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“Can You Suppose That the Lord Will Spare You?”: Moroni’s Charged Rhetoric in Alma 60:30–32

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**“CAN YOU SUPPOSE
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IN ALMA 60:30–32**

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *Under the duress of a lengthy war, and prompted by recent Lamanite military successes, as well as incensed at the government’s failure to resupply Helaman’s armies with provisions and to send men to reinforce the city Nephiah, Moroni sent a second scathing letter to the leaders of the Nephite nation in the Nephite capital city Zarahemla. As other scholars have noted, the name Zarahemla likely denotes “seed of compassion” or “seed of sparing.” In this article, I propose that Moroni’s rhetoric in the letter includes an acerbic word-irony involving the meaning of Zarahemla perhaps achieved in terms of the Hebrew verb *yahmōl* (“[he] will spare,” from *hml*, “spare,” “have compassion.” This word-irony points out that although the Lord had spared the people of Zarahemla and the Nephites in the past, the uncompassionate behavior of the nation’s leaders in Zarahemla was creating conditions under which the Lord would not spare the leadership in Zarahemla. Moroni wrote, “Behold, I come unto you, even in the land of **Zarahemla**, and smite you with the sword ... For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people. Behold, can you suppose that the Lord **will spare** you...?” (Alma 60:30–32). The covenant background of this threat will also be explored.*

Writing at the very end of Nephite civilization, Moroni states, “And if our plates had been sufficiently large, we should have written in the Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also. And if we could have written in the Hebrew, behold, ye would have

had none imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:33).¹ This statement suggests that the Hebrew language and script remained a vital part of the Nephite linguistic repertory throughout the entirety of Nephite history, although they underwent change over time as language and language usage inevitably do. Amaleki, writing during King Benjamin’s reign,² mentions that Mosiah I encountered in Zarahemla a “corrupted” language — presumably a dialect of Hebrew — being spoken among the descendants of Muloch,³ who “had brought no records with them” (Omni 1:17) and kept no records. With no written record and no scriptures to act as a language (and religious) conservator, their language had changed rapidly. Nevertheless, shared linguistic affinities between the Nephites under Mosiah I and the Mulochites would explain how Mosiah could have “caused that they should be taught in his language” with evident facility and could unite together in the way that they did (Omni 1:18–19). Nephite recordkeeping and scribal practices ensured that Hebrew remained a prominent part of the Nephite linguistic and literary repertory after the time of Mosiah I, Benjamin, and Mosiah II, and throughout the reign of the judges, even to the time of Mormon and Moroni.²

Scholars working in the Latter-day Saint tradition widely agree that “seed of compassion,” “seed of pity,” or “seed of sparing” (Hebrew noun *zeraʿ*, “seed,” + noun *ḥemlâ*, “compassion”) represents the most likely etymology and meaning of the Book of Mormon personal name and toponym Zarahemla.⁴ Previous studies have located wordplay and puns

1. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Skousen, *The Earliest Text*, 672.

2. See Omni 1:23: “Behold, I Amaleki was born in the days of Mosiah; and I have lived to see his death and Benjamin his son reigneth in his stead.”

3. In this article, I will use Skousen’s corrected forms of proper names in the interest of promoting the most correct readings of Book of Mormon texts. I hope to see these accepted and used more widely among Latter-day Saints.

4. Scholar JoAnn Carlton, working with Book of Mormon scholar John W. Welch, appears to have arrived first at this etymology. See John W. Welch and JoAnn Carlton, “Possible Linguistic Roots of Certain Book of Mormon Proper Names,” *FARMS Preliminary Report* C&W-81 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1983). See also John A. Tvedtnes, “Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language?,” *Ensign* 16, no. 10 (October 1986), 65; John A. Tvedtnes, “What’s in a Name? A Look at the Book of Mormon Onomasticon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1989–2011 8, no. 2 (1996): 42. Two Community of Christ (formerly RLDS) scholars arrived at the same conclusion, positing the meaning “child of grace, pity, or compassion.”

on the name Zarahemla and *hml* in terms of “sparing.” Pedro Olavarria and David Bokovoy suggest that Zeniff creates an ironic wordplay on the name *Zarahemla* in terms of sparing in Mosiah 9:2 (“and we returned — those of us that were spared — to the land of Zarahemla”).⁵ As I noted in a subsequent study, wordplay on Zarahemla in terms “compassion” occurs in Alma 27:4–5, where Ammon and his brethren “were moved with compassion” on behalf of their Lamanite converts, wordplay which recurs in Alma 53:10–13 where the converted Lamanites reciprocate that compassion a generation later in Zarahemla (“they were moved with compassion”).⁶ Nephi the son of Helaman uses rhetorical wordplay in Helaman 7:24 (“the Lord will be merciful unto [the Lamanites]. Yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent”)⁷ and in Helaman 8:21 (“and do ye not behold that the seed of Zedekiah are with us”).⁸

In this short study, I will propose an additional, intriguing wordplay or word-irony involving the name Zarahemla, perhaps in terms of the Hebrew verb *yaḥmōl* (from *hml* “have compassion,” “spare”)⁹ in Moroni’s letter to Parhoron (or Pahoron, rather than Pahoran)¹⁰ and other government officials in Alma 60:30–32. The rhetorical intent of Moroni’s bitter word-irony involving the name Zarahemla appears to have been to bait or jolt Parhoron and other government officials into action on behalf of Helaman’s army and the other Nephite armies by reminding them that their being Zarahemla-ites — the “seed of compassion” in

See Joseph R. Salonimer and Norrene V. Salonimer, *I Know Thee by Name: Hebrew Roots of Lehi-ite Non-Biblical Names in the Book of Mormon* (Independence, MO: J. R. Salonimer, 1995), cited in Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2: 259, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1177&context=jbms>. See also John A. Tvedtnes, “Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon,” in Geoffrey Kahn, et al, eds., *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols. (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2013), 2:787–88.

5. Pedro Olavarria and David E. Bokovoy, “Zarahemla: Revisiting the ‘Seed of Compassion,’” *Insights* 30, no. 5 (2010): 2–3.

6. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Were Moved with Compassion’ (Alma 27:4; 53:13): Toponymic Wordplay on Zarahemla and Jerushon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* (2016): 233–53.

7. *Ibid.*, 250–52.

8. *Ibid.*, 234–35.

9. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 328.

10. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 4: Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007), 2635–37.

their aptly named capital Zarahemla — did not guarantee that the Lord would “spare” them as a presumed covenant entitlement in the face of the imminent Lamanite threat, especially in view of their uncompassionate treatment of their own countrymen.

Background

The long war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, the latter under the leadership of Nephite (Zoramite; see Alma 54:23–24) dissenters Amalickiah and his brother Ammoron, had gone on for a little over ten years.¹¹ After receiving a letter from Helaman, detailing the success of the latter’s armies in retaking previous lost cities and territory from the Lamanites and requesting more supplies and support, Moroni sends the first of two letters to the government in Zarahemla (Alma 59:3). He does not appear to have received any response to the first letter. Around this same time, the Nephite city of Nephihah, which Moroni presumed that the government would have reinforced due to its apparent strategic importance, fell to the Lamanites (Alma 59:5–12). The great length of the war, the government’s non-response to his first letter, and the government’s utter failure to reinforce the city of Nephihah motivated Moroni to write the scathing letter now preserved in Alma 60. Beyond inaction, Moroni suspected malfeasance on the part of government officials (see, for example, Alma 60:18). Moroni’s rightful anger and suspicion constitutes the backdrop for the rhetoric he uses, including the bitter word-irony involving Zarahemla and his allusions to divine covenant.

Zera ‘ (“Seed”) as (an Abrahamic) Covenant Term

In order to more fully appreciate why the name Zarahemla (“seed of sparing,” “seed of compassion”) and Moroni’s acerbic word-irony involving this name would have been emotive to a Nephite-Mulochite (Mulekite)¹² audience, we must first contextualize the Hebrew noun *zera* ‘ as an Abrahamic covenant term. From its earliest biblical post-creation

11. The war began “in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges” (Alma 48:2). It was “in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges” that Moroni “received and . . . read” Helaman’s letter (Alma 59:1).

12. The printer’s manuscript has the spelling Muloch in Mosiah 25:2. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Three: Mosiah 17–Alma 40* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1464–1470. Cf. Muloki at Alma 20:2, 21:11, which John A. Tvedtnes viewed as the nisbe-form of Muloch/Mulok, meaning “Mulekite”; see Tvedtnes, “Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon,” 2:787–88.

uses in direct reference to human beings (e.g., Genesis 3:15; 4:25; see also Moses 5:11), the word *zera*‘ (“seed” as posterity) takes on covenantal and christological overtones. In the christological paradigm, Christ is understood to be Eve’s “seed” in Genesis 3:15,¹³ and Abraham’s “seed” in the narrowest sense, as Paul sometimes does (e.g., Galatians 3:16). When the Lord “covenanted” with Enoch, he promised that “a remnant of his [Enoch’s] seed should always be found among all nations, while the earth should stand” and “Blessed is he through whose seed Messiah shall come; for he saith — I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity; whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall; wherefore, blessed are they of whom I have spoken, for they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy.”¹⁴ The “seed” of Noah were heirs to the covenant that God made with Noah and his “seed” (Genesis 9:9), “seed” that would include the Messiah (cf. Moses 7:50–53).

Beginning in Genesis 12, and thereafter in the Book of Genesis, *zera*‘ becomes a key Abrahamic covenant term, as designating the “seed” or descendants of Abraham born in fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham regarding a numberless posterity, who will themselves potentially become the recipients and heirs of the same promises (of an eternal relationship with God, certain lands, priesthood, and numberless posterity).¹⁵ The patriarchal narratives of Genesis emphasize that Isaac,

13. The curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:15 — “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed [*zar’ākā*] and her seed [*zar’āh*]; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel [*āqēb*]” — anticipates the covenant “seed” of Jacob [*ya’āqōb*, cf. Jacob as the grabber of his brother’s “heel” in Genesis 25:26] and Christ as the “seed” who will bruise or crush the serpent’s head. The etiological explanation for Seth’s naming, describes Seth as an “appointed” *zera*‘ — i.e., a covenant, chosen “seed”: “And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name **Seth** [*šēt*]: For God, said she, **hath appointed** [*šāt*] me **another seed** [*zera*‘] instead of Abel, whom Cain slew” (Genesis 4:25; cf. Christ as the “seed” begotten in the “likeness” and after the “image” of his Father, comparing Genesis 5:1–3 with D&C 107:42–43).

14. On the relationship between the Enochic, Noahic, and Abrahamic covenants and other gospel covenants, see Kerry Muhlestein, Joshua M. Sears, and Avram R. Shannon, “New and Everlasting: The Relationship between Gospel Covenants in History,” *Religious Educator* 21, no. 2 (2020): 21–40; Kerry Muhlestein, “Recognizing the Everlasting Covenant in the Scriptures,” *Religious Educator* 21, no. 2 (2020): 41–71.

15. See further Genesis 12:7; 13:15–16; 15:3–5; 16:10; 17:7–12, 19; 21:12–13; 22:17–18; 24:7, 60; 26:3–4, 24; 28:4, 13–14; 32:12; 35:12; 46:7; 47:19, 23–24; 48:4, 11, 19.

Jacob, and Joseph, each in their turn, secured the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant through their faithfulness and righteous desires, although they, like Abraham and Sarah, do not receive all the blessings during mortality (see Hebrews 11:13).¹⁶ Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, in Nephi's small plates record, evidence a near-obsession with the concept of "seed" as a key component of the divine covenant.¹⁷ Nephi ties the concept of the preservation of "seed" or posterity in fulfillment of divine covenant into Isaiah's onomastic Shear-jashub theme, a theme built from his son's name (*šě'ār-yāšûb* = "a remnant shall return") foretelling both divine judgment and mercy upon Israel, when he uses the phrase "remnant of our seed" (1 Nephi 15:13–14; 2 Nephi 30:3–4),¹⁸ reflecting his concern for the divine judgments and mercy upon his and his brothers' "seed." This concern was shared by Nephi's successors.¹⁹

That this concept was of tremendous importance to Moroni himself is evidenced by his creation of the "title of liberty" or "standard of liberty" as a symbol of the miraculous preservation of a "remnant of the seed of Joseph" (Alma 46:20–27; see especially vv. 23, 27).²⁰ Moroni had drawn inspiration for this covenant and the symbolic action involving the tearing of garments and coats that accompanied the making of this covenant, from the patriarch Jacob's prophecy regarding the "remnant" of the coat of Joseph: "Even as this remnant of garment of my son's hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder

16. Hebrews 11:13: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

17. 1 Nephi 2:23–24; 4:14; 5:17–19; 6:6; 7:1; 8:3; 12:1, 8–10, 14–15, 19–20; 13:10–14, 30–31, 34–35, 38–41; 14:2; 15:13–14, 18; 16:11; 20:19 (quoting Isaiah); 22:7–9; 2 Nephi 1:5, 31–32; 3:2–3, 11, 16, 23–24; 4:2, 7, 9, 11; 5:11, 23, 25; 9:53; 10:19; 16:13 (quoting Isaiah); 25:21; 26:15; 28:2; 29:2, 14; 30:3–4; see also Jacob 2:12, 30.

18. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Ominous Onomastics: Symbolic Naming and Paronomasia in Old Testament Prophecy," in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2017), 22–25.

19. See Moroni₁'s use of the title of liberty and the story of Joseph's coat (Alma 46:23–24, 27); Mormon's remarks in 3 Nephi 5:23–24; 10:16–17; 29:8; 4 Nephi 1:49; Mormon 5:9, 12 (cf. 5:24); 7:1, 10; and Moroni₂'s remarks in Ether 13:6–10. See also the post-resurrection teachings of Jesus in 3 Nephi 15:12; 16:4; 20:10, 16; 21:2, 4, 12, 22–23, 26.

20. See Matthew L. Bowen, "We Are a Remnant of the Seed of Joseph": Moroni's Interpretive Use of Joseph's Coat and the Martial *nēs*-Imagery of Isaiah 11:11–12," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 169–92.

of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment" (Alma 46:24). Moroni considered the miraculous preservation of the Nephite nation as a fulfillment of covenants made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — i.e., the Abrahamic covenant (see especially Alma 44:4).²¹

Before the Lamanite conquest of the city of Nephi and after, Moroni *always* regarded the preservation of the Nephite nation a matter of covenant. Near the end of his letter, Moroni states, "And now behold, I Moroni am constrained, according to **the covenant** [cf. Hebrew *habbērit*] which **I have made** [*kāratî*, "I have cut"],²² to keep the commandments of my God. Therefore I would that ye should adhere to the word of God" (Alma 60:34). Moroni viewed the failure of Nephite government officials to support himself and Helaman and their troops as evidence of their infidelity to the covenant concluded in Alma 46:17–27 and as the consequences of such infidelity.

Moroni Addresses Parhoron and the Other Government Officials in Zarahemla

The Lamanite conquest of the Nephite city of Nephihah caused Moroni, the supreme Nephite military leader, to become "exceeding sorrowful" and to "beg[i]n to doubt" the chances of Nephite success in repelling the Lamanite invasion (Alma 59:11). Indeed, "all his chief captains ... doubted and marvelled ... because of the wickedness of the people, ... because of the success of the Lamanites over them." This resulted in an exchange of letters between Moroni and Parhoron.²³

Recognizing that Parhoron is not Moroni's only addressee is crucial to understanding the force of his word-irony involving Zarahemla. Although Latter-day Saints sometimes frame Alma 60 as an invective-filled and even misguided personal letter from Moroni to Parhoron, the opening of Moroni's letter makes it clear that Parhoron is

21. Moroni makes clear his view on the covenant nature of divine preservation in his words to Zerahemnah in Alma 44:4: "Now ye see that this is the true faith of God. Yea, ye see that God will support and keep and preserve us so long as we are faithful unto him and unto our faith and religion. And never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith."

22. Cf. Jared T. Parker, "Cutting Covenants," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. D. Kelly Ogden, Jared W. Ludlow, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 109–28.

23. See "Why Was Moroni's Correspondence with Pahoran Significant?" *KnoWhys*, Book of Mormon Central, August 18, 2016, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-was-moronis-correspondence-with-pahoran-significant>.

not his only addressee. Moroni also addresses the other high government officials and bureaucrats working under Parhoron's authority in Zarahemla, the Nephite-Mulochite capital during this era: "Behold, I direct mine epistle to Parhoron in the city of Zarahemla, which is the chief judge and the governor over the land, and also to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war" (Alma 60:1). This emphasis on plural addressees continues in the next verse: "For behold, I have somewhat to say unto them by the way of condemnation. For behold, ye yourselves know that ye have been appointed to gather together men and arm them" (Alma 60:2).

The plural pronoun "you" occurs twelve times in Alma 60:3, 7–8, 23, 27, 29–30, 32, 35 and the possessive pronoun "your" occurs twenty-eight times in Alma 60:5–7, 9–12, 18, 20, 28–29, 31–36. The distinctively plural reflexive pronoun "yourselves" occurs four times in vv. 2, 10, 18, 29. The pronoun "ye," which is usually plural in English usage and ambivalently has singular or plural referents in the Book of Mormon, occurs forty-nine times in Alma 60:2, 5, 8–13, 18–25, 29–31, 33–35. Notably, the prevalingly singular pronouns "thou," "thy/thine," "thee," and "thysself" occur nowhere in Moroni's letter, which suggests that all instances of "ye" here are to be taken as plural. Indeed, Moroni's addressing the recipients as "my beloved brethren" in Alma 60:10 confirms the case beyond doubt: Moroni addresses his letter to the leadership in Zarahemla generally, of whom Parhoron is "chief" (Alma 60:1). The point is made even more clearly in Moroni's recitation of the revelation given to him: "Behold, the Lord saith unto me: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them" (Alma 60:33). To read Moroni's letter as a misguided personal critique of Parhoron's individual leadership is to misread the letter entirely.²⁴

Within the spatial bounds of Moroni's rhetoric, "Zarahemla" (Alma 60:1, 30) also serves as a kind of metonym for the Nephite government (cf. Washington as a metonym for the United States government). Moroni also refers to "the wickedness which first commenced at our **head**" (Alma 60:15) and "it will be expedient that

24. For related insights into this and other misreadings of Moroni's epistle to Parhoron, see Duane Boyce, "Captain Moroni's Revelation," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 155–59; and Duane Boyce, "'Beloved by All the People': A Fresh Look at Captain Moroni," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 181–204, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/beloved-by-all-the-people-a-fresh-look-at-captain-moroni/>.

we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great **head** of our government" (Alma 60:24). "Head" here refers to Zarahemla, which constituted the "head" or capital (< Latin *caput* = "head") city.²⁵

**"Can You Suppose That the Lord Will Spare You?":
Moroni's Acerbic and Word-irony Involving
the Meaning of Zarahemla**

Parhoron, the son of Nephihah (Alma 50:39–40), seems to have been a descendant of Nephi, as perhaps indicated by his father's *Nephitish* name (Nephi + the suffix [i]hah). On the other hand, many, and maybe most, of the political leadership in Zarahemla, were descendants of Muloch through his descendant, Zarahemla. Any wordplay or word-irony involving this name would necessarily resonate even more acutely with descendants — the "seed" — of Muloch and Zarahemla:

Behold, I wait for assistance from you. And except ye do administer unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even into the land of **Zarahemla**, and smite you with the sword, insomuch that ye can have no more power to impede the progress of this people in the cause of our freedom. For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people. Behold, can you suppose that the Lord will **spare** [Hebrew *yahmōl*] you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites when it is the tradition of their fathers that hath caused their hatred — yea, and it has been redoubled by those who have dissented from us — while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world? (Alma 60:30–32)

The etymological "sparing" or "compassion" in the name *Zarahemla* ("seed of compassion," "seed of sparing") is implicitly divine compassion or sparing. Moroni avers that no expectation — covenant or otherwise — will spare government officials in Zarahemla guilty of malfeasance and

25. This concept can be readily discerned in Isaiah 7:8–9, where the prophet describes Damascus as "head" (capital city) of Syria (Aram) and Rezin as "head" (of state) in the capital at Damascus. He describes Samaria as the "head" (capital city) of Israel (Ephraim) and Pekah, "Remaliah's son," as "head" (of state) in the capital at Samaria: "For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

covenant violation from divine judgment — including retribution from Moroni’s own sword. The leader’s malfeasance and covenant violation had been particularly and painfully evident in the uncompassionate neglect of their own countrymen who were fighting for national preservation. Moroni’s question cuts to the heart of the nature of divine covenants: will the Lord spare (*yaḥmōl* < *ḥml*)²⁶ a people and punish their traditional enemies merely on the basis of covenant status or chosenness? Or, put another way, can a covenant people rely upon divine sparing and the destruction of their enemies as a covenant entitlement (rather than a conditional covenant blessing)? Moroni’s question clearly presumes a negative answer.

It should not pass without notice that Moroni appeals to Yahweh as the suzerain enforcer of the covenant. Accordingly, Moroni claims divine authority for himself as a leader of the Lord’s covenant people — “his righteous people” (Alma 60:31). He even goes so far as to invoke the ancient covenant image of the Lord as Divine Warrior²⁷ when he invokes the image of the Lord “com[ing] out in judgment against the Lamanites,” which many Nephites in Zarahemla had come to expect as a covenant entitlement.

The Covenant Preservation of the True “Seed of Sparing”

Moroni goes further still. He advocates that he and his supporters — rather than the Nephite leaders and bureaucrats in Zarahemla — constitute the Lord’s “righteous people” (v. 31), the former qualifying for the Lord’s sparing, even at the expense of the latter: “And behold, if ye will not do this, I come unto you speedily. For behold, God will not suffer that we should perish with hunger. Therefore he will give unto us of your food, even if it must be by the sword. Now see that ye fulfil the word of God” (Alma 60:35).

Because they are faithful to the covenant, Moroni and his supporters are the true *seed of sparing*. Thus, “God will not suffer” them “[to] perish with hunger.” Since the name Zarahemla, as “seed of compassion” or “seed of sparing,” bespeaks covenant preservation, Moroni and those loyal to the same cause (i.e., “the cause of liberty,” Alma 51:17) can expect

26. On the form *yaḥmōl*, see, e.g., Malachi 3:17.

27. For an excellent treatment of the topic of the Lord as Divine Warrior and Jacob’s use of the concept in his covenant speech in 2 Nephi 6–10, see Daniel Belnap, “‘I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee’: The Divine Warrior in Jacob’s Speech of 2 Nephi 6–10,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1 (2008): 20–39.

divine assistance, while the uncompassionate leaders, especially those who have allied themselves with the would-be vassal king Pachus (and by extension the Lamanite king Ammoron) as described in Alma 62:6–9, cannot expect divine assistance, but rather divine judgment — all of this because of the covenant detailed in Alma 46:17–27.

Conclusion

Like several other Book of Mormon texts, Moroni's letter to Parhoron with its threat to him and to the leaders of the Nephite nation behind the lines in Zarahemla plays on the meaning of Zarahemla ("seed of compassion" or "seed of sparing") and its covenant overtones in terms of the Hebrew verb *hml*, "spare," "have compassion": "behold, I come unto you, even into the land of **Zarahemla**, and smite you with the sword ... For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people. Behold, can you suppose that the Lord **will spare** [*yahmōl*] you...?" (Alma 60:30–32). The first element in Zarahemla, *zera'* ("seed"), constitutes a key Abrahamic covenant term in the ancient Israelite and Nephite religious worldview. Recognizing the covenant background of Moroni's rhetoric, including the concept that divine preservation (or sparing) requires covenant faithfulness and righteousness, helps us more fully appreciate the strength of Moroni's threat. The righteous, faithful, and loyal in the manner described by Moroni himself in Alma 44:4 and 46:20–27 could expect divine preservation or "sparing," and the uncompassionate, unrighteous, and disloyal had no promise of divine sparing. Indeed, Moroni himself would enforce the divine judgment for the covenant violations of the latter.

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