of one battle, rather than punish the Lamanite invaders who survived, Moroni extracted a covenant from them that they would no longer aggress against the Nephites and then simply sent them in peace to live with the people of Ammon₂ (Alma 62:14–17). Later that same year, after winning another battle with a Lamanite army, he did the same. Those who survived were not punished for their aggression and cause of death. Instead, when they expressed a desire to join the Ammonites, Moroni granted them their desire and allowed them to do so in peace (Alma 62:19–28).

In these examples, Moroni ran the risk that the soldiers he freed or left alive would one day return to the battlefield against the Nephites. This was the case even when he extracted a promise from them. The Lamanites had shown a warlike nature for centuries,²⁸ and Moroni could not guarantee that those he spared would not once again pose danger. Indeed, in one battle, the Lamanite leader declared that he and his men would not enter a covenant never to aggress against the Nephites again because they *knew* they and their children would break it (Alma 44:8). Yet despite such risks, Moroni still spared as many lives as he could. Indeed, it was Moroni's generosity in this very incident that seriously endangered his own life (Alma 44:12).

28. Jacob tells us that Nephi himself had to fight to defend his people from Lamanite assault (Jacob 1:10, also 2 Nephi 5:14), and aggressive wars are also reported by Jacob (Jacob 7:24), Enos (Enos 1:20), Jarom (Jarom 1:6), Abinadom (Omni 1:10), Amaleki (Omni 1:24), Zeniff (Mosiah 9, 10, 19–21), and Mormon (Words of Mormon 1:13–14) — a record of Lamanite aggression, beginning long before Captain Moroni, spanning the first four hundred and sixty years or so of Book of Mormon history.

Moroni's attitude toward war seems reflective of what Mormon tells us about the Nephites who were being led by Moroni — namely, that the Nephites contended with the Lamanites “reluctantly,” indeed with “much reluctance,” and that they “were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood ... [and that] they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:21–23). Their aim in fighting was not punishment or revenge. It was self-preservation undertaken reluctantly but out of necessity.

Such characteristics appear to be impressive in war. More common, it would seem, is the tendency to objectify enemies and to lust for revenge against them. We've seen that the Lamanites killed many of their prisoners of war, for example, and Gidgiddoni and Mormon encountered vengeful and aggressive attitudes among their own soldiers (3 Nephi 3:20; Mormon 3:14, 4:1–4), despite a Nephite history that explicitly eschewed such attitudes.²⁹ No Nephite leader — including Captain Moroni — succumbed to such temptations, however.³⁰ It seems fair to say that the text shows Moroni behaving toward his aggressors much as the Lord behaves toward the wicked generally: he does not delight in harming them and instead hopes they will cease their attacks — and when they do so, he treats them with a benevolence that is surprising. In the treacherous situations Moroni faced, this generosity of spirit is an impressive manifestation of kindness toward those who were attacking him and his people.

Moroni's Restriction to Defensive War

An additional matter to appreciate about “kindness,” specifically in the kind of circumstances Moroni faced, is this conspicuous feature of the record: *all Moroni's wartime efforts took place on Nephite lands*. He never invaded traditional Lamanite lands, he never sought to overthrow Lamanite society, and he never attempted to conquer a single Lamanite city. He went to battle against the Lamanites only when they were

29. This matter is covered at length in Duane Boyce, “Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount: Resolving a Scriptural Tension,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60 no. 2 (2021), forthcoming.

30. Mormon 4:1–4 is the one time the text suggests that the Nephites aggressed against the Lamanites. After defeating Lamanite aggression in years 361 and 362 (Mormon 3:7–8) — following which the Nephites desired to instigate hostilities of their own to gain vengeance (Mormon 3:9–15) — this passage suggests that they did so. This was a rogue action, however. They pursued this aggression on their own, as Mormon had already refused to lead them (Mormon 3:16).

invading *Nephite* lands, seeking to kill Nephites and to overthrow their society. In every case, Moroni was forced to wage battle in his own homeland, not because of any aggression of his own but because of repeated invasions by others.³¹

We also learn the *necessity* of the Nephites' defending "their wives, and children" (Alma 35:14): the Nephites were defending themselves to prevent their wives and their children from being "massacred" (Alma 48:24). This was consistent with the earlier report that the Nephites were "not fighting for monarchy nor power" but for preservation of their lives, their families' lives, and their religion (Alma 43:9–10, 45, 47). Indeed, Moroni reports at one point that the Lamanites were "murdering our people with the sword," including "our women and our children" (Alma 60:17). We learn in addition that the Lamanites assaulted the Nephites, supposing that they could "slay and massacre" the Nephites "according to their pleasure" (Alma 49:7). Indeed, Ammoron declared that the Lamanites' aggression against the Nephites would be "eternal" — it would continue either to the complete subjugation of the Nephites or to their "eternal extinction" (Alma 54:20).

Such were the hostilities and dangers faced by Moroni and his people. Whereas others might be tempted to seek revenge or to expand one's territory in time of war, the text only shows Moroni fighting against this very aggression from others. Indeed, Moroni's defensive posture is the reason Moroni had only men as prisoners of war, whereas the Lamanites had among their prisoners both women and children (Alma 54:3).³² The Lamanites' military action, after all, consisted in invading the Nephites' homeland — where the Nephites obviously lived as families — and both killing and capturing many women and children. Captain Moroni's military action, on the other hand, consisted in nothing other than waging defense *against* such invasions and doing so in the Nephites' own territory. He never set foot on the Lamanites' homeland and thus never encountered Lamanite women and children settled there, much

31. I think Hugh Nibley was the first to put this feature of the record into print: namely, that all Book of Mormon wars occurred on Nephite lands. See Nibley, "Warfare and the Book of Mormon," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, eds. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 294; see also Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed., ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 298 and Nibley, "Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon," in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 354.

32. Thus, Moroni was able to propose to Ammoron the exchange of one Lamanite prisoner for a full family of Nephite prisoners ("a man and his wife and his children" — Alma 54:11).

less harm or hold them as prisoners of war. In every respect, the text shows Moroni to be engaged in defensive action only.

Offensive Tactics in a Defensive War

In one place, Hardy raises a matter that might seem to undermine the view that Moroni's actions were purely defensive in character. It is the account, in Alma 50, of Captain Moroni's driving Lamanites out of lands that were part of Nephite territory and back into Lamanite lands (Alma 50:6–12).³³ In this episode, so it seems, Moroni resorted to aggressive measures.

However, thinking about the episode in this way confuses offensive war with offensive tactics. The Allied landing at Normandy in 1944 (along with a thousand other examples in World War II) was certainly an offensive tactic, but it was just as certainly not a matter of offensive war; it was not an act of aggression. It was no more than an offensive maneuver undertaken as part of a larger defense — a requirement that was thrust upon the Allies in the first place by the military aggression of the Axis powers attacking them. Indeed, this part of Europe had been invaded by Nazi Germany in the first place, and the landing was a crucial step in taking it back and reversing the spread of Nazi hegemony.

Examples of similar offensive maneuvers certainly appear in the Nephite record, and they have the same character as the Normandy invasion: they are not acts of aggression but are acts conducted strictly in the service of self-defense. Think of Teancum's slaying of Amalickiah (Alma 51:33–34) along with multiple additional examples.³⁴ All are different from the actions condemned by Gidgiddoni and Mormon when they insisted that their armies act strictly in defense (3 Ne. 3:20–21; Mormon 3:14–6). In these examples, the Nephites' desires to engage their enemies were forbidden by Gidgiddoni and Mormon, apparently because they felt those acts would have been offensive rather than defensive in nature. In an important sense, in their desire for revenge, these warriors were seeking to *instigate* hostilities.

In practice, righteous Nephite leaders seem to have defined legitimate defense in a way that prohibited both seeking revenge and, for the most part, leaving their own territory. In his case, Mormon refused to lead the Nephites when they became motivated by revenge and sought to enter Lamanite land to gain their vengeance (Mormon 3:4–11; 4:1–4). And Gidgiddoni, described as “a great prophet” (3 Nephi 3:19), led his armies

33. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176.

34. See, for example: Alma 2:35–37, 43:30–42, 44:18, 50:6–12, 62:15, 25, 31, 38; 3 Nephi 4:11–13, 20–21, 25–27.

in vigorously attacking the Gadianton robbers who were laying siege to them at the time and even prevented their retreat to the “furthermost parts of the land northward” when they abandoned their siege (3 Nephi 4:16–27). However, when military action would have required crossing territorial boundaries and engaging the enemy on their own lands, the same Gidgiddoni prohibited it (see 3 Nephi 3:20–21). Indeed, even when they were earlier pursuing the Gadianton robbers at the time of the siege, he was specific in allowing pursuit only to a specific territorial line, or “the borders of the wilderness” (3 Nephi 4:13).³⁵

The general attitudes we see in such Nephite leaders are the reason that all wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites occurred on Nephite lands; as mentioned earlier, they were all the result of Lamanite invasions.³⁶ Even though, militarily speaking, Nephite leaders could have pursued their aggressors past Nephite boundaries, and even though they were *not* motivated by vengeance, these leaders still did not do so. It appears that a de facto rule governed the Nephites regarding the Lamanites such that they could act to defend themselves, but were they to pass their boundaries, it would no longer be considered defense, and therefore was forbidden. Certainly, that was the rule Captain Moroni followed.

All this helps us see why, although Hardy questions the decision, it was not an act of aggression for Moroni to drive Lamanites who had settled on Nephite land back into Lamanite territory. He did this, after all, while urgently engaged in defense against ongoing Lamanite assault. The event occurred during a lull in the actual fighting, but the lull was not a cessation of hostilities or of danger. Indeed, Mormon reports of the circumstances during this period of Nephite history that the wars did not cease “for the space of many years” (Alma 48:22). Thus, although Hardy questions Moroni for this action, it actually seems to have been

35. This pattern was not followed in every instance. Earlier, for example, the Nephites and Lamanites effectively constituted a single population and were united against those who had broken off from both and re-formed the Gadianton society (Helaman 11:21–33). These robbers located themselves in “the wilderness and upon the mountains” (v. 28), from which locations they “visited great destruction” upon the Nephites and Lamanites (v. 27). In these circumstances armies of the Lamanites and Nephites went into the wilderness and the mountains more than once to try to destroy the robbers. However, although the Nephites and Lamanites as a combined people did not recognize boundaries that would in any sense protect the robbers from pursuit, in this instance their efforts were still not acts of aggression. They were simply offensive maneuvers undertaken as part of an overall need to defend themselves from ongoing onslaught and murder from the Gadianton robbers.

36. The lone exception is the one apparent rogue action discussed in note 30.

a highly prudent course for Moroni to pursue at the time. The Nephites were suffering from continued violence and threat of further attack, and Moroni was responsible to secure the lives of the Nephite citizenry. At the same time, Lamanites possessed lands that, according to the record, belonged to the Nephites (Alma 50:7–9, 11). Moreover, Lamanite presence on these lands actually established “strongholds of the Lamanites” and were seen as sources of “strength and power” for Lamanite invasion within Nephite territory (Alma 50:11–12). Clearing Nephite lands of such “strongholds” and sources of “strength and power” would be the obvious course for any leader. Indeed, later Nephite dissenters appreciably increased the threat to Nephite lives when, living on Nephite lands, they actually overthrew and possessed the city of Zarahemla and then entered an alliance with the Lamanites specifically to assist them in achieving victory over the Nephites (Alma 61:1–8).

This episode indicates the danger posed by Lamanites positioned in Nephite territory. Captain Moroni’s removal of this threat thus seems not only justified but obligatory. It was not an instigation of hostilities; it was an offensive tactic against enemy outposts located on Nephite land, and thus was a legitimate act of defense against an aggressive and determined enemy who had started the war in the first place.³⁷

In all respects, the record shows that Moroni’s behavior is consistent with Mormon’s description of him. He describes Moroni as a man “of a perfect understanding ... [who] did not delight in bloodshed, ... [but who joyed] in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery” (Alma 48:11). The record shows Moroni to be

37. On one occasion, during his heated exchange of epistles with Ammoron, Captain Moroni demanded that Ammoron withdraw his armies and also demanded a certain ratio for prisoner exchange. He threatened that if the Lamanites refused, he would follow them into their own land and wage war against them there (Alma 54:11–13). Indeed, he threatened to wage battle until the Lamanite invaders were “destroyed from off the face of the earth” (Alma 54:12–13). Moroni never pursued these threats, however. When Ammoron refused to withdraw from the war, as Moroni had demanded, Moroni refused the prisoner exchange himself (Alma 54:20; 55:1–2). He was now angrier than ever at Ammoron (Alma 55:1), and we might expect, therefore, that he would carry out his threats — but he didn’t. Indeed, it was *following* these threats, and *following* his increased anger, that, as mentioned earlier, Moroni still refused to “fall upon” vulnerable Lamanite soldiers (Alma 55:18–19) and also spared a Lamanite army he had completely surrounded and could have destroyed at will — just as he had threatened he would do (Alma 55:20–24). Despite his words, in the end Moroni never invaded Lamanite land, and he never spilled blood he could avoid spilling. He spoke more threateningly to Ammoron than he ever actually behaved.

a defender, nothing more, and, under the threatening circumstances he faced, this commitment to strictly defensive fighting is impressive.

Kindness: Summary

What we see in the record, then, is that there is more to the issue of “kindness” than we might often think. The topic cannot be approached simplistically; if it is, we can find the Lord’s own behavior subject to complaint, which would be absurd. In the end, for those who are defending themselves against attack, the question is what acts of kindness are available to them in that position. Conducting oneself as generously as the dangerous circumstances allow and fighting only defensively would seem to be about all that can be done: aggressors themselves preclude any other conceivable acts of kindness. It is significant, therefore, that acting generously and only in defense is exactly what Moroni did, impressively and repeatedly.³⁸

“Humility”

Consider next the opinion that Captain Moroni lacked humility. Hardy does not provide any evidence for this claim, but it does seem to follow from other remarks he makes about Moroni (which are listed in the opening paragraph herein). However, as shown in this paper and elsewhere, these negative descriptions of Moroni’s character are inaccurate. Moroni did not slaughter his political opponents; the text actually presents him as a devoutly religious man; and he was certainly, just as Mormon claimed, comparable to the sons of Mosiah in spiritual matters.³⁹ In addition, he was not at all “hasty” in his suspicions about treasonous activity in the government at the time he wrote his famous epistle recorded in Alma 60 (to which Pahoran responded in Alma 61) and, in fact, had explicit revelation that turned out to be accurate.⁴⁰ Moreover, rather than being “hot-blooded” or “aggressive,” he fought strictly in defense of Nephite lives and Nephite society and was also surprisingly generous toward his

38. Someone could argue that the harm received by the wicked is a *form* of kindness to them — i.e., an act of generosity toward the wicked when the Lord destroys them in their wickedness. To the degree such an argument might succeed, however, it would seem to include Captain Moroni’s actions as well. In whatever sense the Lord’s actions toward the wicked in general are kind, Moroni’s actions toward aggressors specifically would appear to be kind as well. At least — given all that we have seen about Moroni — it would take a strong argument to show that this was not the case.

39. See Boyce, “Beloved by All the People,” 181–95.

40. See Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” 155–59.

attackers.⁴¹ He also fought only because the Lord explicitly commanded him to do so,⁴² spoke bluntly only to those who should have been spoken to bluntly,⁴³ and cannot in fact be described as having a quick temper.⁴⁴

When we look closely, then, the text does not show any of Hardy's negative descriptions of Moroni to be accurate. To the degree we deny Moroni's humility based on these types of claims, therefore, we are simply mistaken.

Another reason some may fail to see humility in Moroni could be due to the common misunderstanding that humility requires being timid, passive, and "soft," in contrast to the dynamic, confident, and bold traits seen in many great leaders. Christ, however, gives us the ultimate example of dynamic, confident, and bold leadership adorned with ultimate humility — the humility to subject himself to the will of the Father in all things, to seek others' pleasure and welfare rather than his own, and to give all that he had in the faithful service of others. Moroni, like all mortals, must pale in comparison to the Savior. Despite his mortal flaws, however, we should still be able to recognize the appropriate humility that accompanied his confidence, his passion, and his successful leadership.

Powerful military leaders without humility have a tendency to amass greater power, often seeking to rule as a king. In contrast, Moroni above all sought to serve God in protecting his people rather than compelling them to serve him.⁴⁵

Humility vs. "Softness"

As generally conceived in the scriptures, humility seems to be a state of meek submissiveness toward the Lord and of unpretentiousness

41. See the earlier sections, "Moroni's Generosity of Spirit" and "Moroni's Restriction to Defensive War." I cover these dimensions of Captain Moroni's conduct further in "Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount."

42. See Boyce, "Beloved by All the People," 191–93. Note, for example, that: (1) the Lord told the Nephites that "inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" and also that "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47); (2) Captain Moroni explained that because of God's commandments he took up the sword to defend the cause of his country (Alma 60:28, 34); (3) he explained that resisting Lamanite invasion was "the cause of our God" (Alma 54:10); and (4) he went to battle against traitors in the government because the Lord instructed him to do so (Alma 60:33).

43. Boyce, "Beloved by All the People," 196–98.

44. *Ibid.*, 198–200.

45. This feature of Captain Moroni's leadership is covered fully in "Beloved by All the People," particularly in the section "Captain Moroni's Similarity to the Sons of Mosiah."

toward others. The concept indicates an absence of rebellion or willfulness toward God and an absence of self-importance or conceit regarding other people. Once we think of humility this way, it is easy to see that Moroni did not lack this virtue. He certainly called out the wickedness of Amalickiah and Ammoron (Alma 54–55), but not out of conceit or self-importance. He contrasted their conduct with God’s commandments and with Nephite motives generally, but not with himself personally. The same was true regarding the king-men and later, the treasonous Nephite governors (Alma 51, 60). He excoriated them but not with condescension. Rather, he recognized the dire threat they posed to Nephite lives. Though certainly not gentle or “soft” conduct, none of this suggests pride or self-importance on the part of Moroni.

If humility, then, is an inner condition, it also seems clear that Moroni did not lack humility toward the Lord. The reality after all is that the Lord does not always *will* soft behavior, which means that following him will not always *result* in soft behavior. The Lord instructed Moroni to go to battle against the treasonous Nephite governors, for example (Alma 60:33), an instruction that simply instantiated the general command he gave the Nephites to defend themselves (Alma 43:46–47). Such defense was a pattern followed by a long line of Nephite prophets and leaders over centuries.⁴⁶

To the degree we think that Moroni’s lack of “softness” indicated a lack of humility, then, we are in error. The determined actions he took to defend Nephite lives were both required by the circumstances and commanded by the Lord. He did not behave “softly” because what the Lord instructed was not “soft.” Indeed, in these circumstances, soft action would actually have been an act of rebellion against the Lord, not an act of humble submissiveness toward him. Moroni’s lack of softness, like his abundance of faith and confidence and his dynamic leadership skills, do not conflict with humility, but are adorned with it.

Comparison with King Benjamin

It might help to think about the difference between humility and mere “softness” by remembering what the record tells us about King Benjamin. He famously taught about humility and serving others in the Book of Mosiah. However, less-discussed is the extent to which he waged war prior to this time. The record tells us that “armies of the Lamanites”

46. The list includes Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, Helaman, Lachoneus, Gidgiddoni, Mormon, and Moroni — all of whom fought in defense and all of whom are depicted in the text as significant spiritual figures.

came against King Benjamin's people and that King Benjamin therefore "gathered together his armies," fought "with the strength of his own arm," contended "in the strength of the Lord," slew with his army "many thousands of the Lamanites," and contended against the invading armies until they had "driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance" (Words of Mormon 1:13–14). Around the time of these wars, Mormon describes King Benjamin as reigning over his people "in righteousness," indeed, as a "holy man" (Words of Mormon 1:17).

King Benjamin was clearly a man of holiness when he taught his people, a circumstance in which he was manifestly gentle in manner. But King Benjamin was also a man of holiness when he led his people in war to defend themselves, a time in which he was manifestly *not* gentle in manner. Each situation required a meek surrender of himself to the Lord and to the needs of the moment, but this submissiveness manifested itself in radically different ways: gentle speech in one case, and killing Lamanite aggressors in the other.

Appreciating the full scope of King Benjamin's life reinforces the view of humility as an inner condition. If we think that humility equates to mere gentleness in outward behavior, then we would not assign that descriptor to the King who fought against the Lamanites, even though the text describes him this way. Reconciling this about King Benjamin reinforces our understanding of Captain Moroni.

With this in mind, it should be remembered that Moroni was as gentle as circumstances allowed. We have seen that he showed a surprising generosity toward those who were attacking him and his people and that he also fought only in defense. For a man routinely forced into war, this is impressive; it is hard to see how anyone could ask for anything more.

Captain Moroni and Helaman

After observing that Moroni lacks the typical religious virtues (specifically, those I have addressed above), Hardy remarks that Mormon gives his readers "a counterexample of a very different kind of military leader" — namely, Helaman, who was high priest over the Church and who also served in combat.⁴⁷ In drawing a distinction between Moroni and Helaman, Hardy observes that in the early years of the conflict, Helaman did his part to help the Nephite cause by preaching, and he describes Helaman as someone who, unlike Moroni, "boasts no particular martial skills or background" and apparently knew "next to nothing about warfare" at the

47. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 177.

time he began leading the Ammonites' sons.⁴⁸ Hardy says that we thus see "a contrast between ordinary success — the result of diligent effort and personal skills [i.e., in the case of Moroni] — and the sort of miraculous accomplishments that can occur when humble people put their trust in God [i.e., in the case of Helaman]."⁴⁹ Indeed, Hardy reports that Mormon writes of Moroni in "secular" terms, crediting whatever success he had to Moroni's "skills as a general."⁵⁰ Hardy thus states that Moroni and Helaman represent "a contrast between these two modes of existence,"⁵¹ emphasizing that in Helaman's case, unlike Moroni's, we see that "success comes from God's intervention rather than his own expertise."⁵²

According to Hardy, then, Helaman is a counterexample to Captain Moroni because we see in him the religious virtues we do not see in Moroni. Helaman, in Hardy's view, was a novice in battle, one who initially helped by preaching, and whose success came despite his inexperience and because of his humility and trust in God. Contrasted with Moroni, Helaman's success was due to God's intervention whereas Moroni succeeded due to his own expertise.

It is not hard to see why this kind of contrast might appear reasonable on the surface. Once we read more carefully, however, the distinction evaporates. It is a false contrast.

Why the Contrast is a Mistake

We have already seen, for example, that Moroni's reliance on the Lord was equal in every way to Helaman's. It is true that Helaman, who had a specific responsibility to teach the gospel, preached to the Nephites as they were preparing for defense. But this was also true of Moroni. As we saw in an earlier section,⁵³ Moroni's very first act of defense was to prepare the people to be faithful to the Lord. And he did this even though *his* specific responsibility, as general of all the armies, was the military defense of his people. Yet his devotion to God came first.

It is also true that Helaman ascribed the success of his efforts to the Lord. He speaks in one place of "the goodness of God in preserving us" (Alma 57:36) and repeatedly expresses the central role of the Lord's help in the Nephites' defense (Alma 58:10–11, 33, 37). But Moroni, too,

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 178.

50. Ibid., 177.

51. Ibid., 179.

52. Ibid., 177.

53. See the section, "Reliance on the Lord."

repeatedly ascribes Nephite success to the Lord and expresses exactly the same kind of reliance on him.⁵⁴

Hardy also proposes that Mormon is drawn to Moroni's achievements — “lavishing” fourteen chapters on his career — because he wants to ensure that his readers do not quickly dismiss “Moroni's very human strivings,” and he refers to Mormon's plaintive wish, “*if only everyone could be like Moroni*” (emphasis in original).⁵⁵ But Mormon's wish actually has nothing to do with Moroni's “very human” strivings; they specifically refer to his *spiritual* strivings — strivings catalogued by Mormon (Alma 48:11–19) throughout his report of Moroni's wartime efforts.⁵⁶ It is simply a mistake to say that Mormon writes of Moroni in secular terms; Moroni's spiritual devotion and reliance on the Lord show clearly throughout Mormon's text.

It is also hard to justify the assertion that Helaman's success came “from God's intervention rather than his own expertise.”⁵⁷ Over the course of three chapters, one hundred and two verses are devoted to the numerous preparations and counter-preparations, moves and countermoves of Helaman's battles against the Lamanites.⁵⁸ The account is rich in intrigue and military strategy and demonstrates in detail that God did not simply hand victory to Helaman. He and his military cohorts appear to have relied every bit as much on “personal skills” and “expertise” as did Moroni. In the end, of course, Helaman knew success was due to the Lord's help, and this is what Hardy emphasizes. What he does not emphasize is that Moroni knew this of the Nephites' success as well.⁵⁹

In trying to contrast Moroni's expertise with what he (mistakenly) thinks is Helaman's more direct reliance on God, Hardy also appears to overstate Helaman's amateur status. It is true that we do not see Helaman involved in war before he takes leadership of the Ammonites' sons, but Hardy is too quick to conclude that this means he “knew next to nothing about warfare.” We have just seen, for example, that the text records in detail various strategic moves and countermoves that involved Helaman; he does not seem like a novice in these exploits. Additionally, Helaman's father had been high priest over the Church before him and was active

54. Ibid.

55. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 178.

56. See again the section, “Reliance on the Lord.” For additional information, see the section “Captain Moroni's Spiritual Character” in Boyce, “Beloved by All the People,” 184–89.

57. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 177.

58. Alma 56:21–57; 57:1–36; and 58:1–29.

59. See the earlier section, “Reliance on the Lord.”

in military leadership and war with the Lamanites (e.g., Alma 2); such involvement was far from unprecedented. More importantly, however, following the very first battle with his stripling soldiers, Helaman tells Moroni that “never had I seen so great courage, nay, amongst all the Nephites” (Alma 56:45), a report that suggests prior experience with military action that would allow him to make such a comparison. The record also shows Helaman giving battle instructions to other military leaders (Alma 58:16) and exchanging personal epistles with Ammoron, the highest authority in the Lamanite army (Alma 57:1–21). Neither action seems likely if Helaman were as new to military matters as Hardy assumes.

It is also noteworthy that the great majority of Helaman’s references to trust in God, devotion, and God’s deliverance occur when he is talking specifically about the Ammonites’ sons — his “stripling” soldiers. Hardy refers to such instances to show that Helaman, unlike Moroni, put more trust in God than in his own skill.⁶⁰ But this is an inapt comparison. While Helaman’s soldiers may have had greater faith than other soldiers, it does not follow that the same held true for Helaman and Moroni. If these young warriors had been part of Moroni’s army, their faith and devotion would have been exactly the same. Yet, if we used Hardy’s logic, we would then find ourselves appealing to Moroni’s reports of their trust in God to show that Moroni was more spiritually reliant than Helaman.

The reality is that the devotion and faith of the Ammonites’ sons was unrelated to either Helaman or Moroni’s faith and devotion, and thus offers no basis for comparison between them.

Captain Moroni and Helaman: Summary

What we see in the end is that the supposed distinction between Helaman and Moroni does not exist. Moroni possessed and displayed the very virtues that Hardy claims he lacked. Additionally, while Hardy claims that Helaman was more reliant on God than Moroni, we have seen that to be false as well. In terms of spiritual devotion, trust in God, and the need for military strategy and skill, Helaman was not a “counterexample” to Moroni; he appears instead to be what he himself said — Moroni’s “brother,” both in “warfare” and in “the Lord” (Alma 56:2).

60. Hardy refers to the Ammonite sons’ faith (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 177, 178), their fighting with miraculous strength (177), their preservation from death (177–78), and their prayers and trust in the Lord (178).

Conclusion

A general reading of the text might seem to suggest that Captain Moroni lacked self-sacrifice, reliance on the Lord, kindness, humility, and that he served as a contrast to Helaman. When we read with a higher degree of resolution, however, the record paints a very different picture. Not only are self-sacrifice and reliance on the Lord evident in Moroni's life, but so are kindness and humility once we think about these qualities with some care. While it might seem at first glance that Moroni lacked the typical religious virtues, closer consideration suggests he was impressive in his possession of them.

The same point can be made regarding Moroni and Helaman. While it might be thought they were dissimilar — that Helaman serves as a counterexample to Moroni's military leadership — closer reading demonstrates them to have been very much alike. Indeed, it turns out that comparing these two figures on spiritual grounds does not diminish Moroni. Rather, the comparison serves only to reveal Moroni to us more clearly — and, seeing him more clearly, the light we discern in the life and devotion of this man of God does not dim but brightens.

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