



Type: Magazine Article

Moroni, A Sketch of the Nephite Republic, V

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *The Contributor*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (March 1890), pp. 164–168

Published by: The Contributor Company

Abstract: Roberts gives us a brief summary of the efforts of Alma the Younger and Amulek in Ammonihah, as well as the success of the sons of Mosiah in their missionary labors among the Lamanites. He details the persecution of the people of Ammon and their seeking refuge among the Nephites and the several wars of conquest attempted by the Lamanites in the following years. He mentions the childhood and upbringing of Captain Moroni during these conflicts and his victory over Zerahemnah.

MORONI.

A SKETCH OF THE NEPHITE REPUBLIC.

v.

IT IS not my purpose to follow the peregrinations of Alma in his missionary labors. It is sufficient to say he met with that varied experience so characteristic of missionary life. Sometimes hailed as a messenger of God and honored as such, and then again despised, reviled mobbed or cast into prison. This latter experience he passed through in the City of Ammonihah. The treatment he received in this nest of iniquity and infidelity was simply shameful. Many of those who professed belief in his message were committed to the flames in his presence, while the fiendish rabble mockingly called upon him to save them. Himself and his faithful companion, one Amulek, they dragged before their judges who committed them to prison. There assembled the lawyers with the judges and priests to taunt them with their helplessness, to spit upon them, and to smite them with their fists. They were kept without food and without water, bound with cords and stripped of their clothing. After many days of such treatment the lawyers and judges and priests again came into the prison and asked them why they did not deliver themselves from their bondage: "Deliver yourselves from these bonds, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words." Alma and his companion had prophesied that unless they repented of their sins their city should be destroyed and become desolate. After these taunts, each one passed by and smote their faces, repeating what had been before said. And after the last one had thus insulted them, in the calm dignity of an offended messenger, nay more, a son of God, Alma arose to his feet and said: "How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even to our deliverance." After that prayer, their bonds were broken, fear seized upon their persecutors and they fled from their presence; but ere they could gain the outside of the prison an earthquake shook its walls and buried them

beneath the *debris*. But from the midst of trembling pillars, falling archways and crumbling walls, God gave his servants safe conduct, leaving them to wend their way unmolested to a more hospitable people.

About a year after these events, in the eleventh year of the republic, there was another invasion of the Nephite country by the Lamanites. The invasion was as sudden as it was unexpected. The Nephites were powerless to hinder it. The invasion was made from the wilderness side of their country, most probably from the south-west. The invaders penetrated the Nephite lands as far as the city of Ammonihah, and destroyed it with all its inhabitants. Yes, the great city that was the pride of those infidels, who blasphemously boasted that God could not destroy it, was laid desolate in a day, its inhabitants slaughtered and left to be devoured by dogs and the wild beasts of the forests; and its structure thrown down to be over-run with weeds, with clambering vines and ferns, until the deep morass or the tangled forest covered the spot desecrated by man's pride, his gross iniquity and heaven-insulting blasphemy. Oh, Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Babylon, cities of Egypt, Ammonihah! What lessons, what warnings ye are to mortals! Where now are your cloud-capped towers, your gorgeous palaces, your massive pillars, your splendid arches, your princely mansions, your mighty walls, your ponderous gates? Crumbled into shapeless masses, a hopeless desolation, cursed of God, shunned of man! Ye glorious cities, once the pride of your people, their seeming strength and always their boast; as unstable have ye been as the baseless fabric of a night's vision, or the fleeting clouds. Yet man will not profit even now by the lessons which ye teach; but blindly plods along, building as his fathers built, committing sins as did his fathers, walking in their pride, repeating their blasphemies, rejecting God's counsels, and yet, expecting to escape the fate of his fathers, and of his fathers' cities! Boasting that the structure he erects now must needs be

immortal, and his civilization eternal; unmindful that thus his fathers reasoned, and thus hoped, but reasoned and hoped alike in vain. Unrelenting Time with his revolutions broke in upon their security and destroyed their cities and the inhabitants thereof. And thus the sad lesson has been repeated generation after generation and will be until man learns to build his social and political fabrics in righteousness, founding them on truth and justice, accepting gratefully the guidance of heaven, and learns to know God and His laws.

But let us turn from this apostrophe to plain narrative. The Nephites under the leadership of one Zoram and his sons, Lehi and Aha, drove the invading Lamanites from their lands without much bloodshed. This invasion was followed by a period of peace lasting some four years, when another war broke out. It happened in this wise:

The sons of Mosiah, who some fifteen years previous to the breaking out of the war of which I speak, renounced all claim to the Nephite throne, and devoted themselves to the work of the ministry among the Lamanites, were very successful in their mission, brought many thousands of the Lamanites to a knowledge of their Redeemer, and organized strong churches in the land of Nephi-Lehi. Then happened what always does happen, those who rejected the truth were stirred up to anger against those who received it. On the continent of America, no less than in Judea, one of the results of accepting the Gospel was incurring the hatred of the ungodly. These new converts to the Gospel were bitterly hated by their brethren. A revolution in the Lamanitish government was attempted, but the good old king died before he was dethroned. War—if the murder of unresisting multitudes can be properly called war, for the Lamanitish Saints refused to resist their enemies—war was waged upon them and their extermination threatened. The propriety of making preparations to defend themselves from the assaults of their enemies had been discussed, but the conversion of these Lamanites to the Gospel had brought with it such an aversion to

the shedding of blood—in which they had recklessly indulged previous to their conversion—that they now refused to take up arms even in their own defense. But instead thereof, bound themselves into a covenant never more to shed the blood of their fellow men, no matter what the provocation might be, and taking their weapons of war they buried them deep in the earth, as a token of peace, and also that they would never again use weapons for the shedding of man's blood.* This covenant they kept under the most trying circumstances. At the first general assault made upon them, one thousand and five were struck down, and yet no act of resistance or attempt to escape was made. And then their enemies, sick of slaying men who would not resist or flee, stopped the butchering, and many of them were converted by the conduct of these believers. But the sons of Mosiah, fearing that the lull in the storm of persecution was but temporary, and desirous of saving the lives of their converts—their people, proposed an exodus from the land of Nephi to Zarahemla; and finding through revelation that the Lord approved of it, the Lamanite Saints took up their journey and reached their destination in safety. The Nephites received them gladly and set apart for their occupation the land of Jershon, to the east of Zarahemla and south of the land Bountiful, bordering on the East Sea, as the Nephites called the Atlantic Ocean. The conditions agreed upon between the Nephites and these Lamanite Saints—known as the people of Ammon—were that they give a portion of their substance to sustain the Nephite armies; and on their part the Nephites were pledged to protect them from their enemies.

No sooner had the people of Ammon fairly settled in Jershon than a host of Lamanites appeared in the south border of the Nephite country. They had pur-

*Alma Chapter XXIV. I doubt not but that it was from this circumstance, handed down through the traditions of their fathers, that comes the source of the custom among the Indians, of burying the hatchet when making a covenant of peace, either among themselves or with the whites.

sued the Ammonites as soon as they had learned of their flight, but failed to overtake them. They were met by the Nephite forces and a desperate battle ensued, both parties sustaining heavy losses in killed and wounded. But the Nephites were finally successful, and drove the intruders from their midst.

The white wings of peace were again spread over the lands of the Nephites for three years. The only disturbance being in the latter part of the third year through the preaching of an infidel, one Korihor, who sought the overthrow of the Church. After creating great disturbance in various principal cities of the land, he was brought to Zarahemla before Alma, the high priest. In the course of his examination for his great blasphemy against God, he was smitten dumb by the power of God. This ended his influence among the people; he became a vagabond and an outcast, and finally perished miserably.

The eighteenth year of the republic witnessed another Lamanite invasion, the fourth since the founding of the republic. The object of this invasion was the subjugation of the Nephite people to Lamanite rule. It must be remembered by the reader that the Lamanites were thoroughly educated to the idea that in the original settlement of the country they inhabited, Nephi, the younger son of Lehi, had usurped the powers of government which of right belonged to the elder sons, Laman and Lemuel. They were prejudice-blind in this matter. They overlooked the fact that Nephi and his friends, finding it incompatible with their safety and peace to dwell with their elder brethren and their followers, withdrew from their midst, made a long journey northward and settled in an unoccupied land and established a society and government of their own, basing it upon such principles as in their judgment seemed most likely to secure to themselves and their posterity the blessings of life, liberty and happiness. This they had a right to do; and by doing it, they severed whatever bands united them to their original colony. Surely if any number of people in a community do not desire to submit to the regulations sought

to be imposed, they ought to be permitted to depart. And in as much as they go to a land over which the original community has no jurisdiction, they have a right to institute such order of government as they choose, select such executive, and make such regulations pertaining to succession of authority, as seemeth them good. This unquestionable right of man, the Lamanites ignored, and claimed the right to rule over the Nephites. This unfortunate circumstance acted always as a spur on the ambitious leaders, and made a convenient cause of war whenever one was desired. It was also a circumstance that apostates from the Nephite Church always availed themselves of, whenever it suited their purpose to arouse the Lamanites to war against their former brethren; and we shall see how they made cruel use of it before the close of this sketch.

The man who led the forces of the Lamanites in this third invasion was named Zarahemna. Nothing can be learned of his previous history; but that he was a man well versed in human nature, a warrior of no mean ability and of desperate courage, is quite evident from the course he pursued in conducting this war. In the first place he had observed that the hatred of an apostate is inplacable, and more deeply rooted in his heart, than in the heart of one who never learned the truth and turned from it. He saw this and took advantage of it by placing apostates from the Nephites, and there seemed to be large numbers of them in his forces, in command of the subdivisions of his army, with a view of keeping alive the deepest possible hatred against their adversaries.

It is at this period of our sketch that its principal character first appears. Moroni leaps into the arena a warrior, armed *cap-a-pie* for the conflict. He is but twenty-five years of age, and yet he is commander-in-chief of the Nephite armies. Nothing may be learned of his parentage or early life. Yet it is reasonable to suppose that in the stormy life of the young republic he had rendered distinguished military service, else he would not have occupied the important post we

find him standing at, when first introduced to him. War had been forced upon the Nephites so frequently during the existence of the republic that many distinguished military leaders must have been developed among them; and a man at twenty-five having conferred upon him the high station of commander-in-chief of all the Nephite armies, must have given evidence of remarkable military skill. He was seven years of age when the first chief judge of the republic was elected. At twelve he witnessed the efforts made by Amlici and his band of conspirators to overthrow the new government, followed immediately by the first invasion of Lamanites to accomplish the same purpose. He was eighteen when the second invasion of Lamanites occurred, and doubtless took an active part in the operations against them. At twenty-two he saw another attempt to subjugate his people to Lamanite rule, and now at the fourth attempt he was twenty-five. This is not the place to speak of the character, the wisdom, the valor, the patriotism, the courage, or the military skill of our hero. Let the events, occurring in the period of eighteen years subsequent to his introduction and the part he took in shaping those events, prove his title to noble patriot, his country's friend, and preserver of the republic.

In this war of the eighteenth year of the republic, the Nephites had the advantage of superior arms and armor, more skilful generals, a better knowledge of the country, for they fought in their own lands; but above all they had that superior advantage which must even be theirs who fight in the better cause—for their home and all its belongings, for wives, for children, for liberty, for freedom to worship God. The Lamanites outnumbered their enemies overwhelmingly and were possessed of undaunted courage. They also had the advantage of being trained from childhood in the use of arms; and they had ever been accustomed to fatigue in the chase. All things considered they made formidable foemen.

By some means or other General Moroni had been advised of the approach of the invading hosts towards the land of

Jershon and had mustered his armies there to meet them. This checked the enemy's advance, who seemed loth to try the issue by a pitched battle with the well armed Nephites. He drew off his forces, and for the time Moroni knew not at what point he would next appear. He sent out spies to watch his movements; but also availed himself of a higher source of information—a source, however, from which only the righteous can draw. Knowing Alma to be a prophet of God, and conscious of the righteousness of his own and his country's cause, he ask the prophet of God to what point the enemy was making, and was answered that he was bending his course towards the land of Manti. Manti was on the south-western frontier of the Nephite possessions towards the head of the valley of the river Sidon, which is supposed to be the river Magdalena.* Here it may be to the reader's advantage to know something of the Nephite country, that is, as to its geographical location.

I take it for granted that the reader remembers Lehi's colony landed on the west coast of South America, in Chili. When Nephi and his followers withdrew from the first colony, and sought out for themselves a home and country in the north, where they might live in peace, they called the country in which they settled the land of Nephi; which according to the late Apostle Orson Pratt, is supposed to have been in or near Ecuador, South America.† Sometime in the fourth century there was an exodus from this land of Nephi, the more righteous part of the people being led away by one Mosiah still further northward where they found and amalgamated with the people of Zarahemla. This land of Zarahemla was located north of the head-waters of the river Sidon, and extended northward to the land of Bountiful, the north extremity of which was the Isthmus joining North and South America.‡ Between the land of Nephi and that of Zarahemla, running entirely across the continent, was

*O. Pratt's note, Book of Mormon p. 238.

†Book of Mormon, page 155, note.

‡Book of Mormon, page 155, O. Pratt's notes.

a strip of wilderness separating the frontiers of the Lamanites' and Nephites' possessions. This strip of wilderness also extended up the west side of the Nephite country, cutting them off from the Pacific Ocean, or West Sea, as it was called by them, until you approached the land Bountiful; and there the Nephites extended their country to the West Sea and maintained it with great determination in order to prevent the Lamanites from taking possession of North America, and thus completely surrounding them. The Nephite military leaders were not blind to the strategic importance of maintaining entire possession of this isthmus. They knew that if hard pressed, they could retreat into North America and hold their own against fearful odds, so long as they held the "causeway" into that land. This land Bountiful also extended to the East Sea. Immediately south of the land Bountiful, and bordering on the East Sea, was the land of Jershon, occupied by the people of Ammon; but it is evident that the land of Jershon did not extend as far south as the land of Zarahemla. The strip of wilderness before alluded to also ran up the east sea-coast, though not extending so far northward as it did on the west. There were also some minor subdivisions between Jershon and Zarahemla which are difficult to locate.

It will be seen by the foregoing that the Nephites were surrounded by a wilderness in which their old-time enemies would collect and sweep down upon them from most unexpected points; and it was only by the utmost diligence that they could retain their possessions.

Moroni, learning that the Lamanite forces were making for Manti, left a portion of his army to guard the south-east, and led the remainder to confront Zarahemna at Manti. Arriving at Manti before his enemy, he reinforced his army by bringing into service the people of that land, and at once prepared to entrap him. Near the head of the valley of Sidon, on the east bank of the river, was a noted hill called Riplah. On the south and east of this hill Moroni concealed part of his army under one of his faithful lieutenants, Lehi; then crossed the Sidon

with the remainder of his army, concealing them in the wilderness along the route leading to Manti.

Zarahemna having taken a circuitous route from Jershon through the wilderness, came into the valley of Sidon north of the hill Riplah. As soon as he had passed that hill and was marching in the direction of the river, Lehi's forces attacked his army in the direction of the rear. The Lamanites faced their enemies and fought desperately, but their naked bodies being exposed to the superior weapons of the Nephites, the slaughter was terrible among them. At last they fled for the river and crossed it, but only to be met by Moroni and his men, and the slaughter, suspended for a time on the east bank of the river, was renewed on the west. Finding themselves surrounded, the Lamanites were filled with terror which Moroni observing ordered the work of death to cease. Addressing himself to Zarahemna he recounted how the Lord had delivered them into his hands and called upon him and his followers by all that they held sacred to deliver up their weapons of war and enter into a covenant never to come again to war with the Nephites. Zarahemna offered to surrender his arms and depart, but refused to make any covenant of peace, and told Moroni that it was his cunning, and the fact that his men were incased in armour that had given him his present advantage, and not the power of God. Finding the most important item of his proffered terms rejected, Moroni refused to accept Zarahemna's surrender, returned his sword, saying, "We will end the conflict." The battle was renewed and raged with unceasing fury until thousands were cut down; and the Lamanites appeared doomed to utter destruction. In view of this prospect the stubborn Zarahemna at last cried out for mercy and accepted unconditionally the terms at first offered. With his poor wreck of an army, so splendid, so confident of success only a few hours before, Zarahemna slunk away into the wilderness under a covenant never again to come to war against the Nephites.

B. H. Roberts.