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Book of Mormon Minute, Volume 3: Alma

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Abstract: The Book of Mormon Minute is a verse-by-verse commentary that was custom-designed for the ScripturePlus app. Each installment covers one to three verses, and ideally can be read in one minute. This commentary focuses on the subtle yet important hand of Mormon in telling the Nephite story. The author, Brant Gardner, will often highlight ways that Mormon makes this narrative truly stunning. In addition, Gardner will touch on points of Nephite history and culture. This commentary is an excellent way to deeply engage with every verse in the Book of Mormon in an easy, digestible way.

Preface

The Book of Mormon Minute commentary was created for the ScripturePlus app. It continues to be part of the app. The idea for the commentary was to have something that could be read in a short amount of time yet provide illumination for a set of verses. This version is lightly edited from the text as it appears in the app. It simply changes the format to provide a different way to access the information for those for whom it makes their experience with the text and the commentary easier.

Because the author has also written a more formal commentary on the Book of Mormon (*Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Kofford Books, 2007), it is appropriate to note the way in which the Book of Mormon Minutes differs from that more complete commentary. The Book of Mormon Minutes were written fresh, without directly consulting *Second Witness*. Thus, they may contain insights that at times differ from those in *Second Witness* because they were written over fifteen years later, and the author must have learned something in the interim. The Book of Mormon Minutes were also written with a more general audience in mind.

One place where there is a continuation of an aspect of *Second Witness* and a difference from the text in the app is that this edition standardizes on Yahweh as the name for the pre-Mortal Jesus rather than the more heavily Anglicized name Yahweh. The reason is that it is hoped that the shift in name can free readers from some ideas that might be brought to the text based on the way that name has been used.

Beginning with the book of Mosiah, this commentary uses subscript numbers to differentiate between individuals sharing the same name. In the book of Alma, we have Alma₂, the son of Alma₁. Alma₂'s son Helaman₁ will also have a son named Helaman₂, so that name will also appear with a subscript. Two Lehis appear in the book of Alma. Lehi₁ refers to the patriarch who led his family out of Jerusalem. Lehi₂ refers to one of Captain Moroni's generals. Although Mormon's son, Moroni, shares a name with Captain Moroni in the book of Alma, the two do not appear together and so Captain Moroni does not appear with a subscript number.

The Book of Alma

Alma 1

Book of Alma: Header

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.

Comments

When the 116 pages were lost, we lost the beginning of what Mormon intended to be his book. We also lost the beginning of the book of Mosiah. That means that the first time we see the way Mormon edits a whole book from the plates of Nephi is in the book of Alma. We will see that in this book, as well as all other books that he edits, Mormon provides a book header that will give us information about what comes in the book.

In the book of Mosiah, we also saw that Mormon will, at times, provide similar headers for chapters. We will see that again in the book of Alma. Those instances are times when Mormon is letting his readers know that what comes in that particular chapter has a different source than the plates of Nephi. Nephi and Jacob also provided book synopses, but the practice died out on the small plates. Mormon was consistent in everything we have from him; therefore, we expect that he was also consistent for what was lost on the 116 pages.

An interesting change occurred in this header that points out the nature of the task that John Gilbert, the compositor, had when he turned the printer's manuscript into a published book. He had to create the sentences and paragraphs himself without guidance from the manuscript. Generally, he did an excellent job. The last sentence of this header is a place where he made a mistake. It was a reasonable mistake, but a mistake nonetheless.

The 1830 edition was punctuated as: "according to the record of Alma the first, and chief judge." There were two Alma's, and this Alma was going to be the ruler, so Gilbert set it similar to names of European royalty. He saw it as "Alma the first." It has been corrected to "Alma, the first and chief judge." A small thing, but it points out how important small points of punctuation can be.

Alma 1:1

1 Now it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, from this time forward, king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, having warred a good warfare, walking uprightly before God, leaving none to reign in his stead; nevertheless he had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made.

Comments

The book of Alma begins a new phase in Nephite record keeping. It is the first time that we begin to see consistent listing of the years. In the small plates, dates had been given according to the time after Lehi's family left Jerusalem, if they were given at all. Now, we will begin to see consistent listing of the years from a new starting point. The beginning of the reign of the judges was seen as a reformulation of Nephite society, and apparently supported by a change in the way dates were recorded.

The new method of record keeping appears to come from the large plates and represents a change that organized the historical information on those plates. From this time forward, information is organized according to years. Mormon will provide the accounting of time from the beginning of the reign of the judges until the record of the birth of the Messiah, which will provide another new beginning date.

Mormon's work itself will follow the basic organization of collecting information, either by single years, or sets of years. We will see that he pays attention to time, and if there is no other reason for ending a chapter, he will end a chapter to correspond to a five-year period. Among the Maya, this was a *hotun*, a period of five years. The Maya later raised stone stelae on five-year anniversaries to summarize the history of those five-year periods. Mormon does not organize his record into five-year periods, but he does pay attention to them when he has no more important reason for ending one chapter and beginning a new one.

Nehor Introduces Priestcraft

Alma 1:2–6

2 And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.

3 And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.

4 And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

5 And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.

6 And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.

Comments

At the very beginning of the reign of the judges comes an important case. Where King Mosiah₂ had separated government from church, the two functions had been reunited in the person of Alma₂ as both leader of the church and the chief judge. This particular case covers both the religious and the political issues. The religious issues are the first to be described.

There are two critical aspects to this man's teaching. The first is that he encourages social stratification. This happens first by creating a position where religious officiators are set apart by being paid for their labors, rather than laboring with their own hands. This separation had, in the past, and now in the present case, led to being "lifted up on the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel." The appearance of costly apparel in the Nephite record is a harbinger of apostasy. This is not due to the apparel, but the social division that creates a situation where one might have costly apparel and another may not be able to have anything similar.

The second problem is even more critical. This man denies the need for the atoning mission of the Messiah. This was the message of Abinadi, which was brought to Zarahemla and reinforced in the creation of churches by Alma₁. This was also divisive to the point where there was a competing church founded. Where Alma₁ brought a church based on Abinadi, this man appears to bring a church based on the beliefs of the priests of Noah, as will be noted later.

Alma 1:7–10

7 And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.

8 Now the name of the man was Gideon; and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.

9 Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword.

10 And the man who slew him was taken by the people of the church, and was brought before Alma, to be judged according to the crimes which he had committed.

Comments

After introducing the man and his religious crimes, we arrive at his social crimes. The beginning of the incident is incited by religious differences, and the hero Gideon contends with this currently unnamed man. They come to blows, and the man slays Gideon.

Thus, there are two crimes. The judge for both crimes is Alma₂, in his position of simultaneously being the chief judge and the high priest of the church. We should note that verse 10 tells us that it was the people of the church who brought him to Alma₂. In essence, it is a hate crime murder. The murder itself was reason for judgment, but it was a crime incited by religious division.

Alma 1:11–14

11 And it came to pass that he stood before Alma and pled for himself with much boldness.

12 But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.

13 And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance.

14 Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.

Comments

Verse 12 notes that “this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people.” That statement must refer to the people under Nephite government. We do not know if it existed in Zarahemla prior to the time that the Nephites arrived, but the undercurrents we see in Zarahemla suggest that it was.

Alma₂ is defining priestcraft as teaching that the priests should be paid and not work with their hands. The implicit indictment is that this is also the introduction of a significant form of social inequality.

The second crime is attempting to enforce his religious beliefs through force, which resulted in Gideon’s death. There was no apparent controversy over whether or not the man had slain Gideon. Therefore, the law applied, and, as Alma₂ declares: “thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king.”

Alma 1:15–16

15 And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the

earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.

16 Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.

Comments

Only after the sentence is passed do we learn the name of the condemned man. It is Nehor. After the listing of his crimes, judgment is passed quickly, and he is executed. We know his name only in the short notice that he died “an ignominious death.” Nevertheless, this will not be the last we hear of the name of Nehor, or of his teachings.

Mormon prepares his readers for what will come by noting that Nehor’s death did not end the teaching of the religious ideas that Nehor had taught. Mormon uses this incident to tie Nehor’s name to the movement of increasing the ideas of priestcraft, and for the coming desires for social inequity. Mormon declares that those engaging in priestcraft did so “for the sake of riches and honor.” Thus, Mormon declares that they perpetuate the problem of social inequality that leads to internal strife throughout the Book of Mormon.

Although Mormon tells Nehor’s story succinctly, he does so intentionally. First, he tells it generically, and then associates the name only when Nehor is already convicted and on his way to an ignominious death. Mormon will begin to use Nehor’s name as a shorthand reference to these teachings whenever we see them. Although this gives the impression that these teachings had begun with Nehor, that is clearly not the case. The priests of Noah taught very similar things. What Mormon is doing is using Nehor’s name as a prejudicial association. Nehor was a convicted murderer, and therefore, we, as Mormon’s readers, are to understand that when we see a reference to the Order of the Nehors, it cannot be good.

Alma 1:17–18

17 Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.

18 And they durst not steal, for fear of the law, for such were punished; neither durst they rob, nor murder, for he that murdered was punished unto death.

Comments

These comments on law and consequences come right after the execution of Nehor. The purpose is to reiterate that the reign of the judges was also a reign of law. There were laws that were set down, but they

were laws related to actions, not beliefs. Thus, Nehor was executed for murder, not for his religious teachings, even though the Nephite nation was under a much greater social threat from the divisive teachings than it was from the single murder.

Alma 1:19–22

19 But it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church of God, and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

20 Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price.

21 Now there was a strict law among the people of the church, that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and that there should be no persecution among themselves.

22 Nevertheless, there were many among them who began to be proud, and began to contend warmly with their adversaries, even unto blows; yea, they would smite one another with their fists.

Comments

In verse 16, Mormon reminded his readers that Nehor's execution did not stop others from preaching as Nehor had. In these verses we see the beginnings of the social divisions that resulted from those teachings. Although modern readers easily see this as religious persecution, we must remember that religion and political beliefs were not clearly separated in the ancient world. Even in Zarahemla, where the creation of churches allowed for more distinction than perhaps in other cities, the connections to the right of rule would have remained. Thus, these persecutions were more than for beliefs, they were divisions in the fabric of society and the definitions of what the right way to do things should be.

While Mormon indicates that the persecution began with those not in the church persecuting those who were, those persecutions had the effect of creating further tensions. Thus, those in the church responded in kind.

What is important for Nephite society is that, because of surrounding persecutions and retaliations for beliefs, there was an increasing tendency for both those in and outside the church to become proud. In Book of Mormon terms, pride is manifest by social divisions.

Alma 1:23–25

23 Now this was in the second year of the reign of Alma, and it was a cause of much affliction to the church; yea, it was the cause of much trial with the church.

24 For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God. And also many withdrew themselves from among them.

25 Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them.

Comments

The result of the persecutions and social divisions was that many who were in the church were affected. They withdrew from the church. Accordingly, their names were “blotted out” of the church records. This does not mean that they abandoned religious thought, but rather that they shifted their religious thinking to align with the teachings that Mormon labeled with the name Nehor. This was not a major shift, but one that was probably seen as a return to an older form of religion: obeying the law of Moses but denying the Nephite emphasis on the coming Messiah. It could even have been seen as a reform.

In verse 25, Mormon begins a shift to show the more appropriate response of those in the church. They were not moved by those who persecuted, nor by those who left. They continued in their commitment to Yahweh’s commandments, certainly as pertaining to the law of Moses, but also to the understanding of the coming Messiah.

The Church of God Prospers

Alma 1:26–28

26 And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.

27 And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.

28 And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.

Comments

The response Mormon writes for the priests of the church is that they continue to uphold the Nephite standards of egalitarianism. They impart both the word of God and of their substance. They do not esteem themselves better than another. Not that they specifically were “all equal, and they did labor, every

man according to his strength.” That is virtually the definition of what Benjamin and Mosiah₂ preached about how Nephite society should be structured.

Included in the list of bad things they did not do, is they did not wear costly apparel. It isn’t the apparel that was bad, it was the idea that when clothing is costly, there is something about it that creates divisions in society.

Finally, in verse 28, the result of this particular righteous behavior is that they begin “to have continual peace again.” They obeyed Yahweh, and they began to prosper.

Alma 1:29–31

29 And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

30 And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

31 And thus they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church.

Comments

The result of obeying Yahweh’s commandments was that those who were in the church, or those who were living those commandments, began to receive the benefit of the promise of the land. They were righteous; therefore they prospered.

Mormon makes certain to point out that the reason for their prosperity was that they had the things that they needed, and shared with all who were in need (although presumably only those in the church). He concludes that they therefore became more wealthy than those who did not belong to the church. Mormon mentions “good homely cloth.” Webster’s 1828 dictionary indicates that something that is “homely” is “plain, like that which is made for common domestic use.” Since we also have the adjective “good” in the description of the cloth, it is probably intended to indicate that it is made in the home, as was much clothing in antiquity. It is an interesting contrast to the “silk and fine-twined linen.”

This is an interesting point because prosperity is typically the issue that begins to create social inequity. That is the reason that Mormon stressed that they became wealthy through their egalitarian sharing with the needy. It is also important to note that most of what made them wealthy was that they had “whatsoever they stood in need.” They had food and shelter. They did have precious things, but the emphasis is

not on the trappings of wealth, but rather that the true definition of wealth is the ability to provide for both one's own needs and to assist with others who might yet be in need.

Alma 1:32–33

32 For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness; nevertheless, the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible.

33 And it came to pass that by thus exercising the law upon them, every man suffering according to that which he had done, they became more still, and durst not commit any wickedness if it were known; therefore, there was much peace among the people of Nephi until the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

The contrast with the egalitarian members of the church is seen in the description of those who are not in the church. Mormon does not paint a pretty picture of them. They “indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness . . . in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel.”

What is hard to see behind the way Mormon paints this picture is that there is prosperity in all the community. Even though Mormon declared that those in the church were wealthier, the very fact that those not in the church could wear costly apparel tells us that they, too, were prospering. The difference is that Mormon defines prosperity differently. It is not simply possessions, but the nature of the person who might have possessions. Thus, prospering was more about caring for others than accumulating personal costly apparel.

Mormon often uses the term “continual peace” as a description of times of the absence of conflict and presence of prosperity. The definition of “continual” is perhaps ironic as there are times where it lasts hardly a year, and rarely as many as three or more years. As with other descriptions of peace and prosperity, Mormon mentions this prosperous time to prepare his readers for its dissolution, which begins in the next chapter.

In the 1830 edition, there was no chapter ending at this point. Our current chapters 1 through 3 were all part of the original chapter I. Thus, right after the statement that there was much peace is the declaration of its duration: “until the fifth year of the reign of the judges. That year and its story begin in the next chapter, and the separation gave Orson Pratt the subject change on which to make a new chapter division.

Alma 2

Amlici Seeks to Become King

Alma 2:1–2

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—

2 Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people.

Comments

Originally part of the same chapter, Mormon begins with events of the first year of the reign of the judges, and now discusses the fifth year. This more frequent marking of the years will continue through the end of 4 Nephi. At the end of our current Alma, chapter 1, Mormon had set the stage by showing that there was prosperity and peace. The real events now unfold as that peace is broken by “a contention among the people.” Although Nephi had originally indicated that the large plates would discuss the wars and contentions of his people, it is in Mormon’s editing that we more clearly see that wars are with external enemies, and contentions come from within. This incident clearly comes from within.

We have two pieces of information about Amlici. The first is that he is after the Order of Nehor, though instead of the name, we get the description of Nehor the murderer. That defines Amlici as a point of social contention, but the second piece of information is even more divisive. Amlici desires to be king. Only five years after the monarchy was dissolved and the reign of the judges implemented, there was a movement to return to kingship. This will not be the only time that we will see this desire for a return to a monarchy dividing Zarahemla society.

Alma 2:3–6

3 Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.

4 Therefore, if it were possible that Amlici should gain the voice of the people, he, being a wicked man, would deprive them of their rights and privileges of the church; for it was his intent to destroy the church of God.

5 And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land, every man according to his mind, whether it were for or against Amlici, in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.

6 And thus they did assemble themselves together to cast in their voices concerning the matter; and they were laid before the judges.

Comments

These verses provide the only description of how the voice of the people worked. There is no indication of ballots, but rather “that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the line, every man according to his mind.” This description makes it appear that groups who felt the same way about a topic gathered together. Next, there was “much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another.” It would appear that they argued back and forth to try to convince others.

We don’t know how they decided who won the voice of the people. We can only tell that they “cast in their voices,” not cast ballots. This would appear to indicate that if someone changed their mind, they might physically move to the group that they agreed with. After some time, it would become obvious which group was larger. How this worked across the whole of the population is not at all clear. It is important for many modern readings concerning the idea of “voice of the people” that we understand that the use of “voice” was not metaphorical, and that it did not represent the modern concept of ballots.

Alma 2:7–10

7 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came against Amlici, that he was not made king over the people.

8 Now this did cause much joy in the hearts of those who were against him; but Amlici did stir up those who were in his favor to anger against those who were not in his favor.

9 And it came to pass that they gathered themselves together, and did consecrate Amlici to be their king.

10 Now when Amlici was made king over them he commanded them that they should take up arms against their brethren; and this he did that he might subject them to him.

Comments

The sanctioned method of change in the laws decided against Amlici's bid to become king. However, he did not accept that result. There were sufficient numbers of followers that he attempted to enforce the minority choice through civil war.

In order for this to happen, there had to have been a large number who desired to follow Amlici. It is possible, although there is no evidence in the text, that these were members of important royal lineages that might have been in line to become king in the absence of Mosiah₂'s sons, but the change in the nature of government took away their opportunity. Then, after five years of perhaps consolidating their followers, they attempted to return to power.

Amlici Leads His Followers to Battle with the Nephites

Alma 2:11

11 Now the people of Amlici were distinguished by the name of Amlici, being called Amlicites; and the remainder were called Nephites, or the people of God.

Comments

The intertwining of religion and politics is evidenced in the way Mormon defines the word "Nephites." We know that that was the designation of the political entity, but Mormon expands that to be "the people of God."

In contrast, the people of Amlici were designated by his name. Royal Skousen found that there were some spelling variations in the name, and that a name we will see later, Amalekites, may have been essentially the same name. In the manuscript, it appears that it was a hard "c" in name Amlici, and the emphasis may have been on the first syllable. Thus, it is entirely possible that they were the same designation.

While that might suggest that they were the same people, the timings and locations of the names suggest different peoples. However, what links them is the desire for kings. In Hebrew, the *mlk* root designates "king." It appears that Mormon intentionally designates many peoples who desired a return to the monarchy, or otherwise represented a contention within Nephite society, with names using the *mlk* root. Thus, Amlicite (pronounced Amlikite) and Amalekite might be essentially the same name, but not because they represented the same people. Rather, they represented the same idea, and therefore, Mormon gave them a name by which Mormon appears to have assumed his readers would understand that they were similar in their desires.

Alma 2:12–14

12 Therefore the people of the Nephites were aware of the intent of the Amlicites, and therefore they did prepare to meet them; yea, they did arm themselves with swords, and with cimeters, and with

bows, and with arrows, and with stones, and with slings, and with all manner of weapons of war, of every kind.

13 And thus they were prepared to meet the Amlicites at the time of their coming. And there were appointed captains, and higher captains, and chief captains, according to their numbers.

14 And it came to pass that Amlici did arm his men with all manner of weapons of war of every kind; and he also appointed rulers and leaders over his people, to lead them to war against their brethren.

Comments

Throughout the Book of Mormon, there is evidence that there were no standing armies. This is the way that many ancient cultures worked, and specifically those in Mesoamerica where many scholars would place the Book of Mormon events. Therefore, it isn't surprising that when hostilities erupted, each side was quickly armed. In many cases, the arms were simply repurposed hunting weapons, but it was also probable that many men would have military weapons available in the chance that they were called to defend their lands.

Thus, there was no need to call up armies because there were no armies. Those who decided to fight simply picked up their weapons and gathered with those who were of a like mind. Note that it is not until the Nephites are preparing to meet the Amlicites that they appoint captains and higher captains. There was no standing army which already had those positions filled.

Alma 2:15–18

15 And it came to pass that the Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla, and there they began to make war with the Nephites.

16 Now Alma, being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains, and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle.

17 And they began to slay the Amlicites upon the hill east of Sidon. And the Amlicites did contend with the Nephites with great strength, insomuch that many of the Nephites did fall before the Amlicites.

18 Nevertheless the Lord did strengthen the hand of the Nephites, that they slew the Amlicites with great slaughter, that they began to flee before them.

Comments

One difference between Mormon's editing of the large plates and what we saw from the writers on the small plates is that Mormon spends more time on the battles and wars than did those earlier writers. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the fact that the large plates were intended to record the wars and contentions of the people, and therefore more of that information was available.

Perhaps Mormon's career in the military made him more sensitive to military matters. In spite of the larger amount of writing about wars, it isn't typically the wars themselves that interest Mormon. He is interested in the people involved in them, and the lessons to be learned from them. In this case, he notes that Alma₂ himself leads the armies, and the Nephites began to defeat the Amlicites. Of course, that was due to Yahweh, who "did strengthen the hand of the Nephites."

Alma 2:19–22

19 And it came to pass that the Nephites did pursue the Amlicites all that day, and did slay them with much slaughter, insomuch that there were slain of the Amlicites twelve thousand five hundred thirty and two souls; and there were slain of the Nephites six thousand five hundred sixty and two souls.

20 And it came to pass that when Alma could pursue the Amlicites no longer he caused that his people should pitch their tents in the valley of Gideon, the valley being called after that Gideon who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword; and in this valley the Nephites did pitch their tents for the night.

21 And Alma sent spies to follow the remnant of the Amlicites, that he might know of their plans and their plots, whereby he might guard himself against them, that he might preserve his people from being destroyed.

22 Now those whom he had sent out to watch the camp of the Amlicites were called Zeram, and Amnor, and Manti, and Limher; these were they who went out with their men to watch the camp of the Amlicites.

Comments

The Nephites pursue the Amlicites but pause in the pursuit. They send spies to see what has happened. Of course, this is a typical military tactic, but Mormon reports it because it is important to the story that continues. The importance of the spies is related in the next verses.

Amlicites Unite with the Lamanites

Alma 2:23–26

23 And it came to pass that on the morrow they returned into the camp of the Nephites in great haste, being greatly astonished, and struck with much fear, saying:

24 Behold, we followed the camp of the Amlicites, and to our great astonishment, in the land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla, in the course of the land of Nephi, we saw a numerous host of the Lamanites; and behold, the Amlicites have joined them;

25 And they are upon our brethren in that land; and they are fleeing before them with their flocks, and their wives, and their children, towards our city; and except we make haste they obtain possession of our city, and our fathers, and our wives, and our children be slain.

26 And it came to pass that the people of Nephi took their tents, and departed out of the valley of Gideon towards their city, which was the city of Zarahemla.

Comments

The Amlicites met a large Lamanite army and joined them. Of course, by the fact of rebellion they had become enemies of the Nephites, and therefore considered Lamanites. Reading between the lines of the story, it is possible that this joining of forces was part of the plan. Perhaps, had the Amlicites been successful, the Lamanites would have invited them and formed a new alliance. In this case, the Amlicites are fleeing and meet with the Lamanites.

It is that fact itself that suggests that there may have been some prior understanding. It is difficult to imagine an army in enemy territory passively waiting to accept a large number of armed men running quickly towards them. It would surely have been bloodshed first and questions later. If, however, the meeting had been arranged, it would explain why the Amlicites survived the encounter.

The new army was greater than the force that Alma₂ led, so the Nephites retreated towards Zarahemla, perhaps as a more defensible position, perhaps as the location for reinforcements.

Alma 2:27–29

27 And behold, as they were crossing the river Sidon, the Lamanites and the Amlicites, being as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea, came upon them to destroy them.

28 Nevertheless, the Nephites being strengthened by the hand of the Lord, having prayed mightily to him that he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, therefore the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them, and the Lamanites and the Amlicites did fall before them.

29 And it came to pass that Alma fought with Amlici with the sword, face to face; and they did contend mightily, one with another.

Comments

Another aspect of ancient warfare was the importance of the leader in the battles. It was not unusual for Alma₂ to engage with Amlici. It is probable that they were distinguished by battle flags or clothing so that their own armies, and also their enemies, would know where they were. It is also not unusual that the victor in this individual battle would be considered the victor in the overall battle.

Thus, Alma₂ and Amlici face each other directly. Although this sounds like a battle of champions, it appears that the battle continued around them. They were the important focus, but not the sole combatants.

Alma 2:30–33

30 And it came to pass that Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried, saying: O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people.

31 Now when Alma had said these words he contended again with Amlici; and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword.

32 And he also contended with the king of the Lamanites; but the king of the Lamanites fled back from before Alma and sent his guards to contend with Alma.

33 But Alma, with his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drove them back.

Comments

Alma₂ invokes Yahweh's aid and defeats Amlici. While this might have ended a war with the Amlicites, there was a king of the Lamanites as well. That king retreated and sent guards to battle with Alma₂, and certainly with Alma₂'s guards. They are repulsed.

The point, from Mormon's point of view, is that Yahweh's hand is evident in the battle. Alma₂ is righteous, and therefore is protected against those who would fight against him. Mormon doesn't specifically invoke the promise of the land but expects that his readers understand that it is being dramatically fulfilled.

Alma 2:34–38

34 And thus he cleared the ground, or rather the bank, which was on the west of the river Sidon, throwing the bodies of the Lamanites who had been slain into the waters of Sidon, that thereby his people might have room to cross and contend with the Lamanites and the Amlicites on the west side of the river Sidon.

35 And it came to pass that when they had all crossed the river Sidon that the Lamanites and the Amlicites began to flee before them, notwithstanding they were so numerous that they could not be numbered.

36 And they fled before the Nephites towards the wilderness which was west and north, away beyond the borders of the land; and the Nephites did pursue them with their might, and did slay them.

37 Yea, they were met on every hand, and slain and driven, until they were scattered on the west, and on the north, until they had reached the wilderness, which was called Hermounts; and it was that part of the wilderness which was infested by wild and ravenous beasts.

38 And it came to pass that many died in the wilderness of their wounds, and were devoured by those beasts and also the vultures of the air; and their bones have been found, and have been heaped up on the earth.

Comments

When the combined armies of the Amlicites and Lamanites are forced across the river Sidon, they appear to understand that they have been defeated, and therefore they begin to flee the battlefield. The miracle of the victory is emphasized when Mormon notes that those who were defeated “were so numerous that they could not be numbered.”

The combined Amlicite and Lamanite armies flee into the wilderness to the northwest of the Nephite lands, even though Lamanites typically enter Nephite lands from the south. This suggests that they were fleeing, and that their typical means of entrance was blocked by the Nephite armies.

We do not hear of many incursions from the west, and these verses help readers understand why. This was a dangerous wilderness. Mormon declares that many who fled in that direction did not survive, but fell to the beasts of the wilderness.

Although our current chapter ends here, Mormon’s original chapter continues without a break. The story of the war is over, but Mormon originally included the aftermath as part of his whole chapter. That story now comes in the next chapter.

Alma 3

Alma 3:1–3

1 And it came to pass that the Nephites who were not slain by the weapons of war, after having buried those who had been slain—now the number of the slain were not numbered, because of the greatness of their number—after they had finished burying their dead they all returned to their lands, and to their houses, and their wives, and their children.

2 Now many women and children had been slain with the sword, and also many of their flocks and their herds; and also many of their fields of grain were destroyed, for they were trodden down by the hosts of men.

3 And now as many of the Lamanites and the Amlicites who had been slain upon the bank of the river Sidon were cast into the waters of Sidon; and behold their bones are in the depths of the sea, and they are many.

Comments

Note the difference in the way the Nephite dead are treated as opposed to the Lamanite or Amlicite dead. The Nephite dead are buried. We do not know anything about the reasons for burial, but certainly it was a form of respect for their dead. In contrast, the Lamanites and Amlicites were left without burial. They were specifically thrown into the waters of the Sidon to be carried to the sea. It was clearly an intentional division in the treatment of the dead, and certainly intended to disrespect the Lamanite and Amlicite dead.

We are not told in what part of the year this war occurred, but it was some time after planting and before the harvest. When the fields were destroyed it would have led to the compound problem of the deaths of many of the men, and then the loss of the crops themselves. There was anguish for the people who were lost, and the specter of a coming famine.

The Amlicites Marked Themselves

Alma 3:4–5

4 And the Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites; nevertheless they had not shorn their heads like unto the Lamanites.

5 Now the heads of the Lamanites were shorn; and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them, and their bows, and their arrows, and their stones, and their slings, and so forth.

Comments

After noting that Amlicite and Lamanite bodies were tossed into the river, Mormon indicates how they were distinguished. The first method of distinguishing Amlicite (or even Nephite) bodies from Lamanites was that they had shaved their heads. While Mormon tells his readers that the Amlicites were distinguishable from Nephites because they had marked themselves with red on their foreheads, the Lamanites were easily seen because they had shaved their heads.

These two features suggest two different reasons for the differences. For the Lamanites, it may be that the shorn heads, if they were completely shorn, indicated that they were not going to be captured in battle. In Maya art, the act of capturing an enemy is represented by the victor grabbing hair that was pulled back. This hairstyle might be termed a ponytail, but it was worn higher on the head, and it is suspected that it was meant to represent corn tassels.

The Amlicite mark is probably confirmation that the meeting with the Lamanites was prearranged. If they were running toward the Lamanites with weapons in hand, the prearranged visual symbol would have told the Lamanites that these were not the enemy, even though they might appear to come in battle mode.

Alma 3:6–10

6 And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.

7 And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women.

8 And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

9 And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

10 Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.

Comments

These verses parallel the description Nephi gave in 2 Nephi 5:20–23 concerning the curse on the Lamanites. In 2 Nephi 5:21 a “skin of blackness” is mentioned during the description of the curse. In Alma 3:6, there is a dark skin which was a mark of the curse. Importantly, it is not the curse itself. In the discussion of 2 Nephi 5:21, it was noted that there is no evidence that the dark skin or the “skin of blackness” ever created a visible difference among the peoples. It was a metaphorical condition that perhaps people believed that they could perceive, but which was based on unrighteousness rather than pigment.

It is important, therefore, to remember that when Mormon is describing the visual differences, he mentioned the Lamanite shorn heads. Had all Nephite, and the Amlicites who were recently Nephites themselves, had a dramatically different skin color, there would have been no reason to note the shaved head as a distinguishing mark.

In both 2 Nephi 5:23 and in Alma 3:9, it is a curse that would come from intermarriage, but it is a cursing that is dependent upon righteousness, not genetics. Note that in 2 Nephi 5:22–23 it says: “And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing.”

The parallel in verse 8 above that the prohibition that was part of the curse was instituted: “that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.”

Alma 3:11–12

11 And it came to pass that whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed those records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and also in the tradition of their fathers, which were correct, who believed in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth—

12 And it is they who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.

Comments

The contrast to the unrighteous, and therefore, cursed, Lamanites were the righteous Nephites, “who believed in the commandments of God and kept them.” The difference was not visual, but rather spiritual.

It is interesting that Mormon notes that it is the Nephites “who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.” In verse 11, Mormon specifically indicates that Nephites should not mix with Lamanites and therefore not believe in Lamanite traditions, but rather in Nephite records. Even if no records are implied, there is certainly an implication that Lamanites told

and believed a very different history than did the Nephites. Mormon ties their truth to the “records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem,” or the brass plates.

Alma 3:13–17

13 Now we will return again to the Amlicites, for they also had a mark set upon them; yea, they set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads.

14 Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.

15 And again: I will set a mark upon him that minglETH his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also.

16 And again: I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed.

17 And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed; and I will bless thee, and whomsoever shall be called thy seed, henceforth and forever; and these were the promises of the Lord unto Nephi and to his seed.

Comments

After the aside about the Lamanites, Mormon returns to the Amlicites. That return highlights the reason that he inserted the information about the curse on the Lamanites. The marking of the Amlicites became a symbolic indication that they had mingled with the Lamanites, and perhaps that they believed something of the traditions of the Lamanites. Thus, they were also cursed, and the mark was the symbolic indication and acceptance of that cursing.

By mingling with the Lamanites, the Amlicites were no more Nephites. “And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed.” After that statement, it is also clear that such people who left the Nephites were no longer covered by the Nephite promise of the land.

Alma 3:18–19

18 Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

19 Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation.

Comments

Mormon closes his discussion of the curse by noting that the Amlicites had not realized that they were cursing themselves. Note the important language: “the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.” The reason for the curse was not the marking of the forehead. It was the decision to come out in open rebellion against God. The mark on the forehead was the visible sign of it, but not the cause.

Verse 19 reiterates that they brought upon themselves the curse, but the very fact that they had to mark themselves with red tells us that the rest of their skin pigment did not suddenly change. They were immediately cursed and removed from protective covenants. They were unrighteous, and the “skin of blackness” was the symbolic mark of that apostasy, not a physical sign.

Alma 3:20–24

20 Now it came to pass that not many days after the battle which was fought in the land of Zarahemla, by the Lamanites and the Amlicites, that there was another army of the Lamanites came in upon the people of Nephi, in the same place where the first army met the Amlicites.

21 And it came to pass that there was an army sent to drive them out of their land.

22 Now Alma himself being afflicted with a wound did not go up to battle at this time against the Lamanites;

23 But he sent up a numerous army against them; and they went up and slew many of the Lamanites, and drove the remainder of them out of the borders of their land.

24 And then they returned again and began to establish peace in the land, being troubled no more for a time with their enemies.

Comments

Mormon concludes the story. There is another battle and Lamanites are driven out of the land. Contrast these few details with the previous war. The difference is that there was an important lesson in the defection of the Amlicites. This was just another war. There were no lessons Mormon cared to pull from it, so he reports it succinctly. As noted, Mormon is ironically uninterested in war. He is interested in the people and the lessons to be learned from the conflicts. Mormon notes that they again “began to establish peace in the land.” As typical, this statement is simply a prelude to the next time that things go wrong.

Alma 3:25–27

25 Now all these things were done, yea, all these wars and contentions were commenced and ended in the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

26 And in one year were thousands and tens of thousands of souls sent to the eternal world, that they might reap their rewards according to their works, whether they were good or whether they were bad, to reap eternal happiness or eternal misery, according to the spirit which they listed to obey, whether it be a good spirit or a bad one.

27 For every man receiveth wages of him whom he listeth to obey, and this according to the words of the spirit of prophecy; therefore let it be according to the truth. And thus endeth the fifth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

These verses end Mormon's chapter I as structured on the manuscripts and the 1830 print edition. He closes with the end of the fifth year of the reign of the judges. As noted in the comments on Alma 1:1, the Maya called a five-year period a *hotun*, and used the *hotun* as a unit of history. Mormon pays attention to those years. In this case, both the essential story and the five-year period end, creating two reasons for Mormon's ending of this chapter before beginning a new one.

Alma 4

Many Are Baptized and Join the Church

Alma 4:1–4

1 Now it came to pass in the sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, there were no contentions nor wars in the land of Zarahemla;

2 But the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain, which were trodden under foot and destroyed by the Lamanites.

3 And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty.

4 And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God; yea, they were baptized by the hand of Alma, who had been consecrated the high priest over the people of the church, by the hand of his father Alma.

Comments

These verses tell us a little more about Mormon's interest in his records. Later in his editing he will not give this type of detail for a year in which there were no real actions. In this case, he is still early in working with the annalistic change in the large plates of Nephi. He gives the year, and some of the important information for the year.

In this case, nothing new happens. The information about what happens in the sixth year is the result of the wars of the fifth year. Those conflicts shook the Nephites and they realized that they must not have been sufficiently righteous. Without specifically invoking the promise of the land, that is clearly what is happening here. The wars were devastating, and therefore the Nephites had not been sufficiently protected; they needed to repent and become more righteous. They did, and “many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God.”

Pride and Wickedness Arise in the Church

Alma 4:5–6

5 And it came to pass in the seventh year of the reign of the judges there were about three thousand five hundred souls that united themselves to the church of God and were baptized. And thus ended the seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and there was continual peace in all that time.

6 And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.

Comments

As with the sixth year, the seventh year sees righteous Nephites. The verse ends with the phrase “continual peace,” which lets the reader know that this condition is about to change.

In the eighth year, Nephite righteousness has led to prosperity. Verse 6 provides an interesting contrast to a very similar verse, Alma 1:29, which also described Nephite prosperity. It, too, spoke of fine silks and fine-twined linen, flocks and herds, and gold and silver. The contrast was the effect of that wealth. In Alma chapter 1, the people continue in their religious principles of egalitarianism. Alma 1:30–31 describe how the people just four years earlier cared for each other and made sure that they had “no respect to persons as to those who stood in need” (Alma 12:30).

Now, in the eighth year, they also have prosperous conditions, but this time “they were lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.” The wearing of costly apparel is the signal that social ranking is returning. Seeing oneself as better than another is the Nephite definition of being lifted up in pride, and it is signaled by the very visual trappings of costly apparel.

Alma 4:7–10

7 Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma had consecrated to be teachers, and priests, and elders over the church; yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people.

8 For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure.

9 And thus, in this eighth year of the reign of the judges, there began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.

10 And thus ended the eighth year of the reign of the judges; and the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church; and thus the church began to fail in its progress.

Comments

Mormon spends more time than usual on the description of the brewing problems in Nephite society. The social segregation led to even less desirable results. Those who were able to obtain the trappings of wealth, when others could not, began to make that distinction more than visible. They “began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure.”

This was not simply a church versus non-church division. Those who were in the church had also prospered and had also begun to believe that they should show the trappings of their new prosperity. Thus, “there began to be great contentions among the people of the church.” The problem was no longer one of affiliation with the church, but to the greater social movement to hierarchy and inequality.

It is important for modern readers to note that “the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church.” When we can be seen living in such a way that we are no longer upholding the beliefs and covenants of the church, it becomes more difficult for those outside the church to believe that the church offers them anything better.

Alma 4:11–14

11 And it came to pass in the commencement of the ninth year, Alma saw the wickedness of the church, and he saw also that the example of the church began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people.

12 Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted.

13 Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ’s sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy;

14 Looking forward to that day, thus retaining a remission of their sins; being filled with great joy because of the resurrection of the dead, according to the will and power and deliverance of Jesus Christ from the bands of death.

Comments

There is no alleviating of the church's problems in the ninth year. The problems deepen with greater inequality among the people, even those who belonged to the church. This, of course, was of great concern to those who did try to maintain the beliefs and covenants of the church.

We see more details for this social division that we have seen before in Mormon's writings. Perhaps there was something similar in the book of Lehi that was lost, but we don't see it in the book of Mosiah. Perhaps a part of the reason is that Mormon is discussing the problems that arose from the introduction of the new form of Nephite society. There were two changes, one to the government and one to the religious community.

Mormon used the Amlicite uprising to show the problems that arose from the change from monarchy to judges, and perhaps these details are intended to be a parallel showing the types of issues that arose from the separation of the religious community into churches and non-churches. When it was easier for non-church people to reject egalitarianism, it became more difficult for those in the church to withstand the social pressures to follow the attractive movement to more visibility and prestige modeled so much around them.

It is certainly a problem that modern readers experience frequently. The desire to be like the attractive image of the world around us can certainly affect the way we present ourselves. Sometimes, we might similarly drift so far into the tempting trappings of the world that we forget some of the more important gospel principles we have covenanted to uphold.

Alma₂ Steps Down from the Judgment Seat

Alma 4:15–17

15 And now it came to pass that Alma, having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God, and the persecutions which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people, and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful; nevertheless the Spirit of the Lord did not fail him.

16 And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church, and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people.

17 Now this man's name was Nephiah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment-seat to judge and to govern the people.

Comments

The recombination of the religious and political aspects of Nephite society into one person ends after only nine years. Alma₂ abdicates the chief judge seat and selects another person to rule. Although the chief judge would no longer be the head of the church, he was nevertheless chosen from "among the elders of

the church,” and accepted by the voice of the people. That the voice of the people accepted such a man as their chief judge suggests that while there were increasing divisions, the larger number of people in Zarahemla were either church members, or at least followed the Nephite religious and political ideals.

Alma 4:18–20

18 Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephihah.

19 And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.

20 And thus in the commencement of the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Alma delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephihah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.

Comments

When Alma₂ leaves the chief judge position, he retained the office of high priest over the church. The reason for this was his intention to try to resolve the growing contentions in the church by going on a personal missionary journey. However, this journey would not be to make new members for the church, but to encourage those of the church to recommit to living correctly according to Nephite principles.

It is interesting that although there is an internal division among the people and Alma₂ had the opportunity to apply a political or military solution, he did not do so. It is probable that there was no simple way to apply a military solution. There was no standing police force or military. Thus, Alma₂ would have to call up neighbors to take arms against neighbors. That would hardly have had a healing result. Thus, his solution was to try to change hearts rather than enforce specific actions.

Our chapter 4 was Mormon’s chapter II. No change was made to this chapter, as it was already very short. The reason for this chapter break is that Mormon is going to change source material for his record, and he makes that change in a new chapter.

Alma 5

Alma 5: Header

The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.

Comments

Mormon wrote this chapter header. Our current scripture formatting places it before the chapter designation, perhaps to separate it from the more modern synopses that appear in italics, but which were not part of the original text.

Mormon uses chapter headers to indicate that he has changed his source from the large plates of Nephi to some other record. This header, itself, does not declare what the source is, but we find it in verse 2. It is “according to his own record.”

When Alma₂ abdicated as chief judge, he kept the portion of the large plates upon which he was recording official history. In addition, he kept a personal record of his missionary journey. Mormon uses this personal record heavily in the first part of the book of Alma, as it contains powerful sermons. When he returns to the large plate record that Alma₂ kept, it will be to descriptions of wars and contentions. As a simple division, the great sermons in the book of Alma come from Alma₂’s personal record and the war chapters come from the large plates of Nephi, as kept by Alma₂ as the official Nephite recordkeeper.

Alma₂ Preaches in the Land of Zarahemla

Alma 5:1–2

1 Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land.

2 And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record, saying:

Comments

As clarified in verse 2, Mormon is using Alma₂'s personal record for this chapter. This personal record will be the source of all but one chapter, from here to our chapter 43, which returns to the large plate record.

Mormon will typically quote heavily from Alma₂, where he typically summarized material from the large plates. To set up the quoted material, he gives this short introduction. Alma₂ intends to heal his people through repentance and a refreshed commitment to following Yahweh's gospel. He will do this by preaching, and he begins in the main city, Zarahemla.

Alma₂ Exhorts the People to Remembrance

Alma 5:3–5

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things, behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi; yea, the land which was called the land of Mormon; yea, and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon.

4 And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God.

5 And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

Comments

It is obvious that Mormon is quoting when the text begins with "I, Alma." In general, Mormon typically summarizes, but there are some texts where he felt it important to provide a full quotation. Typically, the quoted passages are important sermons. Thus, the very fact that we see "I, Alma" should warn the modern reader that Mormon felt that this was particularly important material.

As with many lessons in antiquity, Alma₂ begins with a lesson from the past. He reminds his listeners that he is related to Alma₁, who established a church in the land of Nephi and whose people that Yahweh delivered from bondage. There are two reasons for this introduction. The first is that it establishes Alma₂'s credentials in connection to the church. Secondly, and more importantly, it is a story of deliverance from bondage. While the current church members in Zarahemla are not in bondage to the Lamanites, they are still in need of Yahweh's deliverance.

Alma 5:6–8

6 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

7 Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not.

Comments

It is almost certain that not all of the congregation had been part of Alma₁'s group. We will see Alma₂ visit the descendants of the people of Limhi who had also been in bondage. Therefore, this is a generic call to remembrance of bondage. It is not that all had relatives who had been in bondage, but rather that, as members of the church, their spiritual father (who had created the concept of the church), had been in bondage.

Why should they remember that they had been in bondage? The intended parallel is between physical and spiritual bondage. While the current congregation might not be in physical bondage, Alma₂ is declaring that they are at least in danger of spiritual bondage. For their fathers in the land of Helam (see Mosiah 23:20), and now for them, the secret to salvation was in a change of heart.

The people of Limhi, more than the people of Alma₁, were in bondage due to their own sins that had removed them from the protection of the covenant of the land. The return required that they turn from that darkness to light, and when they did, Yahweh delivered them.

Alma 5:9–12

9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

11 Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

Comments

The two important questions that Alma₂ asks about those who were in bondage and repented are: “were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed?” The reason those questions are important is because they are part of the specific Nephite understanding of the law of Moses. These are not questions rooted in the law of Moses, but rather in the gospel of the coming Messiah. One of the major aspects of Nephite apostasy was to reject the coming Messiah and propose a return to living the law of Moses exclusively, even though that was likely altered somewhat as well.

This becomes very clear in verse 11 when Alma₂ mentions his father’s conversion upon hearing Abinadi. Abinadi’s discourse before Noah’s priests was heavily weighted to teaching about the coming Messiah, which had fallen out of favor in the religion practiced by Noah’s priests.

This suggests that one of the aspects of the general social move to inequality was accompanied by a rejection of the uniquely Nephite belief in the coming Messiah. For that reason, it was important for Alma₂ to emphasize it.

Alma₂ Asks a Series of Piercing Questions

Alma 5:13–14

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Comments

Alma sets up some important parallels. The people of Alma₁ and Limhi had been in bondage. They had to undergo a significant change of heart, from their past behavior to a new acceptance of the coming Messiah. Then they were saved. Alma₂ intentionally uses the word “saved,” rather than “freed from bondage,” because he is turning that past physical bondage into a metaphor for a current spiritual bondage.

The people of Alma₂ are in spiritual bondage because they have moved away from true principles, and perhaps have moved away from faith in the coming Messiah. They, too, must undergo a significant change of heart to leave behind their previous actions and turn to Yahweh, particularly to Yahweh’s early redemptive mission.

This mighty change alters our nature and even the way we present ourselves to others. To be spiritually born signifies a change. This isn’t the typical Christian born again experience, but rather a conversion of soul that should alter our behavior and our understanding. This question is asked of those who were believers and should be believers still. It is an invitation to a continual conversion.

Alma 5:15

15 Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

Comments

Doubtless there were those listening to Alma₂ who thought to themselves that Alma₂ was speaking to someone else, not them. Therefore, Alma₂ sets up questions designed to allow each person to measure themselves against what it might mean to have had a mighty change of heart.

First, and foremost, is “do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?” This is a critical question. How does one exercise faith? There are two problems in discussing faith. The first is that it is a term that comes to us through the New Testament, more than the Old Testament. It isn’t that the concept is different so much as it is a translation coming from Greek that wasn’t used to translate the correlated Hebrew terms. The second problem is that in English, the word faith is grammatically deficient in that it doesn’t have the full range of meaning in regard to parts of speech.

As a simple example, we can say “I am going for a run.” We can also say: “I run.” The word “run” can exist as both a noun and a verb. Of faith, however, we can say: “I have faith.” We cannot say: “I faith.” In Greek, the underlying verb did have a verb form. Thus, we need to have auxiliary words to help with that meaning. We “exercise faith.” Other times, the translators used “believe,” which had a similar meaning, but had the advantage of having both noun and verb forms.

For Alma₂ the question is “do ye exercise faith?” because it is the action that is important. This is not a passive belief. A change of heart does not require the simple belief in “the redemption of him who created” us, but in the living of the covenants that we have made with him who created us.

The next important aspect of this question is that it asks about redemption. This clearly points to the mortal atoning mission of the Messiah. It is the essential Nephite teaching to which a true change of heart will lead them.

Alma 5:16–18

16 I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

17 Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?

18 Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?

Comments

Alma₂ brings the questions to a very individual level. Rather than passing judgment on how we think someone else might be living the gospel, Alma₂ invites all to “imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord.” What will we be able to say in that day?

Alma₂ warns us that we will not be able to lie. We cannot say that we have done righteous work, but not have actually done what was needed. This brings up the question of what those works might be. For Alma₂, it is a return to the question of exercising faith as noted in the discussion of verse 15. What matters is what we do, where our actions are a reflection of the type of person we have become.

The reason that we cannot be saved by claiming righteous works in the last day may be because we have not done them, or we have not allowed a mighty change of heart to change us and inform us of the reasons for doing righteous works. We can have a good relationship with a neighbor, either because we ignore them or truly love them. Both might avoid a bad relationship, but only truly loving the neighbor is the result of the mighty change.

Alma 5:19

19 I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

Comments

In verse 14 Alma₂ had asked: “Have ye received his image in your countenances?” In this verse he asks: “can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?” These are clearly intentionally repeated phrases. This repetition has a superficial resemblance to repetitive resumption only because of the repeated phrase. However, the intervening material is an essential part of the sermon, and not an insertion.

This means that the repetition has a different function. This function is to emphasize aspects of how one might have the image of God on our countenances. The previous verses began with the general statement that one must exercise faith in the true God of redemption, and then spoke of the problem one would have coming before that God and not having lived according to the covenants.

This repeated phrase will set off a second set of conditions that similarly defines the conditions of those who do not fulfill their covenants. The two parallel phrases mark parallel arguments that are intended to intensify the emphasis on those traits.

There is an interesting possible cultural image in engraving the image of God on one’s countenance. In Mesoamerican non-Nephite religion, there were deity impersonators who would be the symbolic embodiment of a god by wearing that god’s mask. Thus, an available image to those familiar with Mesoamerican culture would be the image on the countenance as a representation of becoming like that deity. It would

create a very powerful metaphor to a known practice for how people might become like, or appear to have the qualities of, God.

Alma 5:20–21

20 I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?

21 I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.

Comments

The parallel sections continue. These verses parallel verses 16 and 17 in their intent. In the previous verses, as well as in these, the subject is each individual being presented to God in the final judgment, but without having experienced the mighty change of heart that leads to exercising faith.

Alma₂ declares that those who actively reject the covenants of God are effectively yielding themselves to become subjects of the Devil. The reason for this dramatic statement is that scriptures typically paint pictures in only black and white. Thus, there are two churches, the church of God or the church of the Devil (see 1 Nephi 14:10). Therefore, if one does not exercise faith in God's covenants, they must therefore belong to the opposite possibility. Of course, there is an earth-life full of the possibility of repentance before such a dramatic choice is applicable, and degrees of glory after that. Those nuances are not important to this sermon.

Alma₂ emphasizes that there is only one way to salvation and reiterates that it is “through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers.” The emphasis is on the coming Messiah. This continues to suggest that this congregation, at least, has members who have rejected the belief in the coming Messiah.

Alma 5:22–25

22 And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you?

23 Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?

24 Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?

25 I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.

Comments

These verses parallel the ideas in verses 18 through 21. The imagery depicts standing before God in the final judgment without having become clean. The reason for this emphasis is that becoming clean requires the atoning sacrifice of the coming Messiah. Alma₂ is declaring that they will not be able to stand clean before God in the final judgment, save it is through the atoning mission of the Messiah. The implication is that at least some of them have rejected that belief.

It is not clear why Alma₂ declares that some of the congregation might be considered murderers or “guilty of all manner of wickedness.” Under Nephite law, they would have been brought to justice had they actually committed murder. However, if Alma₂ is speaking of tendencies, then the tendency of those who rejected the understanding of the coming Messiah also typically followed the trends of the greater society. One of the ways that the large Mesoamerican society became richer was through conquest, and such conquests are often characterized as murders and robberies in the Book of Mormon.

Alma 5:26

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

Comments

This may be the greatest question Alma₂ asks of any audience. If you once felt the change of heart, “can ye feel so now?” Alma₂ does not assume that the change of heart is permanent, or that it need only occur once. We can experience the change of heart and then allow that feeling or desire to fade. In Lehi₁’s dream of the tree of life, there were those who reached the tree and partook of the desirable fruit, and yet still were affected by the world around them (see 1 Nephi 8:25, where it says that they were ashamed).

Therefore, the important question is not whether we have felt the change in the past, but whether we currently feel it, whether we endure to the end.

Alma 5:27–28

27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments

have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

28 Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

Comments

How would one know if they continue to feel the change of heart? It is not in the feeling, but in the doing. Firstly, one must keep oneself blameless before God. That is one way of saying that we would need to continue to obey God's covenants and laws. Importantly for the Nephites, Alma₂ also declares that it is required that they have faith in the "blood of Christ." Alma₂ continues to remind the Nephites that having faith in the atoning mission of the coming Messiah is essential. King Benjamin had established a new covenant surrounding that belief: "And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives" (Mosiah 5:8).

Also important is that they be "stripped of pride." It was pride that created social divisions among the Nephites. It was antithetical to Nephite understanding of how one should be and act. Thus, this was a call to return to the desire to treat others as oneself, and to help those in need, and not to place oneself above another.

Alma 5:29–32

29 Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

30 And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

31 Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!

32 Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!

Comments

Alma₂ does not allow the congregation to pretend that he is speaking to some other person. Alma₂ pointedly asks them: "Is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? . . . Is there one among you that doth

make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?” Alma₂ points out that that person is not prepared to stand before his or her God.

Verse 29 requires reading the first two sentences together to get the proper meaning. Were a reader to stop after only “is there one among you who is not stripped of envy?” it might appear that all were already stripped of envy, which would be a good thing. However, the second sentence makes it clear that it is the one who is not stripped of envy that is in danger.

The Two Shepherds

Alma 5:33–36

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

Comments

Alma₂ has pronounced dire consequences upon those who cannot currently feel the mighty change of heart. In these verses he presents the way of redemption for those who are to be judged of God. The Atonement invites all humankind to repent and partake of the fruit of the tree of life.

The promise is that those who truly repent and accept the opportunity to change will be able to stand clean before their God, while those who do not will be hewn down and cast into the fire.

The idea that there might be some who would have felt the mighty change and then wandered from the path of righteousness suggested a possible tie to Lehi₁'s Tree of Life dream. In these verses we see the tree of life explicitly mentioned. The idea of partaking of the fruit and the waters could easily be references to the tree in the Garden and the symbolism that surrounded that tree, but the idea that those who reject the tree, or those that did not bring forth good fruit, would be cast into the fire appears to invoke imagery from Zenos's olive tree allegory.

It is tempting to see all three images continuing in Nephite society, and meeting here through implication and reference.

Alma 5:37–39

37 O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice!

38 Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

39 And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil.

Comments

Alma₂ did not come to preach to those who were living according to the covenants of the church, but to those who were in violation of the principles of Nephite religion. Therefore, he continues to emphasize those who are not doing as they should. In this case, he reminds them that their departure from the true way is due to their own choices. Their “good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ.” The problem is that they are denying the atoning Messiah.

Earlier, in verses 19 and 20, Alma₂ contrasted those who had God’s image on their countenances with those who became subjects of the Devil. That division is reiterated here. There are those who are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, and if one is not of the fold of the Good Shepherd, they are of the fold of the Devil. In the ultimate judgment, there are only two options, each diametrically opposed to the other.

Alma 5:40–42

40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.

42 And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.

Comments

The dichotomy between Christ as the Good Shepherd and the opposite choice, the Devil, is further clarified. The difference is by definition: “whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh

from the devil.” As verse 41 points out, that dichotomy holds for humankind’s actions. If we do good, it comes from Christ. If we do not good, it comes from the Devil. Our choices are manifest through the nature of our actions.

It is important to remember that Alma₂ is speaking of the final judgment. There is no discussion of repentance precisely because it is a discussion of the final times—times after which the judgment of our actions comes—times after opportunities for repentance have passed.

What we become will depend upon the master we have chosen, Christ or the Devil. The reward reflects the choice of master; life everlasting, or death “as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.”

Alma₂ Testifies That His Teachings Come from God

Alma 5:43–45

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God.

44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

45 And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Comments

Alma₂ declares his authority for these statements. It was important that he do so, for he was condemning nearly all in his audience. With such a potentially condemnatory sermon, who was he to pronounce it? Alma₂ declared that he did so under his authority in the Church. In the broad sense, we would call it the priesthood, for he invoked the holy order of God. It is possible, however, that he intended it to be more than simply the priesthood. There were ordained priests, but they did not have the authority to judge the congregation. Alma₂ did through his ordination to be the high priest and head authority over the church.

The next unasked, but important, question is how Alma₂ knew this information. Therefore, he asks: “do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?” The similarly unstated answer had to be that they believed that he did. Then the logical question was: “and how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?” He tells them in the next verses.

Alma 5:46–47

46 Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.

47 And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God.

Comments

The ultimate source of Alma₂'s knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit. However, Alma₂ makes certain to note that it was not a simple endowment of knowledge, but one he had to struggle for. He “fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself.” He does not reference his particular conversion. It would appear that this need to know for himself grew from that experience, but he considered it separate from at least the visitation from the angel.

Equally as important to knowing that he spoke the truth is that he could testify that the fathers had spoken the truth. He had said, in verse 44, that “I am called to speak . . . and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.” Alma₂ declares that he not only so testifies, but that he has that testimony through the Spirit of God as well. He speaks of the spirit of prophecy because he is testifying of what verse 44 called “the things which are to come.” That is a phrase that points directly to the coming atoning Messiah.

Alma₂ Testifies of the Coming of Christ

Alma 5:48–49

48 I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.

49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

Comments

The demonstration that things which are to come points to the mission of Christ appears in verse 48. Alma₂ declares: “I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come.” There should be no doubt in the mind of the modern reader as to what he meant. There also would have been no doubt for his ancient audience.

Alma again states his authority for his pronouncements. It is “the order after which I am called.” That order must be his authority of his position as high priest for the church. Even though others who were ordained priests might have the responsibility to preach, it is particularly his responsibility to guide the whole church and to attempt to bring them to unity in Yahweh’s covenants and in their understanding of the coming atoning Messiah.

Alma₂ Exhorts Repentance

Alma 5:50–51

50 Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men.

51 And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying: Go forth and say unto this people—Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Comments

There is a slight difference in the calls to repentance in verses 50 and 51. In verse 50 it is the Spirit calling all to repentance. That is one of the functions of the Spirit, to testify of truth. That truth is that all should come unto Yahweh, the king of heaven and earth. The combination of “heaven and earth” is a common adjective for Yahweh. Alma₂ provides that expression in an expanded form, and it is the only time we see it in association with Yahweh as king. This may have two reasons. The first is the implication that only Yahweh is now their king, since the Nephites are now under the reign of the judges. The other is that there is a triumphal Messiah expected who is to be king of heaven and of earth. Alma₂ is declaring that the atoning Messiah is also the one who will be that triumphal Messiah. Yahweh will perform both Messianic functions. They will come at different times.

Verse 51’s call to repentance comes through Alma₂ at the Spirit’s invitation. It comes as divine support behind Alma₂’s call to this congregation. The fact that they must repent to inherit the kingdom of heaven emphasizes the realm where the king of heaven dwells, and ties to verse 50.

Alma 5:52–56

52 And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.

53 And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?

54 Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—

55 Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?

56 And finally, all ye that will persist in your wickedness, I say unto you that these are they who shall be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

Comments

Alma₂ is wrapping up his sermon by reiterating the main points. At the final day, there will come a time when “every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.” That theme was first stated in verse 35.

Alma₂ tells them that they cannot continue being puffed up in pride or wear costly apparel. Those themes were first suggested in verses 28 and 29, where Alma₂ used the need to be stripped of envy and pride. The theme of persecution was found in verse 30.

The themes of elevating oneself over another and turning one’s back to the poor and needy were not explicitly mentioned, but those are common themes indicating Nephite apostasy from truth. As Alma₂ ends, he reiterates the nature of the congregation’s sins from which they are called to repentance.

Alma₂ Invites the People to Follow the Good Shepherd

Alma 5:57–60

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous,

that the word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

58 For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.

59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

60 And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.

Comments

Much of Alma₂'s sermon has focused on the unrepentant and the eternal consequences of arriving at the final judgment unrepentant. Now, Alma₂ ends with hope. There is a call to repent, and there are blessings that flow from repentance, through the atonement of the coming Messiah:

The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous, implying that they will not share their fate.

The names of the righteous are written in the book of life, meaning they will have eternal life. Eternal life signifies the quality of life in the kingdom of heaven.

The righteous have the protection of the promise of the land, here stated as protection from the wolf that would devour the sheep.

All of these blessings come if those in the congregation heed the call of the Spirit and the Good Shepherd, who is the coming Messiah.

A subtle point in this important sermon is that the imagery of the Good Shepherd, the sheep, and the wolves, are probably present due to the translation rather than the Nephite original. Particularly, if the setting is Mesoamerica, there were no sheep, therefore, no shepherds. Even if the location were anywhere else, there was no sheep husbandry. The original plates must have had an image that invoked the same thoughts, but the specifics of this language come from the New Testament's Old World heritage.

Alma 5:61–62

61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.

Comments

Alma₂ closes by reiterating his authority. In verse 44 Alma₂ had declared his authority through the Holy Order to which he had been called. Now he declares unequivocally that he speaks under Yahweh's authority and direction. As head of the church, he speaks to those who are in the church. The closing is the invitation to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which he had referenced in verse 34.

Alma 6

Alma₂ Reestablishes the Order of the Church

Alma 6:1–4

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church.

2 And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church.

3 And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church that did not repent of their wickedness and humble themselves before God—I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts—the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous.

4 And thus they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.

Comments

Chapter 4 was a quotation from Alma₂'s personal record. Other than the introduction, Mormon simply copied what was in the journal. Mormon closed that chapter when he finished copying. Now he needs to finish the basic story and move to the next event. It is typical of Mormon's editing to finish a quotation, and then finish the story at the beginning of the next chapter rather than finish in the same chapter.

Verse 4 simply says that they "began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla." That is an interesting conclusion because all the elements that Mormon indicated, that led to that statement had already been established prior to the time Alma₂ spoke to the congregation in Zarahemla. The difference was not in the organization, but in the separation of those who would repent and follow Yahweh's laws and those who would not.

The governing aspects of the church didn't change, but there was a change in the people and some of those people did repent. The generic nature of the response suggests that perhaps Alma₂ didn't say anything specific in his personal record, nor in the official record. Mormon may have given such a generic summation based on his assumptions, rather than specific information.

Alma 6:5–6

5 Now I would that ye should understand that the word of God was liberal unto all, that none were deprived of the privilege of assembling themselves together to hear the word of God.

6 Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

Comments

Mormon interjects information about how the church should exist in a multi-religious community. There should be the preaching of the word of God, of course, and those who desire to hear the word should be free to assemble together to hear it.

For Mormon, the children of God should exercise, or enact, their faith by praying and fasting for not only those of the church, but for those who did not yet know God.

Alma₂ Goes to Preach in Gideon

Alma 6:7–8

7 And now it came to pass that when Alma had made these regulations he departed from them, yea, from the church which was in the city of Zarahemla, and went over upon the east of the river Sidon, into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword.

8 And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word which had been spoken by his fathers, and according to the spirit of prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come to redeem his people from their sins, and the holy order by which he was called. And thus it is written. Amen.

Comments

The final verses are the linking text that will move both Alma₂ and the events from Zarahemla to the city of Gideon. This information might have been at the beginning of the next chapter, as Mormon often has his linking narrative at the beginning of a chapter with the quoted material ending it. In this case, Mormon picks up on phrases from Alma₂'s sermon in Zarahemla.

In Alma 5:46 Alma₂ had said: "Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy

Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.” Mormon picked up on the concept of fasting and prayer in verse 6, and now he reprises the source of Alma₂’s authority through the spirit of prophecy. After reprising those words from the previous sermon, Mormon testifies that they were indeed true. Ending his testimony with *Amen* triggered the close of this chapter, and ensured that even though short, it would be separate from the next rather than be part of it.

Alma 7

Alma₂ Preaches in Gideon

Alma 7: Header

The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.

Comments

Although Mormon does not signal when he departs from a source that was not the large plates, he does tend to signal a return to a separate source. In this case, it is either the return to Alma₂'s record, or simply to the reiteration that the significant information is coming from Alma₂'s personal record that is important.

As with the previous sermon, this one will be quoted from Alma₂'s record. Although it is obvious that Alma₂ recorded the sermons on separate records, it is not clear how much linking material he provided. If it was his personal record, there might not have been much as he knew what it was, and perhaps he was not writing to inform a specific future audience of those events.

What we can tell is that Mormon provides the rather generic linking material between the quoted sermons. Since the linking material was wholly contained in the short chapter 6, Mormon begins this chapter with the quoted material and no further narrative introduction.

Alma 7:1–2

1 Behold my beloved brethren, seeing that I have been permitted to come unto you, therefore I attempt to address you in my language; yea, by my own mouth, seeing that it is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth, I having been wholly confined to the judgment-seat, having had much business that I could not come unto you.

2 And even I could not have come now at this time were it not that the judgment-seat hath been given to another, to reign in my stead; and the Lord in much mercy hath granted that I should come unto you.

Comments

There are two difficult phrases in verse 1. The first is that Alma₂ was “permitted to come unto you.” Why did he need permission? That would be the implied question, but it is probably the wrong question. The question should be: “What gave him permission?” The permission wasn’t from authority, but it was from sufficient freedom from responsibilities that made it possible. That is clearly what he says in verse 2. It was the fact that he gave up the judgment-seat that allowed him to come.

The second question stems from the statement that “therefore I attempt to address you in my language.” That statement could easily lead to the question of why he mentions language. Was there a difference in the language spoken? That would be unlikely, since Alma₂’s father came from the same place as the people in Gideon and surely spoke the same language. There is no indication that those who returned to the land of Nephi spoke a different language than those in Nephi.

Even though it is probable that the common language in Zarahemla was different from the land of Nephi, it is equally probable that both the people of Gideon and Alma₂ himself were bilingual, speaking both the language of Zarahemla and the older language of the Nephites from the land of Nephi.

Probably the more important indication is when Alma₂ says that he speaks “by the words of my mouth.” It is most likely that both phrases are intended to highlight the fact that he has come in person, rather than highlight the particular language he uses.

The People of Gideon Are More Righteous

Alma 7:3–5

3 And behold, I have come having great hopes and much desire that I should find that ye had humbled yourselves before God, and that ye had continued in the supplicating of his grace, that I should find that ye were blameless before him, that I should find that ye were not in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla.

4 But blessed be the name of God, that he hath given me to know, yea, hath given unto me the exceedingly great joy of knowing that they are established again in the way of his righteousness.

5 And I trust, according to the Spirit of God which is in me, that I shall also have joy over you; nevertheless I do not desire that my joy over you should come by the cause of so much afflictions and sorrow which I have had for the brethren at Zarahemla, for behold, my joy cometh over them after wading through much affliction and sorrow.

Comments

Alma₂ begins by setting up a contrast between the people in the city of Gideon and the people in the city of Zarahemla. Alma₂ preached repentance to those in Zarahemla. In Gideon, he will preach the opposite.

Alma₂ speaks of exceeding great joy in having been able to witness repentance in Zarahemla. He notes that such joy was the result of afflictions and sorrow that required that he preach strongly to them. Nevertheless, he declares that according to the Spirit of God he will have joy over the people of Gideon, without the afflictions and sorrows.

What made the difference between the two cities? The people of Gideon were either the very ones who had been with King Limhi in the city of Lehi-Nephi or they were their children. Where Alma₂ had to remind the people of Zarahemla of the power of God to deliver them from captivity (see Alma 5:3–4), the people of Gideon had lived through the experience. It was they who were in bondage and who had required a great change of heart in order to be sufficiently humbled before Yahweh to be released from that bondage. Their conversion was still fresh and powerful.

That contrasted with those in Zarahemla, whose salvation from the Lamanites in the land of Nephi was at least three, if not four, generations in the past.

Alma₂ Prophecies of Christ

Alma 7:6–8

6 But behold, I trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren; I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea, I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come.

7 For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

8 Behold, I do not say that he will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle; for behold, the Spirit hath not said unto me that this should be the case. Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are according to his word.

Comments

The spirit confirmed to Alma₂ that this people were not in a state of apostasy, as were many in the city of Zarahemla. As Alma₂ sets up the contrast between the two peoples in the different locations, he points out the particular apostasies that had developed in Zarahemla. This gives us a picture of what was happening, that the sermon itself did not mention. While we can read the information for historical purposes, Alma₂ presented it in order to congratulate the people in Gideon for not falling into those traps, clearly because they were also ideas and actions that were available to them in their greater environment.

What were the sins in Zarahemla? Alma₂ has preached about the sin of pride and of lifting oneself above others in his sermon in Zarahemla. What is added here is “I trust that you do not worship idols.” The only reason for saying this to the people in Gideon is that it was possibly true of many in Zarahemla. Thus, we have confirmation that a competing religious idea had entered. It is highly likely that it stemmed from both other available beliefs within the greater religion, and from the inheritance of the people of Zarahemla from before the arrival of the Nephites, or from the people of Zarahemla during the time when “they denied being of their Creator” (Omni 1:17).

Most importantly, Alma₂ admonishes the people in Gideon to further separate themselves from the wickedness of Zarahemla by understanding that “there is one thing which is of more importance than they all.” That is the coming of the Messiah. In Alma₂’s Zarahemla sermon he noted that they had drifted from their understanding of the coming Messiah. That is, in Nephite religion, the thing “of more importance than they all.” Therefore, Alma₂ encourages the people in Gideon to continue in their belief in that coming Messiah and to understand that “the time is not far distant.” They are to prepare themselves just as we modern readers are to be prepared for the next time that the Redeemer comes to the world.

Alma 7:9–12

9 But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

10 And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Comments

All humankind needs the power of repentance in their lives. Even though the people in Gideon had not suffered the dramatic apostasies of those in Zarahemla, the Spirit tells Alma₂ to “Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye.” The difference is not in the need for continual repentance and efforts to improve, but in the types of changes that are required for progress. Zarahemla needed to return to the path. Gideon needs to continue in the path.

The nature of what is taught is therefore dramatically different. Where Zarahemla's task was to understand their own failure to believe in the coming Messiah, the people of Gideon were in a position to learn and understand more of that same coming Messiah. Thus, they also learn that the coming atoning Messiah would redeem us by taking upon himself our pains and sicknesses but would also take upon himself death. He would overcome all of those conditions and redeem us from sin and from death.

The people in Gideon were ready to learn that the atoning mission of the Messiah would not only redeem them from sin and death, but also to succor them. Theirs would not be a God of an event but one of continual presence and assistance in this life.

Alma₂ Teaches the Gospel

Alma 7:13–15

13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

14 Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

15 Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

Comments

The logical result of true repentance and understanding of the Savior's mission is to desire baptism. Therefore, Alma₂ calls the people to be baptized. The teaching itself raises no questions but teaching it to this particular people does. These are the people who desired of Ammon that they be baptized, for they had heard of Alma₁ baptizing. Although Ammon did not feel he could perform that ordinance for them, they were later baptized (see Mosiah 25:17–18). Why then does Alma₂ ask them to be baptized?

The ultimate answer is that the text doesn't give us enough information to know. There are two possibilities:

1. There were those among them who had not been baptized. It is not known whether they were people who had later joined the former people of Limhi, or whether some of the children of the people of Limhi were too young to have been baptized.

2. The Nephite baptism retained some of the aspects of the mikveh in the law of Moses. That was a ritual cleansing by immersion that would happen more than once. Thus, there was a baptism as a symbol of entering the church, but perhaps a repeated baptism that symbolized a renewal of cleansing and perhaps a renewal of covenants. In earlier days of the Latter-day Saint church, members who had already been baptized might be baptized again as an act of renewal and recommitment to their covenants.

Alma₂ Rejoices in the Faith of Those in Gideon

Alma 7:16–18

16 And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.

17 And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things? Behold, I say unto you, yea, I know that ye believe them; and the way that I know that ye believe them is by the manifestation of the Spirit which is in me. And now because your faith is strong concerning that, yea, concerning the things which I have spoken, great is my joy.

18 For as I said unto you from the beginning, that I had much desire that ye were not in the state of dilemma like your brethren, even so I have found that my desires have been gratified.

Comments

Alma₂ lays out two conditions for obtaining eternal life: be baptized (“whosoever doeth this,” referencing baptism), and keep the commandments. This is the same commandment we see in Matthew 10:22: “he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”

These are the conditions. Alma₂ asks the rhetorical question of whether they believe them. It is rhetorical because the Spirit had already testified to him that they did. When Alma₂ began the sermon, he noted that he had joy in those of Zarahemla who had repented, but in Gideon the joy is “because your faith is strong.” They are not in the state of apostasy like those in Zarahemla.

Alma 7:19–21

19 For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

20 I perceive that it has been made known unto you, by the testimony of his word, that he cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning

from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round.

21 And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness.

Comments

Continuing his contrast between the people in Gideon with those in Zarahemla, he notes that the people of Gideon “are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God.” The undeclared contrast is to those in Zarahemla who were in the very opposite path.

As with his sermon in Zarahemla, Alma₂ references the final judgment between good and evil. The path of righteousness leads to God. One in that path does not turn “from that which is right to that which is wrong.” Thus, those in that path come clean to God. Those who do not, come filthy to God and “shall remain in his filthiness.” The opposition of clean and filthy becomes another version of the opposition between good and evil. Only good and clean will enter into the kingdom of God.

Alma₂ Reminds the People of their Duty to God

Alma 7:22–25

22 And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received.

23 And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

24 And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

25 And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.

Comments

Alma₂ lists the qualities that disciples of Christ might receive as they learn to walk in the paths of righteousness:

1. Humble, submissive, and gentle: These are qualities that evidence a desire to treat others with respect. They are the embodiment of the principles that would be violated when one begins to think of him or herself as above or better than another.
2. Easy to be entreated: Not easy to be tempted, but easy to be led to the fruit of the tree of life.
3. Patience and longsuffering: These are aspects of enduring to the end. The path is not without its bumps and bruises. Agency makes real life messy, but the path still leads to the fruit.
4. Temperate in all things: Another aspect of social equality, of not esteeming oneself above another.
5. Diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times: Another repetition of the concept of enduring to the end.
6. Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need: Pray! We should trust in God's love for us and his desire for us to succeed. We may confidently ask for help.
7. Returning thanks. An important aspect of humility is recognizing the goodness of God and remembering to be grateful for all we have. Those who forget this principle and begin to think that they themselves have somehow earned what they have, have already begun to drift from the necessary humility before God.
8. Faith, hope and charity. These are important principles and will be repeated in the text. They will be examined separately in another comment.

Alma 7:26–27

26 And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word.

27 And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.

Comments

Alma₂ ends this sermon differently from the one in Zarahemla. There the final statements were invitations to repent. Here, Alma₂ rejoices in current efforts of the people. Therefore, rather than the invitation to repent, Alma₂ blesses them, their houses, lands, flocks and herds.

It is interesting to note that Alma₂ blesses specific possessions, and then “all that you possess,” and only then “your women and your children.” It is possible that this is a reflection of the ancient understanding in a patriarchal society that one’s wife and children were legally considered possessions. Even if that were the case in the ancient Nephite culture, it should not be taken as an indication of how modern

readers should consider our families. We should consider them much more than possessions and place them at the front of the list rather than at the end.

With the *Amen*, Mormon ends this chapter. The boundaries of this chapter are the same as in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

Alma 8

Alma₂ Returns to Zarahemla

Alma 8:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written, having established the order of the church, according as he had before done in the land of Zarahemla, yea, he returned to his own house at Zarahemla to rest himself from the labors which he had performed.

2 And thus ended the ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Mormon finished quoting the sermon that Alma₂ delivered to the people in Gideon. He moves to the next sermon he wants to include, but he needs to set up the story and therefore, he returns to narration. In this section of the Book of Mormon, the current chapters follow the boundaries of the original chapters. That is helpful because it helps us understand how Mormon is using his source. Chapter 6 was Mormon's narrative interlude that finished the story of preaching in Zarahemla and going to Gideon to preach. Chapter 7 was the quoted sermon. Now, in chapter 8 we have the narrative history that will set up the sermon that begins in chapter 9.

One of the features of the times, that Mormon uses the large plates as a source is the marking of the years. In this case, however, it is possible that the marking of the years was also on Alma₂'s personal record. Alma₂ was the one who introduced that system and mentality to the large plates, and it wouldn't be surprising to find that he also used it in his personal record.

Alma₂ Goes to the Land of Melek

Alma 8:3–6

3 And it came to pass in the commencement of the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma departed from thence and took his journey over into the land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon, on the west by the borders of the wilderness.

4 And he began to teach the people in the land of Melek according to the holy order of God, by which he had been called; and he began to teach the people throughout all the land of Melek.

5 And it came to pass that the people came to him throughout all the borders of the land which was by the wilderness side. And they were baptized throughout all the land;

6 So that when he had finished his work at Melek he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.

Comments

These four verses provide all the information that we have about Alma₂'s preaching in the land of Melek. We do not know why Mormon did not include the quoted sermon. Perhaps it had no significantly new information. The only information we have is that he taught and many were baptized.

From Melek, Alma₂ journeys to Ammonihah. In Ammonihah we will have a mixture of quotation and narration because it was an important incident and example. Mormon will spend longer on the events of Ammonihah than on any of the other sermons.

Alma₂ Is Rejected at Ammonihah

Alma 8:7

7 Now it was the custom of the people of Nephi to call their lands, and their cities, and their villages, yea, even all their small villages, after the name of him who first possessed them; and thus it was with the land of Ammonihah.

Comments

This comment is Mormon's insertion in his intended text. It is short enough that it is easy to see the brackets for the repetitive resumption. In verse 6, Alma₂ "came to a city which was called Ammonihah." Then in verse 8, Mormon wrote: "Alma had come to the city of Ammonihah." As with other cases of repetitive resumption (see comments on 1 Nephi 6:1–6), the material in between the repeated lines is a departure from the original.

That tells us that Mormon thought that it was somehow important to let his readers know that the name Ammonihah was related to the first ruler of the city. Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us why it was important. Work on names in the Book of Mormon strongly indicates that many names have meanings for the text. Given the nature of the story, we might expect that this name would have an unfavorable connotation. However, the obvious root name is *Ammon*, and everything Mormon has said about anyone named *Ammon* has been good.

As a suggestion, perhaps Mormon is saying that Ammonihah began as a righteous Nephite city but has become apostate. The name would suggest that origin, but the rest of the story will demonstrate their apostate nature.

Alma 8:8–10

8 And it came to pass that when Alma had come to the city of Ammonihah he began to preach the word of God unto them.

9 Now Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma.

10 Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city; that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance.

Comments

Mormon sets up the conflict that will play out in the next several chapters. Alma₂ came to preach the word of God, but “Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah.” Thus, the essential dichotomy is established. This is a story of the conflict between Good and Evil but demonstrated on a very human scale in a very human and understandable context.

We see that Alma₂ “labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer.” Reading that, a reader might understandably expect that a clearly righteous leader, one who had been dramatically saved through God’s direct intervention, might prevail through mighty prayer and succeed.

That will not be the case.

Alma 8:11–13

11 Nevertheless, they hardened their hearts, saying unto him: Behold, we know that thou art Alma; and we know that thou art high priest over the church which thou hast established in many parts of the land, according to your tradition; and we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions.

12 And now we know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephiah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us.

13 Now when the people had said this, and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city, he departed thence and took his journey towards the city which was called Aaron.

Comments

Instead of the power of Alma₂'s prayers turning the hearts of the people of Ammonihah to God, they clearly remain in their current state. In addition, they declare that they have no reason to listen to Alma₂. Since Alma₂ gave up the judgment seat, he has no political authority. As they declare that "we are not of thy church," he has no religious authority over them.

This question of authority to preach will be subtly reinforced later in this event. Alma₂ will preach with Amulek, and, thus, there will be two witnesses as required by the law of Moses. While Mormon will not make that law of witnesses completely obvious, he sets it up by making certain to include the problem of why Alma₂ would have authority to preach by including these statements from the people of Ammonihah.

An Angel Commands Alma₂ to Return to Ammonihah

Alma 8:14–17

14 And it came to pass that while he was journeying thither, being weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul, because of the wickedness of the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass while Alma was thus weighed down with sorrow, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying:

15 Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you.

16 And behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent the Lord God will destroy them.

17 For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, (for thus saith the Lord) which is contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments which he has given unto his people.

Comments

After attempting to preach in Ammonihah, Alma₂ turns away, "being weighed down with sorrow." In that state, an angel appears to him telling him that even though he felt as though he failed in Ammonihah, he yet had "great cause to rejoice." The divine messenger indicates that it was he who had also appeared to Alma₂ while he was on a very different road for a very different purpose. That appearance altered Alma₂'s life, and now that messenger tells Alma₂ that it has been successful.

Alma₂ is called to return to Ammonihah and declare that unless they repent, they will be destroyed.

Alma₂'s father, Alma₁, was converted by a prophet who had attempted to preach, but was rejected by the people of Lehi-Nephi. The Lord told that prophet, Abinadi, to return and preach. It was not specified that Abinadi preach destruction, but he did prophecy the coming death of King Noah and the bondage of the people.

There is therefore a subtle subtext to the story of Alma₂ in Ammonihah. Abinadi's similar rejection and divine call to return converted his father. Perhaps that is the message for Alma₂, that he might not change the prophesied course, but that he would make important converts.

Alma₂ Meets Amulek

Alma 8:18–21

18 Now it came to pass that after Alma had received his message from the angel of the Lord he returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah. And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah.

19 And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man: Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?

20 And the man said unto him: I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision: Thou shalt receive. Therefore, go with me into my house and I will impart unto thee of my food; and I know that thou wilt be a blessing unto me and my house.

21 And it came to pass that the man received him into his house; and the man was called Amulek; and he brought forth bread and meat and set before Alma.

Comments

Alma₂ is commanded to return to a city that had flatly rejected him. It would be understandable if he traveled reluctantly, or, with measured assurance. Instead, Alma₂ "returned speedily." Understanding without question that the command had come from God, Alma₂ went quickly to fulfill the Lord's command.

The next three verses introduce us to Amulek. Alma₂ enters the hostile city, and we understand that Yahweh guided him to the particular person that Alma₂ needed to meet. The laws of hospitality would require that anyone would give something to eat of anyone who asked. However, that was also one of the Nephite principles that was among the first to be abandoned in the forms of Nephite apostasy.

When asked for hospitality, Amulek responds: "I am a Nephite." Why? This was Amulek's declaration that he did believe in the religion of the Nephites as opposed to the more dominant Order of the Nehors present in Ammonihah. We will learn that Amulek has not always been a faithful Nephite, but at this moment he is, and has received a vision letting him know that he would meet a prophet of God and should take him under his care.

Amulek's name is interesting. It clearly shows the *mlk* root which means "king" in Hebrew, and which frequently appears in the names of Nephite apostates who want to return to a monarchy. In this case, it perhaps signals that Amulek was not always a faithful, believing Nephite. The name hints at the past. Amulek's story also declares that repentance is possible, and that the gospel can transform a person. Thus, Amulek becomes a powerful preacher, next to another repentant former apostate, Alma₂.

Alma 8:22–27

22 And it came to pass that Alma ate bread and was filled; and he blessed Amulek and his house, and he gave thanks unto God.

23 And after he had eaten and was filled he said unto Amulek: I am Alma, and am the high priest over the church of God throughout the land.

24 And behold, I have been called to preach the word of God among all this people, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy; and I was in this land and they would not receive me, but they cast me out and I was about to set my back towards this land forever.

25 But behold, I have been commanded that I should turn again and prophesy unto this people, yea, and to testify against them concerning their iniquities.

26 And now, Amulek, because thou hast fed me and taken me in, thou art blessed; for I was an hungered, for I had fasted many days.

27 And Alma tarried many days with Amulek before he began to preach unto the people.

Comments

In the current chapter, Mormon mixes narration and quotation. Verses 23–26 are quoted, where verses 22 and 27 are Mormon's narration. Mormon could easily have narrated the information we learn in verses 23–26, but, instead, quotes them to bring the reader more closely into the story. The more we read the quoted material, the more we are interacting with Alma₂ himself, rather than through Mormon as the mediator.

Alma₂ declares to the whole gathered family that he is the high priest over the church. With Amulek's declaration that he is a Nephite, the family would accept Alma₂ as a dignitary, quite the contrast to the reception that Alma₂ had with the general public.

Alma₂ and Amulek Preach Together

Alma 8:28–32

28 And it came to pass that the people did wax more gross in their iniquities.

29 And the word came to Alma, saying: Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying—Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, except ye repent I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away.

30 And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

31 And they had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither was it possible that any man could slay them; nevertheless they did not exercise their power until they were bound in bands and cast into prison. Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his power in them.

32 And it came to pass that they went forth and began to preach and to prophesy unto the people, according to the spirit and power which the Lord had given them.

Comments

The setup for the sermons is almost complete. What remains is the command to begin to preach. The command to preach repentance or coming destruction is reiterated. It is also commanded that Amulek go with him. The Lord, therefore, provides Alma₂ with the second witness that will be needed to provide divine justice upon a people should they not repent.

Mormon gives away some of the ending of the story by indicating that while Alma₂ and Amulek might be imprisoned, they could not be confined nor slain. Those events will be discussed before Mormon finishes with the story of Ammonihah.

Alma 9

Alma₂ and Amulek Preach in Ammonihah

Alma 9: Header

The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which were declared unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma.

Comments

Chapter 8 certainly appears to have been based on Alma₂'s personal record, so this header does not indicate a new source, but clarifies where the quoted material comes from. Although other chapter headers appear to cover only the chapter they head, in this case Mormon appears to give us a header that covers multiple chapters. Mormon notes that “they are cast into prison and delivered by the miraculous power of God.”

At the end of chapter 9, in verses 32 and 33, Mormon tells us that an attempt was made to cast Alma₂ and Amulek into prison, but that the people were unable to do so. That doesn't fit the header's description of being in prison and miraculously delivered. That does happen, but not until chapter 14. Although Orson Pratt divided some of the intervening chapters, there were nevertheless two whole chapters in the 1830 edition before the story occurs that fits the information in this header.

People of Ammonihah Demand a Second Witness

Alma 9:1–3

1 And again, I, Alma, having been commanded of God that I should take Amulek and go forth and preach again unto this people, or the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, it came to pass as I began to preach unto them, they began to contend with me, saying:

2 Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away?

3 Now they understood not the words which they spake; for they knew not that the earth should pass away.

Comments

Yahweh commanded Alma₂ to take Amulek when he went to preach. Of course, he did. We learn why in verse 2. The very first question asked was, “Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man . . . ?” The answer will be that they will not have to believe one man. There will be two witnesses. God had already prepared the perfect answer for what God knew would be a principal argument that the people would put forth.

Verse 3 interjects the commentary that the issue of the earth passing away was perhaps a real one. The did not understand the prophecies that the earth would pass away. It is important for modern readers to understand that, although the story of Ammonihah is given to represent a people in rebellion against God, they may have had some legitimate questions. Likewise, there are those in the modern world who will question God’s representatives. They may question some of the statements, and the reason will still be “for they knew not.” Legitimate questions are not necessarily attacks on the faith, but opportunities to explain divine understanding.

Alma 9:4–6

4 And they said also: We will not believe thy words if thou shouldst prophesy that this great city should be destroyed in one day.

5 Now they knew not that God could do such marvelous works, for they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

6 And they said: Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?

Comments

Not all of the people’s comments were legitimate questions. In verse 4, it is not a question, but rather a declaration that they will not believe Alma₂’s prophecy. Alma₂ makes allusion to Lehi₁ in Jerusalem, but this is the situation that Lehi₁ faced. Lehi₁ preached to a people in Jerusalem who likewise did not believe the prophecies that their great city could be destroyed. The unstated parallel continues when we find that, like Jerusalem, Ammonihah was indeed destroyed.

The final section of this introduction to Alma₂ and Amulek in Ammonihah is the repetition that the people need not believe if God “sendeth no more authority than one man among this people.” Although Alma₂ will speak first, Amulek serves as the second witness.

The scriptural justification for the people of Ammonihah’s statement about one witness is derived from Deuteronomy 19:15: “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” A single witness was not sufficient, just as the people of Ammonihah declare. Knowing the law, Yahweh had already provided.

Alma₂ Warns of Coming Destruction

Alma 9:7–11

7 And they stood forth to lay their hands on me; but behold, they did not. And I stood with boldness to declare unto them, yea, I did boldly testify unto them, saying:

8 Behold, O ye wicked and perverse generation, how have ye forgotten the tradition of your fathers; yea, how soon ye have forgotten the commandments of God.

9 Do ye not remember that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God? Do ye not remember that they were all led by him through the wilderness?

10 And have ye forgotten so soon how many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies, and preserved them from being destroyed, even by the hands of their own brethren?

11 Yea, and if it had not been for his matchless power, and his mercy, and his long-suffering towards us, we should unavoidably have been cut off from the face of the earth long before this period of time, and perhaps been consigned to a state of endless misery and woe.

Comments

The reaction of the people is to attempt to capture Alma₂. The result is reminiscent of what Alma₂'s father (Alma₁) witnessed in the court of King Noah when they attempted to take hold of Abinadi. Abinadi had not delivered his message, therefore, they could not hold him. Alma₂ had not delivered his message, therefore, they could not hold him either.

Alma₂ had begun his sermon in Zarahemla by referencing the captivity of the fathers in Lehi-Nephi (see Alma 5:4–6). In Ammonihah, he uses the same introduction, but shifts the captivity earlier to Lehi₁ in Jerusalem. After that deliverance, we have verse 10 which moves to bondage in the new world. It has not been once that Yahweh has delivered them, but “many times he delivered our fathers out of the hands of their enemies.”

The point of this beginning is to speak to the people's disbelief that they could be destroyed in a day. Alma₂ points out many times that the Nephites have been close to destruction, but were delivered through Yahweh's power. The point is that they are now facing a similar situation. They are bound for destruction, but, through repentance, it could be avoided.

Alma 9:12–14

12 Behold, now I say unto you that he commandeth you to repent; and except ye repent, ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. But behold, this is not all—he has commanded you to repent, or he will utterly destroy you from off the face of the earth; yea, he will visit you in his anger, and in his fierce anger he will not turn away.

13 Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

14 Now I would that ye should remember, that inasmuch as the Lamanites have not kept the commandments of God, they have been cut off from the presence of the Lord. Now we see that the word of the Lord has been verified in this thing, and the Lamanites have been cut off from his presence, from the beginning of their transgressions in the land.

Comments

The reason for highlighting previous close calls with bondage or destruction was to underscore the power of God to save. However, there is a requirement for such salvation. Alma₂ reiterates the promise of the land given to Lehi. They will prosper upon principles of righteousness, but Alma₂ also explicitly quotes: “Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.”

Alma₂ drives this lesson home by noting that it has been fulfilled among the Lamanites; “inasmuch as the Lamanites have not kept the commandments of God, they have been cut off from the presence of the Lord.” The clear message is that “we see that the word of the Lord has been verified in this thing.” The negative aspect of the promise of the land is real, and the Lamanites are the prime example of the fact that it has been invoked.

The example of the Lamanites proves that God fulfills the negative aspect of the promise of the land. Alma₂ will continue to compare and contrast the people of Ammonihah with the Lamanites who have already been “cut off from the presence of the Lord.”

Alma 9:15–17

15 Nevertheless I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than for you, if ye remain in your sins, yea, and even more tolerable for them in this life than for you, except ye repent.

16 For there are many promises which are extended to the Lamanites; for it is because of the traditions of their fathers that caused them to remain in their state of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them and prolong their existence in the land.

17 And at some period of time they will be brought to believe in his word, and to know of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers; and many of them will be saved, for the Lord will be merciful unto all who call on his name.

Comments

The Lamanites are the traditional enemies, and also the traditional example of the worst cases. When the people of Ammonihah are told that it “shall be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than for

you,” it is meant to be shocking. It is the same tactic Jacob used in Jacob 3:5. The intent was to say something that would be considered so far from the expected that the listeners would have to pay attention.

Alma₂ explains how this is possible for Lamanites, who have been cut off from the presence of the Lord, that they are yet the recipient of promises in the future. There is an ultimate redemption for them. Alma₂ explains that “at some period of time they will be brought to believe in his word.” Thus, there is hope for the currently unrepentant Lamanites. Alma₂ will explain how that differs from the currently unrepentant people of Ammonihah.

Alma 9:18–19

18 But behold, I say unto you that if ye persist in your wickedness that your days shall not be prolonged in the land, for the Lamanites shall be sent upon you; and if ye repent not they shall come in a time when you know not, and ye shall be visited with utter destruction; and it shall be according to the fierce anger of the Lord.

19 For he will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people. I say unto you, Nay; he would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God;

Comments

The difference between the Lamanites and the people of Ammonihah lay in what they had been taught. In verse 17, Alma₂ has indicated that the Lamanites had believed in false traditions of their fathers, and that explained their continued resistance to the gospel. However, the people of Ammonihah had been taught correctly, at least at one time. Therefore, they are now in rebellion against truth and that invokes the negative aspect of the promise of the land.

The people had said that they didn’t believe that their city could be destroyed in a day. Alma₂ lays out their sins which would justify the invocation of the negative aspect of the land’s promise. He had begun his discourse by speaking of Yahweh saving his people. Alma₂ is indicating that Yahweh will not protect them. Although Alma₂ hadn’t previously declared how the city would be destroyed, in verse 19, he appears to promise that it will be at the hands of the Lamanites. Indeed, that is exactly what will happen.

Alma 9:20

20 Yea, after having been such a highly favored people of the Lord; yea, after having been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people; after having had all things made known unto them, according to their desires, and their faith, and prayers, of that which has been, and which is, and which is to come;

Comments

Even though the people of Ammonihah are in apostasy from the Nephite religion, Alma₂ treats them as Nephites, and therefore, inheritors of the blessings that have come to the whole of the Nephite nation. Thus, they have “been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people.” Although the people of Ammonihah certainly believed that this favor described their own city, it will be clear as Alma₂ continues that he is speaking of the Nephites in general rather than the people of Ammonihah specifically.

It is as Nephites that they have been taught “that which has been, and which is, and which is to come.” This phrase is intended to describe the gospel. The Nephites were taught that which was, because they have been taught of the prophets and prophecies from the brass plates. They are taught that which is, because the Nephite church continues those teachings and preaches them. They are taught of that which is to come, because they have been taught about the coming atoning Messiah.

Alma 9:21–23

21 Having been visited by the Spirit of God; having conversed with angels, and having been spoken unto by the voice of the Lord; and having the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and also many gifts, the gift of speaking with tongues, and the gift of preaching, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of translation;

22 Yea, and after having been delivered of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord; having been saved from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they having waxed strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; having been brought out of bondage time after time, and having been kept and preserved until now; and they have been prospered until they are rich in all manner of things—

23 And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, I say unto you that if this be the case, that if they should fall into transgression, it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them.

Comments

Although it is possible that there was something in the untold history of Ammonihah that fits the events that Alma₂ discusses, it seems more probable that things like conversing with angels and having been spoken to by the voice of the Lord refer to prophets of the Nephite religious tradition. Nevertheless, Alma₂ presents the Nephite tradition as the Ammonihahite tradition. In particular, Alma₂ appears to invoke the long Nephite history under the monarchy, and Mosiah₂ in particular, when he notes that the Nephites have had the gift of translation. Mosiah₂ translated the plates of Ether, an event that would have been within the lifetime of many in the city of Ammonihah.

Alma₂ reprises Yahweh's power to save by mentioning Jerusalem again. The point of all these advantages of living according to the covenants that Yahweh made with the Nephite people is to contrast the current position of the people of Ammonihah. As a people who have received all these benefits, it is a greater sin to leave them behind than it is for the Lamanites, who had never had those advantages. This verse parallels verse 16 where Alma₂ also indicated that it would be better for the Lamanites than the people of Ammonihah at the last day.

Alma 9:24–27

24 For behold, the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites, but they are not unto you if ye transgress; for has not the Lord expressly promised and firmly decreed, that if ye will rebel against him that ye shall utterly be destroyed from off the face of the earth?

25 And now for this cause, that ye may not be destroyed, the Lord has sent his angel to visit many of his people, declaring unto them that they must go forth and cry mightily unto this people, saying: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand;

26 And not many days hence the Son of God shall come in his glory; and his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, equity, and truth, full of patience, mercy, and long-suffering, quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers.

27 And behold, he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name.

Comments

The people had said that they did not believe Alma₂'s prophecy that they would be destroyed (see verse 4). Alma₂'s response has been to show that only Yahweh's protection has prevented the Nephite destruction on many occasions. Now he reiterates that concept but directs the blame directly upon the people of Ammonihah. It is no longer about the Nephites in general, but this city in particular. The promise is that they will be destroyed unless they repent.

Yahweh, in his mercy, is giving them another opportunity to repent. It is that opportunity that Alma₂ offers them. It is important to note that a significant aspect of their repentance is to realize that "not many days hence the Son of God shall come in his glory." One of the common traits of Nephite apostasy was the rejection of the doctrine of the coming Messiah. Therefore, Alma₂ mentions it as an important part of repenting. Of course, Alma₂ understands that repentance comes only through the atoning mission of the Messiah.

The final solution is to repent and be baptized into the church that the people of Ammonihah have rejected.

Alma 9:28–30

28 Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been—if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivity of the devil.

29 Now behold, this is the voice of the angel, crying unto the people.

30 And now, my beloved brethren, for ye are my brethren, and ye ought to be beloved, and ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance, seeing that your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God, and seeing that ye are a lost and a fallen people.

Comments

These verses end the sermon itself. Alma₂ issues the call to repentance by noting that they should “prepare . . . the way of the Lord.” That is a reference to the coming atoning mission of the Messiah and is the teaching of that which is to come which Alma₂ had mentioned in verse 20.

As Alma₂ finishes, he declares that he speaks by authority of an angel of God. He minces no words, declaring that they have hardened their hearts against the word of God and are a lost and fallen people. Those conditions remove them from Yahweh’s covenant protection. Although he does not restate it here, these are the conditions that will lead to the destruction of the city.

The People Are Angry with Alma₂

Alma 9:31–34

31 Now it came to pass that when I, Alma, had spoken these words, behold, the people were wroth with me because I said unto them that they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people.

32 And also because I said unto them that they were a lost and a fallen people they were angry with me, and sought to lay their hands upon me, that they might cast me into prison.

33 But it came to pass that the Lord did not suffer them that they should take me at that time and cast me into prison.

34 And it came to pass that Amulek went and stood forth, and began to preach unto them also. And now the words of Amulek are not all written, nevertheless a part of his words are written in this book.

Comments

Verses 31 through 33 are copied from Alma₂’s record. Alma₂ himself provided the linking narration which will lead to the next copied sermon. After finishing his sermon, it is understandable that the people would be angry with him. He has rather severely criticized and condemned them, even though he offered them

repentance. The people appear not to have believed that they needed repentance, but rather needed to be rid of Alma₂. They attempt to take him but are unable to.

In the header to this chapter, Mormon indicated that Alma₂ and Amulek would be cast into prison and miraculously freed. This is not the occasion referenced in the header, because Alma₂ was not taken to prison.

Verse 34 is Mormon's transitional narrative. Mormon indicates that he is continuing to copy from the record of Alma₂, and that he is abridging it. Thus, he provides the direct link to the next included sermon, rather than writing everything that might have happened in between this sermon and the next one, which begins in the next chapter.

This chapter was retained just as it appeared in the 1830 edition. Thus, this ending is from Mormon's plates, rather than from Orson Pratt's revisions. It is possible that the chapter ends due to a chapter ending in Alma₂'s record. We will see that more clearly later in the material that Mormon copies about Alma₂ and Amulek's preaching.

Alma 10

Amulek Reaffirms Alma₂'s Teachings

Alma 10:1

¹ Now these are the words which Amulek preached unto the people who were in the land of Ammonihah, saying:

Comments

Mormon provided the text that ended the previous chapter. He provides a simple sentence that narrates the beginning of this inserted sermon. Since Mormon told us that there was an attempt to put Alma₂ in prison and that there were many things written that he didn't use for his abridgment, we should assume that this sermon took place at a different time, perhaps at a different place. What Mormon has done is give us the first witness, Alma₂, and now gives Amulek as the second witness. Thus, Mormon shows conformance to the Deuteronomic law of witnesses.

Alma 10:2–4

² I am Amulek; I am the son of Giddonah, who was the son of Ishmael, who was a descendant of Aminadi; and it was that same Aminadi who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God.

³ And Aminadi was a descendant of Nephi, who was the son of Lehi, who came out of the land of Jerusalem, who was a descendant of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren.

⁴ And behold, I am also a man of no small reputation among all those who know me; yea, and behold, I have many kindreds and friends, and I have also acquired much riches by the hand of my industry.

Comments

As Alma₂ stood before the people of Ammonihah, their first recorded question to him was: "Who art thou?" It was a question about why they should listen to him.

As Amulek begins, he answers the same questions. Perhaps it was explicitly asked. Perhaps it was implicit. Mormon doesn't give us that information. Nevertheless, Amulek declares who he is. The first, and, in the ancient world, the most important, information concerns his family. He gives information about his father and grandfather, then the more distant relatives. The closer relatives could have been known in the city, but the ancestors tie him to an inherited image.

He mentions his ancestor Aminadi, "who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple." This is several generations back, and therefore, probably from before the time the Nephites left the land of Nephi. We know nothing more of this incident, but the way Amulek uses it, he expects that those who hear it will know the story and respect both it and him as a descendant of an honorable lineage.

The genealogy continues to Nephi and then Manasseh. Thus, Amulek traces his lineage to the Old World, providing what must have been a respected and ancient lineage that was used to trace Nephite political authority.

In addition, Amulek declares that he, himself, is known among the people. Perhaps his mention of acquiring riches is due to the respect that the people of Ammonihah gave to wealth and status. Through all of this introduction, Amulek suggests that he is a man to whom the people should listen.

Alma 10:5–6

5 Nevertheless, after all this, I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people.

6 Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart, even until the fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Perhaps the people should listen to Amulek due to his lineage or wealth, but Amulek also understood that such circumstances might not allow everyone to relate to him, even should they listen. Therefore, he tells them the important information that they could relate to. He is like they are.

Even though Alma₂ had declared that the people of Ammonihah had received the gospel teachings, Amulek personally knew that not all who had the opportunity to hear would have heeded what they heard. He was one of those who had not been very interested in "the ways of the Lord." Modern readers might see this as a declaration that he hadn't been a religious person, although we should remember that our modern perception doesn't replicate the ancient situation.

Even more importantly, Amulek says that “I was called many times and I would not hear.” This places him in the position of standing for all of the people of Ammonihah. Alma₂ had accused them of being called, but not hearing. Thus, Amulek puts himself forward as the model of such a person of the city.

Alma₂ had promised that the people of the city could repent. Amulek models that repentance. He tells his story, and places it firmly in a time that everyone could understand. It was recent. If we can accept the accuracy of the statement that it was on the “fourth day of this seventh month,” it would appear that the seventh month had not yet ended when Amulek told this story.

Alma 10:7–9

7 As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me and said: Amulek, return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; for he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house.

8 And it came to pass that I obeyed the voice of the angel, and returned towards my house. And as I was going thither I found the man whom the angel said unto me: Thou shalt receive into thy house—and behold it was this same man who has been speaking unto you concerning the things of God.

9 And the angel said unto me he is a holy man; wherefore I know he is a holy man because it was said by an angel of God.

Comments

Mormon previewed this story when he introduced Amulek in Alma 8:20, but he left the details to be expanded in Amulek’s sermon. The first interesting phrase in this story is that the appearance of an angel came as Amulek was journeying to see a “very near kindred.” He doesn’t define who that was. There is evidence in the Book of Mormon that kindred tended to live together. However, that wouldn’t require journeying. It is also typical for the wife to move to the land of the husband. Thus, a reasonable speculation is that he was going to see a near female relative who lived among her husband’s kin.

The angel tells Amulek that a prophet will ask him for food, which is precisely what we learned in Alma 8:19. Here the question isn’t repeated, only that he met the man and took him to his house. As a good storyteller would, Amulek builds the story before revealing that the holy man was Alma₂, “this same man who has been speaking unto you concerning the things of God.” Amulek testifies that Alma₂ is a man of God, and that he knows this because an angel declared it to him.

Alma 10:10–11

10 And again, I know that the things whereof he hath testified are true; for behold I say unto you, that as the Lord liveth, even so has he sent his angel to make these things manifest unto me; and this he has done while this Alma hath dwelt at my house.

11 For behold, he hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake.

Comments

This is the conclusion of the story. Amulek identified himself both through his ancestry and his current position. He likened himself to those in Ammonihah by declaring that he, too, thought little of the things of God. However, he introduces his repentance through the presence of first an angel, then of a holy man.

These two verses speak of the blessing of having Alma₂ dwell in his house. The purpose of this declaration is to testify that because Alma₂ is that holy man declared by an angel, that he might bless the people of Ammonihah just as he blessed Amulek and all his household.

The listing of kin in verse 11 is historically interesting, for it gives us a glimpse into the construction of social units in Ammonihah. Amulek states that Alma₂ blessed his house. That does not mean the building, but the people of Amulek's immediate kin. In later Aztec terminology, there was an indication of the people of the house, who were typically kin, but might include others. It is the group for which Amulek was responsible. This appears to conclude all that Amulek had intended to say.

Amulek defined who the people are in his house. First himself, and then "my women." Given the other people mentioned, it appears possible that part of the apostasy of the people of Ammonihah might have been the adoption of polygamy. It is possible that Amulek had more than one wife. This is strengthened by the next category in the list, which are the children, and only after the children do we get his father. Thus, while "my women" might be his wife, mother, and perhaps sisters, the nature of progression through the different kin lends credence to the reading of multiple wives. Of course, this is in a city that has already declared that it has left the Nephite religion. We saw in the kingdom of Noah that a similar process occurred where the apostasy from the Nephite religion included not only the rejection of the Messiah, but also multiple wives.

Lawyers Plot to Cross Amulek

Alma 10:12–15

12 And now, when Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused, and also of the things which were to come, according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

13 Nevertheless, there were some among them who thought to question them, that by their cunning devices they might catch them in their words, that they might find witness against them, that they might deliver them to their judges that they might be judged according to the law, and that they might be slain or cast into prison, according to the crime which they could make appear or witness against them.

14 Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people before the judges.

15 Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skilful in their profession.

Comments

These three verses are part of the narrative transition from Amulek's initial testimony into the public exchange that will be quoted next. Although it is possible that Mormon wrote this linking narrative, it is also possible that it was just what Alma₂ had written as the transition on his own record. The next quoted material appears to have come right after the termination of the testimony and as part of the same event. Thus, both Mormon and Alma₂ would need to provide a transition. Without any more evidence than preference, it would appear more parsimonious to suggest that Alma₂ wrote this intervening text.

The point of the text is to set up the conflict to come. Therefore, there is an explanation that the lawyers stepped in to attempt to find a reason to take them to a judge. Modern readers should not assume that the word "lawyers" represents our understanding of lawyers. They were those who were expert in the law, but the law included the law of Moses. Hence, they were religious as well as legal experts. In Ammonihah, the interrogation is from religious experts called lawyers. In the case of Abinadi, the experts were called priests. They functioned similarly.

Alma 10:16–18

16 And it came to pass that they began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him cross his words, or contradict the words which he should speak.

17 Now they knew not that Amulek could know of their designs. But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them: O ye wicked and perverse generation, ye lawyers and hypocrites, for ye are laying the foundations of the devil; for ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God.

18 Ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people.

Comments

It is possible that Amulek understood the lawyers' motivations through the Spirit, but it is also probable that he knew them well enough to easily discern that they did not have earnest and heart-felt questions. It is important to remember that this is Amulek who will powerfully combat the lawyers' questions. Alma₂ will yet speak, but Amulek's purpose was not solely to be the sidekick who testified to Alma₂'s greatness. Amulek himself spoke in power. The Lord called him to perform, not to sit on the sidelines.

Amulek points out exactly what the lawyers are doing. They are hypocrites in that their questions might appear to be seeking truth, but they were actually seeking to entrap Amulek. Amulek declares that it is this type of behavior that will bring destruction upon the people.

Alma 10:19–21

19 Yea, well did Mosiah say, who was our last king, when he was about to deliver up the kingdom, having no one to confer it upon, causing that this people should be governed by their own voices—yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction.

20 And now I say unto you that well doth the Lord judge of your iniquities; well doth he cry unto this people, by the voice of his angels: Repent ye, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

21 Yea, well doth he cry, by the voice of his angels that: I will come down among my people, with equity and justice in my hands.

Comments

Amulek invokes King Mosiah₂. One of the cautions that was given at the time of the change to judges was that it was possible that a people might choose evil over good. Mosiah₂ declared that when that happened the people, having made that choice, were ripe for destruction. Amulek declares that the people of Ammonihah are in that exact position. They have chosen to leave the protective covenant. Alma₂ had promised that destruction would come unless they repent, and Amulek underlines that prophecy. Although repentance is possible, the lawyers' questions show no true sign of repentance.

When Yahweh declares that “I will come down among my people, with equity and justice in my hands,” it means a just destruction for this people. There could be other results for the repentant, but those who reject the covenant of the Nephite religion face the promised just destruction.

Alma 10:22–23

22 Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by famine, and by pestilence, and the sword.

23 But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent.

Comments

The Ammonihahite apostasy was deep enough, and had been in place long enough, that they already qualified for destruction. Amulek declares that it would have happened by now had it not been that there were righteous people praying for them. The implication is that this last opportunity to repent, although by the word of a prophet of God, Alma₂, was the last chance they would be given.

Therefore, “the time is soon at hand except ye repent.” They are being given their last chance.

Alma 10:24–27

24 And now it came to pass that the people were more angry with Amulek, and they cried out, saying: This man doth revile against our laws which are just, and our wise lawyers whom we have selected.

25 But Amulek stretched forth his hand, and cried the mightier unto them, saying: O ye wicked and perverse generation, why hath Satan got such great hold upon your hearts? Why will ye yield yourselves unto him that he may have power over you, to blind your eyes, that ye will not understand the words which are spoken, according to their truth?

26 For behold, have I testified against your law? Ye do not understand; ye say that I have spoken against your law; but I have not, but I have spoken in favor of your law, to your condemnation.

27 And now behold, I say unto you, that the foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges.

Comments

The people are understandably angry. None of us likes to be publicly called out for our transgressions. The people’s response is also interesting. They invoke the voice of the people, and how they have chosen their lawyers and their laws. This selection by the voice of the people was the very mechanism that Mosiah₂ had suggested would be most effective. Amulek had appealed to King Mosiah₂ and so do the people. The difference is that Amulek had referenced the caution Mosiah₂ gave about when the people would choose

evil over good. By saying that their laws were just, the people are suggesting that they are also good, and that they, therefore, have chosen good rather than evil.

Amulek clarifies. He does not dispute that the law is good. He does not dispute that selecting the lawyers by the voice of the people can be good. Amulek declares that the problem is not in the laws, but in the actual people who hold important positions. The voice of the people had chosen unrighteous people.

Alma 10:28–31

28 And now it came to pass that when Amulek had spoken these words the people cried out against him, saying: Now we know that this man is a child of the devil, for he hath lied unto us; for he hath spoken against our law. And now he says that he has not spoken against it.

29 And again, he has reviled against our lawyers, and our judges.

30 And it came to pass that the lawyers put it into their hearts that they should remember these things against him.

31 And there was one among them whose name was Zeezrom. Now he was the foremost to accuse Amulek and Alma, he being one of the most expert among them, having much business to do among the people.

Comments

Unsurprisingly, the people who chose unrighteous leaders continue to support those unrighteous leaders. Since Amulek has spoken against them, it is Amulek who is not only wrong, but is “a child of the devil.”

Verse 31 introduces the next important player in the game, Zeezrom. He is presented as “one of the most expert among [the lawyers].” It is probable that Mormon uses the name Zeezrom as a metonym. That is, it is a name that represents something about the quality of the man. Having done this, however, Mormon appears to realize that his readers won’t understand the metonym without further information. Therefore, he will interrupt his quotation of this event to add information that seems to serve multiple functions, one of which is to explain the name Zeezrom as well as other names that Mormon will use.

Alma 10:32

32 Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.

Comments

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Orson Pratt created a new chapter here because what follows in our chapter 11 is a discussion of weights and measures that doesn’t seem to fit the sermon as laid out in chapter 10. Pratt was correct that the discussion of weights and measures doesn’t really

belong. It is Mormon's insertion into Alma₂'s text, and as noted in the comments on the previous verses, is probably entered because Mormon had just given his readers the name Zeezrom, which required some explanation that Mormon understood that his audience would need.

The interruption is bracketed by repetitive resumption. Verse 32 is the opening bracket. The repetition of this information comes in the next chapter, Alma 11:20. That verse, as well as the repeated text in Alma 11:20 are Mormon's text, then he will return to copying from Alma₂'s personal record.

Alma 11

Judges' Wages Explained: Weights and Measures

Alma 11:1–4

1 Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.

2 Now if a man owed another, and he would not pay that which he did owe, he was complained of to the judge; and the judge executed authority, and sent forth officers that the man should be brought before him; and he judged the man according to the law and the evidences which were brought against him, and thus the man was compelled to pay that which he owed, or be stripped, or be cast out from among the people as a thief and a robber.

3 And the judge received for his wages according to his time—a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver, which is equal to a senine of gold; and this is according to the law which was given.

4 Now these are the names of the different pieces of their gold, and of their silver, according to their value. And the names are given by the Nephites, for they did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem; neither did they measure after the manner of the Jews; but they altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the judges, they having been established by king Mosiah.

Comments

Mormon's insertion begins with an explanation of the wages of the judges. Mormon notes, in verse 4, that this system was not inherited from Jerusalem, but was more specific to the Nephites. Nevertheless, scholars have found that it is similar to the system of weights and measures that was used in Egypt.

Mormon introduced this insertion by noting that “the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ” (Alma 10:32). These three verses describe the nature of their employ. The most important part of the nature of their employ is that they were to receive wages according to time, not according to the crime, nor the ability of the defendant to pay. The intent is to separate their wages from the temptation to make money from their position as judges or by the nature of their judgments.

There is nothing in this insertion that is making a judgment on the people of Ammonihah. This is simply an explanation of how the various weights and measures work together.

Alma 11:5–19

- 5 Now the reckoning is thus—a senine of gold, a seon of gold, a shum of gold, and a limnah of gold.
- 6 A senum of silver, an amnor of silver, an ezrom of silver, and an onti of silver.
- 7 A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold, and either for a measure of barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain.
- 8 Now the amount of a seon of gold was twice the value of a senine.
- 9 And a shum of gold was twice the value of a seon.
- 10 And a limnah of gold was the value of them all.
- 11 And an amnor of silver was as great as two senums.
- 12 And an ezrom of silver was as great as four senums.
- 13 And an onti was as great as them all.
- 14 Now this is the value of the lesser numbers of their reckoning—
- 15 A shiblon is half of a senum; therefore, a shiblon for half a measure of barley.
- 16 And a shiblum is a half of a shiblon.
- 17 And a Leah is the half of a shiblum.
- 18 Now this is their number, according to their reckoning.
- 19 Now an antion of gold is equal to three shiblons.

Comments

Although it is interesting to work out the interrelationships among these values, Mormon does not include them so that his readers can make change in a Nephite market. He does provide more information that we might need, but there are some of the names of the measures that are important. First, we find that there is an “ezrom” of silver. That is likely to have been the root for Ze-ezrom. It has been suggested that the name might simply be a designation of “silver guy.”

We also learn that one term for a measurement of gold is an “antion.” We will see that root in another lawyer, “gold guy” Antionah in Ammonihah. We will also see it as the root of Antionum, the city of the Zoramites. The probability that the name of the Zoramite city is to be seen as a metonym comes from the disparity between the name of the city and the people, since Mormon has already told us that a city and its people were named for their founder (Alma 8:7). Thus, the city and the people should be the same. When we understand that the Zoramites are also lovers of sumptuous goods, we understand why Mormon used that particular name for them.

In all these cases, we would not understand the underlying implications of the names, if we didn't have this list. That becomes the most probable reason that Mormon entered it, although it does help to understand that an "onti" is the largest measure and therefore, underscores the nature of the bribe that will be offered.

As a final cultural note, the fact that the name for the measure is different based upon what is being measured confirms that we are dealing with a system of weights and measures, rather than a system based on any agreed upon value. Modern monetary systems are based on an accepted common unit of value, therefore, there are names for divisions, but not based on what is being valued. The need for the names tells us that all these units were valued and could be used in exchange.

Alma 11:20

20 Now, it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ, therefore, they did stir up the people to riotings, and all manner of disturbances and wickedness, that they might have more employ, that they might get money according to the suits which were brought before them; therefore they did stir up the people against Alma and Amulek.

Comments

The phrase, "it was for the sole purpose to get gain, because they received their wages according to their employ" is the repetitive resumption from Alma 10:32 which said: "the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ." This repetition of the departure phrase confirms that the inserted material is finished, and Mormon is back to his planned text.

The rest of the verse resets the conditions of antagonism that had been laid out prior to the introduction of Zeezrom, who is the pivotal figure in the questioning session that begins in the next verse.

Zeezrom Questions Amulek

Alma 11:21–23

21 And this Zeezrom began to question Amulek, saying: Will ye answer me a few questions which I shall ask you? Now Zeezrom was a man who was expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good; therefore, he said unto Amulek: Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you?

22 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord, which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord. And Zeezrom said unto him:

Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being.

23 Now Amulek said: O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations?

Comments

The dialogue between Zeezrom and Amulek appears to begin quite politely. However, Zeezrom quickly moves to a financial gambit, offering him six onties of silver. We learn in verse 13 above that an onti was the largest measure of silver. This was a bribe of not one, but six of the largest measures. The measurements list doesn't allow us to understand precisely the amount of the bribe, but we do know that a day's wage for a judge was a senum of silver (see verse 3). The next two values double the previous one. The last two don't have a value, but assuming that they also doubled the previous designation, the bribe would have been equal to sixteen days of pay for a judge, presumably one of the higher compensated positions.

Amulek does not accept it, and berates Zeezrom for offering it? But why was that the original offer? Alma₂ and Amulek were preaching repentance, and Zeezrom offered the bribe as a fast way to end the conflict. Had Amulek accepted, Zeezrom could say that they were not sincere and therefore, need not be heeded. With the refusal, he had to move to the questions.

Alma 11:24–25

24 Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay, thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him.

25 And now thou hast lied before God unto me. Thou saidst unto me—Behold these six onties, which are of great worth, I will give unto thee—when thou hadst it in thy heart to retain them from me; and it was only thy desire that I should deny the true and living God, that thou mightest have cause to destroy me. And now behold, for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward.

Comments

Amulek continues to berate Zeezrom for the bribe. He asks a rhetorical question about whether Zeezrom believes in God. Amulek isn't looking for a response because he answers the question for Zeezrom. Zeezrom knows that there is a God, but he has made riches his real god.

Amulek points out that Zeezrom expected that Amulek would respond to the offer of more riches, because (at least by implication) Zeezrom would have. We remember that Amulek had introduced himself as one who had acquired many riches (see Alma 10:4). Amulek's conversion was recent, and Zeezrom perhaps felt he was not so fully converted as to refuse what had been a previous desire for riches.

Alma 11:26–33

26 And Zeezrom said unto him: Thou sayest there is a true and living God?

27 And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God.

28 Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?

29 And he answered, No.

30 Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?

31 And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.

32 And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?

33 And he said unto him, Yea.

Comments

The beginning exchange starts with the theme that Amulek had brought up. Zeezrom asks if Amulek believes that there is “a true and living God.” Amulek does. The next question is important because it leads to the heart of Nephite theology. Zeezrom asks if there is more than one God. The answer is no. That will become significant because in verse 32 Zeezrom asks if the one who shall come is the Son of God. That is important because it is part of Nephite teaching that God himself will come down. Thus, Zeezrom is setting up a possible contradiction between the concept of one God, which any believer in the brass plates religion would profess, and the Nephite emphasis on the one who is to come.

Alma 11:34–35

34 And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word.

35 Now Zeezrom said unto the people: See that ye remember these things; for he said there is but one God; yet he saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people—as though he had authority to command God.

Comments

The next logical trap Zeezrom sets is to ask if this coming atoning Messiah will save the people in their sins. This is important because all teaching about the coming Messiah is about his atoning mission. The Messiah will come to save humanity. The difference is whether humankind is saved in their sins or from their sins. Amulek catches the difference and says; “no.” He is not saying that the Messiah will not redeem. It is the nature of redemption that will be the issue.

Zeezrom pounces on the negative response, and declares that Amulek is in contradiction to the Nephite teaching, and that he is proclaiming some divine authority to do so, because he had said that he knew these things through communication with an angel (see verse 31 above).

Alma 11:36–37

36 Now Amulek saith again unto him: Behold thou hast lied, for thou sayest that I spake as though I had authority to command God because I said he shall not save his people in their sins.

37 And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins.

Comments

Amulek clarifies the problem. He is not saying that the Messiah will not save. He will. The difference is that the Messiah can save only upon principles of repentance. The unrepentant cannot be saved. The argument Amulek offers is that “no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Amulek uses the phrase apparently believing that it is accepted and understood.

We do see a similar phrase in 1 Nephi 10:21 which says that “no unclean thing can dwell with God.” This phrasing does not appear in the Bible, but it is related to the concepts of clean and unclean under the law of Moses. The Nephite phrasing might be derived from Isaiah 52:10–11: “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.” Although Isaiah doesn’t mention entering God’s presence directly, the vessels of the Lord are in the temple, and therefore, symbolically in the presence of God.

Alma 11:38–39

38 Now Zeezrom saith again unto him: Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?

39 And Amulek said unto him: Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last;

Comments

Zeezrom springs the trap he had laid with the question about there being one God. He asks if the Son of God is the very Eternal Father. The two different titles certainly make it seem that there are two Gods. However, when Amulek responds, he simply affirms that they are the same and then moves to the more important issue, which is that the very Eternal Father will come to earth to redeem his people.

Amulek’s simple answer makes it more difficult for modern readers who are used to a distinction between the Father and the Son, each as a member of the Godhead. That was not the Nephite understanding, however. It really was the Father, or Yahweh, who came to earth. For Amulek, Son of God and Eternal Father were just two names for the same being, but each name was appropriate for the location of that being. While in heaven, Yahweh is the Eternal Father. Coming to Earth, he is called Son of God.

This is not a metaphysical oneness, but rather the Nephite belief that it was that very God who came to earth. It is Yahweh with different titles in different realms. An explanation for this is given in the comments on 3 Nephi 1:14.

Alma 11:40–41

40 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

41 Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

Comments

As Amulek explains the mission of the Messiah, he returns to explaining why the Messiah cannot save people in their sins. Redemption will come to those who believe on his name and keep his commandments. Those who repent and believe are saved.

Those who do not, will not be saved. For them, it will be just as though “there had been no redemption made.” As Amulek finishes describing the conditional nature of redemption from sin, he mentions that there is a difference between redemption from sin and redemption from death. The Atonement will serve both functions, but redemption from death will come to all. Nevertheless, all who will be freed from the bands of death will still need to stand before God, their final judge.

Alma 11:42–44

42 Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

43 The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

44 Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil.

Comments

Having introduced the topic of redemption from death, Amulek explains what that means. Verse 42 speaks of temporal death, because the universal redemption of humankind applies only to temporal death. The nature of redemption will be that the spirit and body will rise again, “reunited again in its perfect form.”

Nevertheless, while all will receive that restoration of body and spirit, it will come with a “bright recollection of all our guilt.” That is Amulek’s quick reminder that just because temporal death is defeated through the restoration of body to spirit, it is not the only type of restoration needed. The restored body and spirit will still need to stand before God to be judged of the things we have chosen to do, including our repentance and change, to more closely follow the covenants and laws of God.

Alma 11:45–46

45 Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning the resurrection of the mortal body. I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption.

46 Now, when Amulek had finished these words the people began again to be astonished, and also Zeezrom began to tremble. And thus ended the words of Amulek, or this is all that I have written.

Comments

As Amulek finishes his discussion of the resurrection, Zeezrom began to tremble. This indicated that he was spiritually affected by Amulek’s discourse. It was certainly not simply the words, but the spirit that accompanied those words that caused Zeezrom’s reaction.

Mormon certainly wrote the very last sentence, and probably the last two (or all), of verse 46. The next chapter begins with Alma₂ speaking after noticing Zeerom’s astonishment. That would appear to be an event in close proximity to the ending of Amulek’s discourse. Thus, when Mormon indicates that he could have written more, we are to understand that Amulek continued to speak, but this was all that Mormon decided to include.

This ends the chapter in the 1830 edition. The difference between copied material from Amulek and the next chapter’s copied material from Alma₂ likely influenced Mormon’s decision to create this chapter division.

Alma 12

Alma₂ Exposes the Attempt to Entrap

Alma 12:1–2

1 Now Alma, seeing that the words of Amulek had silenced Zeezrom, for he beheld that Amulek had caught him in his lying and deceiving to destroy him, and seeing that he began to tremble under a consciousness of his guilt, he opened his mouth and began to speak unto him, and to establish the words of Amulek, and to explain things beyond, or to unfold the scriptures beyond that which Amulek had done.
2 Now the words that Alma spake unto Zeezrom were heard by the people round about; for the multitude was great, and he spake on this wise:

Comments

Mormon wrote the text at the end of chapter 11 and continues to write his own linking narrative here. Amulek had originally been called as a second witness to Alma₂, and Zeezrom will become a second witness to Amulek.

Chapter 11 ends with Zeezrom realizing his error: “and also Zeezrom began to tremble.” (Alma 11:46). Mormon tells us that there was more to what Amulek said, but that he chose not to write more. What he now chooses to write is Alma₂’s sermon to Zeezrom and the gathered crowd.

Alma 12:3–6

3 Now Zeezrom, seeing that thou hast been taken in thy lying and craftiness, for thou hast not lied unto men only but thou hast lied unto God; for behold, he knows all thy thoughts, and thou seest that thy thoughts are made known unto us by his Spirit;
4 And thou seest that we know that thy plan was a very subtle plan, as to the subtlety of the devil, for to lie and to deceive this people that thou mightest set them against us, to revile us and to cast us out—
5 Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee. Now I would that ye should remember that what I say unto thee I say unto all.

6 And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity.

Comments

Alma₂ addresses Zeezrom first, but in verse 6 makes it clear that Alma₂ intends this as a condemnation of all of those present. Just as Amulek has easily discerned the reason for the bribe, he understood the attempts to trap him with the types of questions asked. Alma₂ declares that Amulek knew those things because God knows all and can communicate through his Spirit to his servants. Of course, that very fact declares Alma₂ and Amulek as Yahweh's divinely appointed servants.

Alma₂ declares that Zeezrom and the people are under the spell of the adversary to God. The force opposing God led them to attempt to entrap God's true representatives. They have been listening to the wrong source, and the source to which they have been listening will lead to their destruction.

Zeezrom Inquires about the Resurrection

Alma 12: 7–8

7 Now when Alma had spoken these words, Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly, for he was convinced more and more of the power of God; and he was also convinced that Alma and Amulek had a knowledge of him, for he was convinced that they knew the thoughts and intents of his heart; for power was given unto them that they might know of these things according to the spirit of prophecy.

8 And Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God. And he said unto Alma: What does this mean which Amulek hath spoken concerning the resurrection of the dead, that all shall rise from the dead, both the just and the unjust, and are brought to stand before God to be judged according to their works?

Comments

Amulek's words began Zeezrom's conversion, and Alma₂'s words and power in the Spirit intensify the conversion. What becomes interesting is that both the pre-repentant and post-repentant Zeezrom asked questions. The difference isn't in asking questions, but in the intent behind the questions. There was little desire for an answer to the first questions asked; they were designed for other purposes. Now, however, "Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently." Upon strongly feeling the Spirit, the questions continue, but the nature of the questions changes. Now they are sincere attempts to understand.

Alma 12:9–11

9 And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him.

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

11 And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.

Comments

This part of the exchange seems somewhat anomalous. Zeezrom asked about the resurrection and the final judgment, and rather than answer that question directly, Alma₂ discourses on the fact that some are given to know, and some harden their hearts against what they could know. Alma₂ will, in fact, answer the original question in the next verses, but why this interlude?

Zeezrom is a lawyer and should know the law. He has access to the scriptures and has the learning to understand them, yet he asks a question that Alma₂ declares has already been taught. The unasked question is, therefore, why Zeezrom does not already know these things. To that unasked question, Alma₂ answers that he, and those who have accepted similar ideas about God, have hardened their hearts so that they do not understand the word that has been given.

Alma 12:12–14

12 And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

13 Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

14 For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

Comments

As Alma₂ clarifies Amulek's teachings for Zeezrom, he does not do it as a theoretical discussion of principles. He places Zeezrom and the people of Ammonihah at the very final bar of God where they will be judged. He softens the blow slightly by including himself: "if our hearts have been hardened." Alma₂ can easily do this as he had such a hardened heart before his miraculous conversion. Nevertheless, the point is to make the discussion personal and immediate, rather than theoretical.

Alma₂ has accused the people of Ammonihah of rejecting true principles, of having hardened hearts. Thus, "our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us." The judgment at God's hand is not based on external events or criteria, but rather on what we have become. If we have hardened our hearts and will not allow repentance to take hold of us, we are judged according to that hardening of our hearts. We will understand that when we stand before God, our guilt will be our own and we cannot blame anyone else for our uncleanness before God. Although on earth we might hide those feelings, perhaps in groups of like-minded people, before God all will be laid open for God to see.

Alma 12:15

15 But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.

Comments

The first phrase, "but this cannot be," refers to the previous verse where Alma₂ declares that should the unclean come before God, that we will desire to hide from his presence. That cannot be: "we must come forth and stand before him in his glory." The final judgment places us, and all that we have become, before God and his righteousness. At that final time a division between good and evil will occur. If we have not become good, we cannot withstand his presence. In shame the unjust enter the reward of the wicked.

The opposite is also true. Those who have repented through the power of the Messiah's name, and have lived according to the true way, shall be judged good. They will not be ashamed to be in the presence of the Lord.

Alma 12:16–18

16 And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness.

17 Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; and then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them according to his will.

18 Then, I say unto you, they shall be as though there had been no redemption made; for they cannot be redeemed according to God's justice; and they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption.

Comments

Although Alma₂ briefly noted that there is repentance and the opportunity to stand clean before God, his emphasis is on the negative judgment, because that is what awaits the unrepentant people of Ammonihah. Alma₂ has spent no time on the temporal death and resurrection because that is simple. All receive the benefits of resurrection without condition.

The difference is that there is a second death. Alma₂ defines that as a spiritual death rather than a physical death. By using the same term, however, he can more easily compare and contrast the temporal and spiritual deaths. Both can occur. The first is automatically overcome, but the second is conditionally overcome.

Alma₂ explains that those who do not repent, who do not accept Christ's name, will incur a final and complete separation from God. They will be under the "power and captivity of Satan." In the black and white imagery that is often used in prophecy, there are only two options for the judgment, good or evil. Those who die the spiritual death have elected evil, and, hence, are subject to Satan, as the opposite of God.

The lake of fire and brimstone should not be seen as literal, but rather symbolic of the opposite conditions of living in the presence of God.

Modern Saints understand degrees of Glory and think about the question of whether there might be progression after entering those Glories. Those are not Alma₂'s concerns. His teaching shows only the two options. Once assigned to Satan's domain there is no change, as mankind does not die again in order to enable another change.

That should not suggest that there are no degrees of Glory, only that they were not the reason Alma₂ preached this sermon. For this people, they had to choose repentance or destruction, and the destruction would be real. They really had only two choices: repent and survive or remain unrepentant and be destroyed.

Antionah Challenges Alma₂

Alma 12:19–21

19 Now it came to pass that when Alma had made an end of speaking these words, the people began to be more astonished;

20 But there was one Antionah, who was a chief ruler among them, came forth and said unto him: What is this that thou hast said, that man should rise from the dead and be changed from this mortal to an immortal state, that the soul can never die?

21 What does the scripture mean, which saith that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the east of the garden of Eden, lest our first parents should enter and partake of the fruit of the tree of life, and live forever? And thus we see that there was no possible chance that they should live forever.

Comments

After Zeezrom (“silver guy”) not only fails to trap Amulek and Alma₂, he is replaced by Antionah (“gold guy”). The names not only identify the person, but also say something about the nature of the person. Thus, even before he speaks, we understand that he will do as Zeezrom began. He will ask questions designed to entrap, not to understand.

In this case, Antionah decides to go after the statement that all should rise from the dead to become immortal. He uses scripture to show that Adam and Eve were forbidden access to the Tree of Life after they were driven from the Garden, precisely so that they could not live forever. Therefore, Antionah suggests that what Alma₂ says contradicts the scriptures.

Alma₂ Explains the Fall, the Plan, and the Resurrection

Alma 12:22–24

22 Now Alma said unto him: This is the thing which I was about to explain. Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.

23 And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

24 And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

Comments

Alma₂ doesn’t explain the trap, but rather simply responds seriously to the question. First, he agrees with Antionah about the basic interpretation of the Garden story. Adam was driven from the Garden.

Parenthetically, the general absence of women in the Book of Mormon is remarkably underscored by the absence of Eve in this story.

Alma₂ also agrees that had Adam been able to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life, that he would have had continued life. He also notes that since God had declared that eating of the Tree of Knowledge would bring death, it was expedient that Adam be prevented from eating of the Tree of Life. So far, he is building his case by showing agreement with the scriptures as Antionah has cited them.

The difference between Alma₂ and Antionah lies in the nature of death. That there is death in this world does not mean that God intended for death to be permanent. Living forever in mortality is a different condition than living forever as a resurrected being. Antionah made the mistake of limiting his vision of God's plan.

Alma 12:25–27

25 Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation of the world, there could have been no resurrection of the dead; but there was a plan of redemption laid, which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, of which has been spoken.

26 And now behold, if it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state; and thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated, and the word of God would have been void, taking none effect.

27 But behold, it was not so; but it was appointed unto men that they must die; and after death, they must come to judgment, even that same judgment of which we have spoken, which is the end.

Comments

Alma₂ lays out the basic plan of salvation. The first important point is that the plan of salvation was in effect before the foundation of the world. It preceded the Garden of Eden, and the events of the Garden are built upon the foundation of that promise of salvation, not the cause for its later implementation.

If Adam and Eve, and all humankind, were to live forever in the mortal state there would be no division in time, no chance at a change of status. Thus, they would not have the opportunity of entering into God's presence for they would be forever linked to the temporal state. Death is an essential part of the plan of salvation.

This life is not meant to be permanent; it is meant to be a temporary training ground for something different, something indescribably better.

Alma 12:28–30

28 And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

29 Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory.

30 And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men, and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world; and this he made known unto them according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.

Comments

Life in this mortal state is not simply to be lived but is an opportunity to improve our souls. Thus, humankind needed to “know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them.” That is, they needed to understand the greatness of the plan and how it extended beyond this morality.

To do so, Yahweh sent angels to deliver the message, and therefore, the gospel became known. In terms the Nephites might more readily understand, the law of Moses was declared. This was not all, however, for there is also the possibility of spiritual death. That possibility also required a remedy through God’s plan and that is the plan of redemption, or the Atonement. That was the part of the plan that depended upon agency, upon humankind acting “according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.”

Alma 12:31–32

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good—

32 Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God.

Comments

The act of partaking of the Tree of Knowledge did exactly as promised. It gave them knowledge, “becoming as gods.” That phrase, “becoming as gods,” indicates that the principle of agency is not only applicable to God, but an inseparable part of what defines God. Alma₂ quickly teaches the lesson that Lehi₁ had taught, that it is essential to act according to our own wills. Lehi₁ taught that without that agency, and particularly without the knowledge of good and evil, which he termed an “opposition in all things,” there would be no purpose in the creation of this earth (2 Nephi 2:11, 12).

Agency was not the only important gift of God. With the ability to choose came the instructions on how to choose well. Hence “God gave unto them commandments.” We have not only been given the ability to choose, but also given the guidelines for making the choices that will lead us to stand blameless before God at the last day.

Alma 12:33–35

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

35 And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.

Comments

The final piece of the divine plan was to provide for a way out of the mistakes and missteps that would surely come as we used our agency here on earth. God knew that we could not always choose well. Sometimes, we must learn from our mistakes. That is only possible if the mistakes do not have eternal consequences that would prevent us from overcoming them. That is the plan of redemption. That is calling upon the name of the Son, who is the coming atoning Messiah.

The promise is that those who repent and do not harden their hearts can receive divine mercy and forgiveness through their repentance as enabled by the Son's atonement. However, Alma₂ chooses his words carefully, for the people of Ammonihah are not repentant and have hardened their hearts.

Thus, he ends by saying that those who do harden their hearts, those who are like the people of Ammonihah, will be destroyed. This time, it is not a temporal destruction that is promised, but an eternal one.

Lest that sound too harsh, we must remember that Alma₂ is speaking in absolutes. It is true that if one does not repent, they are cut off from God. It might not be true for all in Ammonihah, and modern revelation helps us understand that the opportunity to repent is extended beyond this life. Still, that was not the message Alma₂ was delivering. He was delivering an ultimatum that they choose between good and evil.

Alma 12:36–37

36 And now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord; therefore your iniquity provoketh him that he sendeth down his wrath upon you as in the first provocation, yea, according to his word in the last provocation as well as the first, to the everlasting destruction of your souls; therefore, according to his word, unto the last death, as well as the first.

37 And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts, that we provoke not the Lord our God to pull down his wrath upon us in these his second commandments which he has given unto us; but let us enter into the rest of God, which is prepared according to his word.

Comments

The final choice is theirs, as it should be. They can choose to harden their hearts and be cut off or choose repentance and be permitted into the rest of God. Those are ultimately the only two choices any of us have. We may have longer than this life to make the choice, but eventually we will be with God, or not with God.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 13

Alma₂ Expounds on the Priesthood

Alma 13:1

1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

Comments

Alma₂ uses a different direction for time than we tend to use. We might see casting our minds forward as looking to the future. That is not the meaning here. In this case, it is what we would term casting our minds back to an earlier time. We don't have an explanation for this idiomatic way of using the language, but it is clear from the context that Alma₂ is telling them things about the past that inform them of their present.

Alma₂ reminds his audience that God ordained priests to the priesthood. Our reference to the priests "after his holy order" would be to the Melchizedek priesthood, but the Nephites do not make that kind of distinction in their priesthood. For them, priesthood comes from God and provides the right to perform ordinances and to teach in God's name. There is no division in the priesthood about what may be done by different priesthoods. Authority was authority, and authority from God was power from God.

Alma 13:2–3

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

Comments

Alma₂ continues to speak of the priests of old. These are the teachers, not simply the officiators. The point is that they were to teach the people to know “in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” The essential restored truth of the Nephite gospel is the understanding that the atoning mission of the Messiah is to come, and that it has been part of what prophets and righteous priests taught in the scriptures.

This is the first time in the Book of Mormon that we see an understanding of events of the premortal existence. The priests who preached the true understanding of the mission of the Son were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God.” The statement makes it clear that this happened according to God’s foreknowledge, and therefore had to occur before the priests were born.

The next thing we learn is that these priests were chosen “on account of their exceeding faith and good works.” Although we might see this as a suggestion that it was their premortal works that qualified them, that probably isn’t the meaning here. Alma₂ notes that they also had to choose between good and evil, and that places the good works in the mortal realm. Thus, the priests have been foreordained, but only upon God’s knowledge of how they will act during their mortal lives. Having them chosen for their works also clearly separates them from the lineage based Levitical priests, who were born into their calling.

This leaves the confusing statement that the righteous and faithful are called with a holy calling which was “prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.” The preparatory redemption is the one that prepares us to meet God and stand clean before Him. That is what the Atonement enables. Thus, the priests are called, understanding that they were to preach so that the people might know “in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” The language may be complicated, but the meaning is simply to reiterate what Alma₂ declared in verse 2.

Alma 13:4–6

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—

Comments

Verse 4 repeats the calling discussed in verse 3. These priests were called according to their faith. At this point, the emphasis is not on the premortal preparation, but the mortal teaching. During mortality, they,

and all humankind, are free to choose between good and evil. The priests were called according to their faith, but others would harden their hearts.

In verse 5, “in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren” refers to the state of humanity under agency. All are equally able to choose. The ability to receive both the understanding, and then the blessing of the Atonement, depends upon choosing good. Those who harden their hearts do not have access to the redemptive aspect of the Atonement.

Alma₂ links these foreordained priests to the mission of the Messiah. The Messiah was prepared from the foundation of the earth. Those who were to preach of his coming were also prepared from the foundation of the earth. This is not a new message; it is one of the oldest.

Returning to the ordination of the priests, Alma₂ declares that they were ordained specifically to “teach his commandments.” While many of the children of Israel, and presumably those of Ammonihah, believed that those were Yahweh’s commandments to Moses, Alma₂ declares that it was really to prepare for the commandments of Christ.

Alma 13:7–9

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—

8 Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

Comments

Alma₂ summarizes his argument. Both the high priesthood and the mission of the Son himself were ordained from the foundation of the world. The need for redemption is part of the blessing of agency, and that is an eternal principle “being without beginning of days or end of years.” Although that phrase is unique to the Book of Mormon, it echoes language associated with Melchizedek, who had “neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (Hebrews 7:3).

Where the book of Hebrews in the New Testament associated the phrase with Melchizedek, Alma₂ associates it with the priesthood. This is because there is a nonlinear, king-based priesthood associated with Melchizedek, and that is the type of priesthood available in the New World.

Thus, the priests who participate in the priesthood of the Son will share that priesthood forever. The priesthood is eternal, just as the Son is eternal.

The final “Amen” closed a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The next verse continues the discussion of the priesthood that is associated with Melchizedek, so it isn’t unusual for Orson Pratt to see the next verses as part of the same story. However, that wasn’t the way Mormon wrote. The testifi- catory Amen closes chapters, even if the story or sermon isn’t over. We therefore often see the end of the story written at the beginning of the next chapter, as we do here.

Melchizedek, a Great High Priest, Preached Repentance

Alma 13:10–13

10 Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

13 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

Comments

This part of the discourse began by discussing priests who had been foreordained to preach of the coming atoning mission of the Messiah. Not only were they to preach it, however, but they received the benefits of that redeeming mission even though it had not yet occurred. Just as they were ordained based on God’s foreknowledge of their actions, they could enjoy the benefits of the Atonement based on God’s foreknowl- edge of Christ’s actions.

Thus, they could obey the commandments and have their garments made white (which is the meta- phor for the cleansing from sin), which is a crucial aspect of the Atonement. They continued to live according to those commandments, and therefore, they entered into the rest of the Lord. They are pre- sented as the model for what we should also do in order to enter into the rest of the Lord.

Alma 13:14–16

14 Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.

15 And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.

16 Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

Comments

Alma₂ moves from his general arguments to a specific one from the scriptures. The people of Ammonihah still profess to believe in the scriptures, meaning the plates of brass, but do not believe in the coming Messiah. Alma₂ uses a story from those scriptures to show that the ordained and righteous priests understood the redemption. He turns to Melchizedek.

Genesis 14:18–20 give us all our Old Testament knowledge of Melchizedek, save that a Messianic hymn, Psalm 110, notes of the coming Messiah or perhaps of simply a king in Israel: “thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). That is all we know that would have been available to Lehi₁ and his descendants.

However, Alma₂ appears to have a little more of the story, which we will see in the next verses. At this point, he is setting up the story. The declaration is that the people of Ammonihah should be as the people in the days of Melchizedek. Rather than move immediately to the example, Alma₂ takes a small detour and notes that Melchizedek was important because even Abraham paid tithes to him, and that because Melchizedek was one of the foreordained high priests, he understood the need for the Messiah’s redemptive act.

Alma 13:17–20

17 Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;

18 But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father.

19 Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention.

20 Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice. Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction.

Comments

Verse 20 makes it clear that the story told in verses 17 and 18 was on the Nephite copy of the brass plates. It is not in our Old Testament. The story begins with a people who “had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; they had all gone astray.” This is the parallel to the people of Ammonihah.

Through Melchizedek’s great faith and his understanding of the coming redemptive act, he preached repentance to his people and “they did repent.” Alma₂, presumably through that same ordination and priesthood and with that same understanding of the coming redemption, is preaching to the people of Ammonihah. Clearly, the message is that they too should repent.

Alma₂ Teaches That the Time to Repent Is Now

Alma 13:21–24

21 And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh;

22 Yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations; yea, doth declare it, that they may have glad tidings of great joy; yea, and he doth sound these glad tidings among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us.

23 And they are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and this because of our being wanderers in a strange land; therefore, we are thus highly favored, for we have these glad tidings declared unto us in all parts of our vineyard.

24 For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.

Comments

An example was given of the people repenting after Melchizedek preached to them. Now Alma₂ puts himself in parallel to Melchizedek and cries repentance. If they believe the scriptures, Alma₂ is telling them that they must believe that he has the same authority as Melchizedek to deliver the same message to a similarly wayward people.

Moreover, it isn’t just Melchizedek and Alma₂, it is angels. An angel appeared to Alma₂ to prepare him to preach this message. An angel appeared to Amulek to prepare him to assist in delivering the message. The message of the coming Messiah is for all to hear and provides the means for true repentance for those who truly hear that message.

Alma 13:25–26

25 And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice.

26 And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

Comments

Having declared that angels have transmitted the message that the Messiah will come, now the faithful only wait to have angels declare that the time has come. Alma₂ says that he wishes it could be in his day, but that he is content to have it happen in the future.

What is important is that it will happen. The words of all the faithful priests that he has been speaking about will come true. Thus, the people of Ammonihah should understand the scriptures that they profess to believe and accept the message of the coming Redeemer.

Alma 13:27–30

27 And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance;

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering;

29 Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.

30 And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death.

Comments

Alma₂ concludes his sermon with yet another plea for the people of Ammonihah to humble themselves and repent. In the case of Ammonihah, it was particularly important that they “not procrastinate the day of [their] repentance.” There was a prophesied destruction coming and it is not far in the future.

The promise made to them is the same promise to us all. Through the Atonement, the Lord may grant us repentance and through repentance we will not need to suffer the second death.

Alma 13:31

31 And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book.

Comments

Mormon writes this line. Because the chapter ends, it is not obvious that Mormon will continue his narration for many verses to come. At the end of Amulek's discourse, Mormon had written: "And now the words of Amulek are not all written, nevertheless a part of his words are written in this book" (Alma 9:34). We see a very similar transition here. In Alma 9, those words did precede a chapter break, but they do not here.

In both cases, Mormon is noting that there are two kinds of "books" he is working with. The first is his source, and in both cases, he indicates that his source has more information. That source might be the large plates of Nephi, or it might be a separate record, such as the record of Alma₂ that he is using for this part of his narrative. The second is the "book" he is writing, or the plates upon which the Book of Mormon was written. When he says that things are not written in "this book," he means the plates of Mormon upon which he is writing.

Alma 14

The People Put Alma₂ on Trial

Alma 14:1–2

1 And it came to pass after he had made an end of speaking unto the people many of them did believe on his words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures.

2 But the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek; for they were angry with Alma, because of the plainness of his words unto Zeezrom; and they also said that Amulek had lied unto them, and had reviled against their law and also against their lawyers and judges.

Comments

Alma₂ and Amulek were a powerful pair of preachers. They had had an effect on Zeezrom, and Mormon makes certain that his readers understand that they affected more than just Zeezrom. However, it was also true that they were ineffective in turning the hearts of the majority of the people in Ammonihah. The people's minds and hearts were unchanged, and they still saw Alma₂ and Amulek as resisting their laws. By laws they meant their religiously supported way of life. The ancient world did not make clean distinctions between political and religious realms, and laws were supported by the belief that God was the lawgiver. Thus, they believed that their laws were violated, and that their lawyers and judges were contradicted, even though modern readers see the discourses of Alma₂ and Amulek as purely religious.

Alma 14:3–5

3 And they were also angry with Alma and Amulek; and because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness, they sought to put them away privily.

4 But it came to pass that they did not; but they took them and bound them with strong cords, and took them before the chief judge of the land.

5 And the people went forth and witnessed against them—testifying that they had reviled against the law, and their lawyers and judges of the land, and also of all the people that were in the land; and also

testified that there was but one God, and that he should send his Son among the people, but he should not save them; and many such things did the people testify against Alma and Amulek. Now this was done before the chief judge of the land.

Comments

The phrase “sought to put them away privily” is borrowed from Matthew 1:19, where Joseph, thinking of Mary, “was minded to put her away privily.” In Matthew, the phrase indicates Joseph’s desire to keep Mary from public humiliation, which is the exact opposite of what the people of Ammonihah desire. The phrase used in translation does not correctly demonstrate the intent of the people in Ammonihah. For them, they desired to put Alma₂ and Amulek away very publicly.

Therefore, they were bound with strong cords and taken to the chief judge of Ammonihah. This would have been a very public binding, and it was probably better to say that they were paraded before the chief judge of Ammonihah rather than simply taken. When they are there, the “people” witness against them. This was a very public event.

As Mormon lists the reasons that Alma₂ and Amulek should be judged guilty of contradicting the laws of Ammonihah, they related the important theological difference about the Son of God living among the people, but not saving them. This, of course, was true and was the very point of Alma₂ and Amulek’s discourses.

Alma 14:6–7

6 And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken; and he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell.

7 And it came to pass that he began to cry unto the people, saying: Behold, I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God. And he began to plead for them from that time forth; but they reviled him, saying: Art thou also possessed with the devil? And they spit upon him, and cast him out from among them, and also all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek; and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them.

Comments

Zeezrom had been one of Alma₂ and Amulek’s accusers in the beginning, but he heard what they said and began to believe. As one who had opposed the true word of God and then understood that word, Zeezrom “began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt.” This was the very same thing which had happened to Alma₂ when he, too, had preached against the word of God and had come to a realization of his guilt. Alma₂’s experience involved an angel. Zeezrom’s involved two witnesses sent by an angel.

The intensity of the experience might have differed, but the conversion was the same. The first stage of conversion was the absolute understanding of where Alma₂ or Zeezrom had taught incorrectly. That overpowering feeling grounded their change of heart.

Zeezrom's conversion is then contrasted with the persistence of the people in condemning the true word of God. As there were many more of the unbelieving people, they exercised their majority right by expelling Zeezrom and any others who had believed upon Alma₂ and Amulek's words. The throwing of stones appears to have been to encourage them to leave. We will see these people again in chapter 15. Others were martyred in a much more gruesome manner.

Alma₂ and Amulek Forced to Watch as Believers Are Burned

Alma 14:8–11

8 And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire.

9 And it came to pass that they took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire.

10 And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.

Comments

This incident poses extremely important questions, one which has been asked multiple times. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why doesn't a merciful God prevent terrible atrocities? Amulek asks if they cannot "stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames?" He doesn't ask whether it was possible, but rather why they do not do what Amulek believes sincerely they could do.

Alma₂'s answer is not really satisfying for a modern reader. Nevertheless, it contains the elements of the answer to all such questions. The first, and unstated, reason is the imperative of agency. The Lord

can, and does interfere in some actions of humankind, but not in all. Mortals cannot know his reasons for when he chooses to intervene, but it is certain that agency is the overriding principle.

The second part of the answer is that earthly injustices are temporal, not eternal. While human injustice may often result in the death of innocents, in the eternal perspective, “the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory.” Those who perpetrate such actions also receive the eternal justice for their actions. Alma₂ tells Amulek that from God’s perspective, all will be made just, even when our current perspective sees things as terribly unjust.

Alma₂ and Amulek Are Cast into Prison

Alma 14:12–16

12 Now Amulek said unto Alma: Behold, perhaps they will burn us also.

13 And Alma said: Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

14 Now it came to pass that when the bodies of those who had been cast into the fire were consumed, and also the records which were cast in with them, the chief judge of the land came and stood before Alma and Amulek, as they were bound; and he smote them with his hand upon their cheeks, and said unto them: After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?

15 Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire; neither has God saved them because they were of thy faith. And the judge smote them again upon their cheeks, and asked: What say ye for yourselves?

16 Now this judge was after the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon.

Comments

Having watched the suffering of those who believed on their words, Amulek honestly wonders if they would be next. Alma₂, however, understands that their work is not finished. That did not mean that they would have it easy, however.

The chief judge of the land of Ammonihah expects that Alma₂ and Amulek would be subdued, if not scared, by witnessing the destruction of so many people. Therefore, he can ask: “after what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?” His question suggests that the particular form in which the righteous were killed was designed to mock Alma₂’s prophecy of fire and brimstone for the wicked.

Note that the concepts of what a judge might do according to the law are different for Ammonihah than what we would expect. The judge himself mocks Alma₂ and Amulek in both words and by physical

intimidation. Mormon reminds his readers that this judge, and by extension, all of Ammonihah, was part of the “order and faith of Nehor.” In case his readers have forgotten, Mormon makes certain that we remember that Nehor slew Gideon, and therefore, we should not see this order and faith favorably.

Alma 14:17–19

17 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek answered him nothing; and he smote them again, and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison.

18 And when they had been cast into prison three days, there came many lawyers, and judges, and priests, and teachers, who were of the profession of Nehor; and they came in unto the prison to see them, and they questioned them about many words; but they answered them nothing.

19 And it came to pass that the judge stood before them, and said: Why do ye not answer the words of this people? Know ye not that I have power to deliver you up unto the flames? And he commanded them to speak; but they answered nothing.

Comments

In verse 18 we finally see the fulfillment of the reference in the header to Alma chapter 9 that Alma₂ and Amulek would be cast into prison. Soon we will see the fulfillment of the miraculous delivery. In the meantime, Mormon continues to describe the conditions of their confinement.

Alma₂ and Amulek are questioned and physically beaten and thrown into prison. When they are brought out, it is to face the lawyers and teachers. These were the political and religious leaders of Ammonihah, and it was they who taught and enforced the law as understood through the Order of the Nehors. Although they are questioned, they say nothing. That description is repeated in verse 18 and 19, indicating that regardless of the questioning, they firmly declined to say anything.

We saw in the trials of Nehor and Amalikhah that there were confessions given prior to execution. Although the text appears to indicate that they were voluntary, it is possible that these intimidation methods were intended to elicit confessions from Alma₂ and Amulek through less than voluntary means. Thus, their remaining silence prevented the lawyers from even twisting their words into a confession that might allow the lawyers to convict them and sentence them to death.

Alma 14:20–22

20 And it came to pass that they departed and went their ways, but came again on the morrow; and the judge also smote them again on their cheeks. And many came forth also, and smote them, saying: Will ye stand again and judge this people, and condemn our law? If ye have such great power why do ye not deliver yourselves?

21 And many such things did they say unto them, gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them, and saying: How shall we look when we are damned?

22 And many such things, yea, all manner of such things did they say unto them; and thus they did mock them for many days. And they did withhold food from them that they might hunger, and water that they might thirst; and they also did take from them their clothes that they were naked; and thus they were bound with strong cords, and confined in prison.

Comments

The physical intimidation intensified. Alma₂ and Amulek were starved and stripped naked and continued to be bound. All these actions were not unusual in Maya culture. A painted pot has been discovered that shows captives before a ruler, and they are stripped and bound, with some indication that they may have been beaten. In Palenque, Mexico, one of the murals showed men with fingers outstretched in what was thought to have been a graceful gesture, until cleaning the mural uncovered that their fingernails had been removed and blood dripped from the fingers. The use of such draconian measures against captives resonates with the poor treatment of Alma₂ and Amulek. Very similar actions were taken against the sons of Mosiah₂ in the Lamanite city of Middoni, as we will see in Alma 20:30.

Alma 14:23–25

23 And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for many days, (and it was on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) that the chief judge over the land of Ammonihah and many of their teachers and their lawyers went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords.

24 And the chief judge stood before them, and smote them again, and said unto them: If ye have the power of God deliver yourselves from these bands, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words.

25 And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; and when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet.

Comments

On yet another occasion, the chief judge over the land of Ammonihah entered the prison to continue the persecution of Alma₂ and Amulek. This time, he asks “if ye have the power of God deliver yourselves from these bands, and then we will believe.” It was probably the wrong thing to say.

After accepting the abuse for an indeterminate time, Alma₂ and Amulek finally respond. They rise to their feet because “the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek.” Mormon neatly sets up the final

condemnation of Ammonihah. They will get their sign. They will not repent. Their destruction is sure. It will not be seen until Alma chapter 16, but it is surely coming.

Alma 14:26–29

26 And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.

27 And it came to pass that so great was their fear that they fell to the earth, and did not obtain the outer door of the prison; and the earth shook mightily, and the walls of the prison were rent in twain, so that they fell to the earth; and the chief judge, and the lawyers, and priests, and teachers, who smote upon Alma and Amulek, were slain by the fall thereof.

28 And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ. And they straightway came forth out of the prison; and they were loosed from their bands; and the prison had fallen to the earth, and every soul within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, was slain; and they straightway came forth into the city.

29 Now the people having heard a great noise came running together by multitudes to know the cause of it; and when they saw Alma and Amulek coming forth out of the prison, and the walls thereof had fallen to the earth, they were struck with great fear, and fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions; and thus they did flee from the presence of Alma and Amulek.

Comments

The power of God was indeed upon them and was manifest in a way that not only saved Alma₂ and Amulek, but signaled that God was behind their deliverance. God is God over heaven and earth, and therefore earth responds to his commands. Assuming that the Book of Mormon took place in Mesoamerican, it occurred in a land quite familiar with earthquakes. It was not simply that there was an earthquake, but that it came apparently upon command, and broke down the building in such a way that Alma₂ and Amulek could escape unscathed.

The combination of Alma₂'s prayer, the earthquake, and the ability of Alma₂ and Amulek to walk out of the prison created fear in those who were nearby, and they fled—further allowing Alma₂ and Amulek to make their escape.

This is not the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. The story continues immediately in the next chapter.

Alma 15

Alma₂ and Amulek Go to Sidom

Alma 15:1–2

1 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that city; and they departed, and came out even into the land of Sidom; and behold, there they found all the people who had departed out of the land of Ammonihah, who had been cast out and stoned, because they believed in the words of Alma.

2 And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children, and also concerning themselves, and of their power of deliverance.

Comments

In Alma 14:7 we learned that some believers in Ammonihah had been cast out, apparently forced out by casting stones at them to encourage them to leave. They went to Sidom, and Alma₂ and Amulek went to Sidom. This suggests that Sidom was friendly to both the Nephite government and religion, and that it was the most logical way to travel to another city. It was probably reasonably close, and may have been connected by known paths, if not actual roads.

The immigrants to Sidom meet with Alma₂ and Amulek and exchange stories.

Alma 15:3–5

3 And also Zeezrom lay sick at Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness, for he supposed that Alma and Amulek were no more; and he supposed that they had been slain because of his iniquity. And this great sin, and his many other sins, did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore, having no deliverance; therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heat.

4 Now, when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage; and he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.

5 And it came to pass that they went immediately, obeying the message which he had sent unto them; and they went in unto the house unto Zeezrom; and they found him upon his bed, sick, being very low with a burning fever; and his mind also was exceedingly sore because of his iniquities; and when he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him.

Comments

Among the refugees was Zeezrom, who lay sick. What we learn of his sickness is that Zeezrom attributed it to spiritual, rather than physical causes. He had a fever, but perhaps saw the feverish burning as a physical manifestation of the burning of fire and brimstone that he felt might be the fate of his soul.

In a state where he felt that his illness had a spiritual cause, he was encouraged to know that Alma₂ and Amulek were in Sidom, for he likely felt that they had the power to heal the spiritual sickness. Zeezrom has them brought to him, and begs them to heal them, clearly believing that they could.

Alma 15:6–12

6 And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation?

7 And he answered and said: Yea, I believe all the words that thou hast taught.

8 And Alma said: If thou believest in the redemption of Christ thou canst be healed.

9 And he said: Yea, I believe according to thy words.

10 And then Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ.

11 And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk; and this was done to the great astonishment of all the people; and the knowledge of this went forth throughout all the land of Sidom.

12 And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.

Comments

Asking a feverish patient if they believe in the power of Christ unto salvation is not standard modern medical procedure. Nevertheless, Zeezrom was certain that this was a physical manifestation of a spiritual illness, and so the question is appropriate. It was a signal of his repentance from the former teachings of the Order of the Nehors and his willingness to accept the Nephite religion as Alma₂ and Amulek had explained it.

When Zeezrom confesses faith in the redemption of Christ, Alma₂ asks God to heal Zeezrom. It was done. The end of this episode sees Zeezrom not only healed, but also converted from defending the Order of the Nehors into a preacher of the Nephite religion.

Alma 15:13–14

13 And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom, and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were desirous to be baptized.

14 And it came to pass that they were many; for they did flock in from all the region round about Sidom, and were baptized.

Comments

The closing of the story emphasizes the successes that Alma₂ and Amulek had. They had converted Zeezrom, they had converted many who had physically left Ammonihah. While those who left certainly felt the loss of homes and lands and perhaps friends, they would find out soon that leaving will also have saved their lives. Better the loss of their homes rather than of their lives.

In addition to those converted from Ammonihah, there were others in the land of Sidom who were converted. We do not learn why they had not already been converted. Perhaps they were believers in the general idea of the Nephite religion but had not formally associated with this new concept of a church. Their baptism was not only for cleansing from sin but was also a witness of their entry into the church.

Alma 15:15–19

15 But as to the people that were in the land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people; and they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek to the devil; for they were of the profession of Nehor, and did not believe in the repentance of their sins.

16 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek, Amulek having forsaken all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God, he being rejected by those who were once his friends and also by his father and his kindred;

17 Therefore, after Alma having established the church at Sidom, seeing a great check, yea, seeing that the people were checked as to the pride of their hearts, and began to humble themselves before God, and began to assemble themselves together at their sanctuaries to worship God before the altar, watching and praying continually, that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction—

18 Now as I said, Alma having seen all these things, therefore he took Amulek and came over to the land of Zarahemla, and took him to his own house, and did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord.

19 And thus ended the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

The ending of this story shows the contrast between those who remained unbelieving in Ammonihah and those who were converted and fled Ammonihah, as well as those converted in the land of Sidom. The

righteous pray “that they might be delivered from Satan, and from death, and from destruction,” the very things that the next chapter will demonstrate happening to those who remained in Ammonihah and remained believing after the Order of the Nehors.

This ends the chapter from the 1830 edition. The ending is probably triggered by the statement that it was the end of the tenth year of the reign of the judges. When Mormon had no other more important reason to end a chapter, he often looked to a period of five years. See also the comments on Alma 1:1 and 3:25–27 for more information on the use of five-year periods.

Alma 16

Lamanites Destroy Ammonihah

Alma 16:1–2

1 And it came to pass in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, on the fifth day of the second month, there having been much peace in the land of Zarahemla, there having been no wars nor contentions for a certain number of years, even until the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year, there was a cry of war heard throughout the land.

2 For behold, the armies of the Lamanites had come in upon the wilderness side, into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah, and began to slay the people and destroy the city.

Comments

One of the repeated aspects of Mormon's writing is that when he mentions a time of continual peace, it is a prelude to the disruption of that peace. The previous chapter ended with a statement of the year and this chapter begins with a statement of the year. In this case, the shift to note both the year and the conflict with the Lamanites tells us that Mormon has temporarily stepped away from his editing of Alma₂'s personal record and has returned to the large plates for this information.

This return to the large plates does not mean that he is moving away from Alma₂'s record, but rather that he establishes this Lamanite invasion according to the record on the large plates. This particular interlude tells the Nephite side of the story of the destruction of Ammonihah. Mormon includes it as the fulfillment of the prophecy Alma₂ pronounced upon the city.

Since this insertion of material from the large plates serves the story of Alma₂ and Amulek, Mormon returns to finish their story at the end of the chapter and after declaring that their pronouncement upon Ammonihah was fulfilled.

Alma 16:3–4

3 And now it came to pass, before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah, and taken others captive into the wilderness.

4 Now it came to pass that the Nephites were desirous to obtain those who had been carried away captive into the wilderness.

Comments

Although Alma₂ had declared that Ammonihah would be destroyed if it did not repent, and his personal record showed that they did not repent, Mormon gives us the short version of the destruction of Ammonihah from the perspective of the large plates. There is little information given, but it is important for understanding the later story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, which will provide a Lamanite view of the same battle.

The first important piece of information to file away is that this was a lightning raid on Ammonihah. It was a surprise, and the Nephites didn't have time to raise an army sufficient to drive the Lamanites from the land.

The second piece of information is that the Lamanites took captives. That will become an important part of the story later, but it is interesting to note that we don't get that explicit statement of taking captives in most stories of Nephite wars with the Lamanites.

Lastly, this was not a sustained campaign. Where other wars appear to attempt to establish territorial dominance, this was a hit-and-run raid. The Lamanites destroyed Ammonihah, took captives, and immediately left.

All these features will become important when the other side of the story is told. Their presence here is corroboration that Mormon is dealing with historical records and seeing them according to the way each faction recorded them.

Alma 16:5–8

5 Therefore, he that had been appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites, (and his name was Zoram, and he had two sons, Lehi and Aha)—now Zoram and his two sons, knowing that Alma was high priest over the church, and having heard that he had the spirit of prophecy, therefore they went unto him and desired of him to know whither the Lord would that they should go into the wilderness in search of their brethren, who had been taken captive by the Lamanites.

6 And it came to pass that Alma inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And Alma returned and said unto them: Behold, the Lamanites will cross the river Sidon in the south wilderness, away up beyond the borders of the land of Manti. And behold there shall ye meet them, on the east of the river Sidon, and there the Lord will deliver unto thee thy brethren who have been taken captive by the Lamanites.

7 And it came to pass that Zoram and his sons crossed over the river Sidon, with their armies, and marched away beyond the borders of Manti into the south wilderness, which was on the east side of the river Sidon.

8 And they came upon the armies of the Lamanites, and the Lamanites were scattered and driven into the wilderness; and they took their brethren who had been taken captive by the Lamanites, and there was not one soul of them had been lost that were taken captive. And they were brought by their brethren to possess their own lands.

Comments

The Nephites could not prevent the raid on Ammonihah, but they could attempt to do damage to the Lamanites as retaliation. To do so, they go to Alma₂ as the high priest to receive knowledge of where to search for the Lamanite army. Alma₂ consults Yahweh and receives the information on the path that the Lamanites were taking. Most Lamanite invasions came from the south through the pass near Manti, which was near the headwaters of the Sidon. This Lamanite army may have bypassed Manti but ended up on the same basic path.

The Nephite army heeds Alma₂'s word and finds the Lamanite army as promised. They were able to recover the captives even while the "Lamanites were scattered and driven into the wilderness." The appearance of the captives as a motivation in this story occurs multiple times. Captives are mentioned as part of the Lamanite attack, then as a reason to pursue the Lamanites, and finally as a culmination of the Nephites following Yahweh's information and recovering the captives as Yahweh had promised. Captives are important to the story for reasons that we will see again as part of the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

At this point, however, the return of the captives highlights Yahweh as God of the Nephites and as a God directly involved with his people.

Alma 16:9–11

9 And thus ended the eleventh year of the judges, the Lamanites having been driven out of the land, and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness.

10 But behold, in one day it was left desolate; and the carcasses were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness.

11 Nevertheless, after many days their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth, and they were covered with a shallow covering. And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate.

Comments

Mormon finishes the successful expulsion of the Lamanites by turning to the city of Ammonihah. He first notes that "every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed." Of course, that is hyperbole. Typically, some people survive such invasions, and if there was no one else, the returned captives survived. Mormon's point is not pure and accurate history, however. It is theologically important to note that they were all destroyed, because the best shows the fulfillment of the prophecy. We are to remember that the righteous of Ammonihah had either been killed by the Ammonihahites or had fled to Sidom.

The picture of the heaped dead is meant to invoke destruction, and Mormon specifically says that “in one day it was left desolate.” Mormon places an extra meaning on the word *desolate*. He will use that word more and more in conjunction with both the lands and the people of Jared. Mormon is setting up the comparison between desolation for Ammonihahite wickedness and the end of the Jaredites in desolation for their wickedness.

Notice how Mormon emphasizes the idea of desolation. “And it was called Desolation of Nehors.” “Their lands remained desolate.” It is not a coincidence that the land northward, the land that Mormon associates with the Jaredites, is called the Land Desolation, in dramatic counterpoint to the Nephite land to the south, the Land Bountiful. These are names with a purpose.

Alma 16:12

12 And the Lamanites did not come again to war against the Nephites until the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus for three years did the people of Nephi have continual peace in all the land.

Comments

This is a fascinating verse because it confirms that noting continual peace leads to an entry about conflict. What is fascinating is that while Mormon tells us that the Lamanites came to war in the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges, he tells us absolutely nothing more. We may assume that the Lamanites were defeated, else, surely, he would have provided some information concerning that. However, at this point in his text he returns to the story of Alma₂ and Amulek and ends this chapter with the ending of the fourteenth year. There is no more mention of this war with the Lamanites.

Alma₂ and Amulek Continue to Preach

Alma 16:13–17

13 And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance to the people in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.

14 And as many as would hear their words, unto them they did impart the word of God, without any respect of persons, continually.

15 And thus did Alma and Amulek go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work, to preach the word throughout all the land. And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites.

16 And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming—

17 That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

Comments

Once brought together by an angel, Alma₂ and Amulek continue as missionary companions. At this point, however, we lose detail. Mormon shifts into generic discussions. He tells us that they preached “in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues,” but unlike the quoted sermons, Mormon doesn’t tell us where these places were. The previous itinerary of specific locations is replaced with general statements.

Continuing the vague nature of the descriptions, Alma₂ and Amulek are successful, and they continued to establish the church. In verse 16 Mormon provides the idea of what establishing the church meant: “there was no inequality among them.”

One point of verse 13 has been of some concern, and that is the listing of synagogues. There is a meaning of the synagogue as a specific type of meeting place that postdates the departure of Lehi, from Jerusalem. However, the term can also be used in its generic meaning of a gathering place, the literal Greek meaning of the word. Considering that it can simply mean a gathering place, and that we see it in translation, rather than in the original, provides ample explanation for what that term is doing in the text, even if there is a later-developed meaning of the word that would not have been in the Nephite text before translation.

Alma 16:18–21

18 Now those priests who did go forth among the people did preach against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be—

19 Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.

20 And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.

21 And now after the church had been established throughout all the land—having got the victory over the devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord pouring out his blessings upon the people—thus ended the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Mormon continues the list of things that were preached. Among the preaching against lyings and deceivings, there is also the very important teaching about the “coming of the Son of God.”

All of these things simply establish the ending of the story of Alma₂ and Amulek’s preaching tour. Mormon has left specifics, and is simply noting that outside of Ammonihah, good was accomplished. Putting an end to that story allows him to return to Alma₂’s personal record and the next important story he wanted to take from that record. That begins in the next chapter.

This chapter remained unchanged from the 1830 edition, when the 1879 changes to the chapters were made.

Alma 17

Alma₂ Encounters the Sons of Mosiah

Alma 17: Header

An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance—according to the record of Alma.

Comments

Mormon tells us that his source is the “record of Alma.” This is the same record that we have previously seen for the sermons in Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ammonihah. The major difference is that this will be a story of the sons of Mosiah₂, not Alma₂. As this chapter begins, we are introduced to the way that the story of the sons of Mosiah₂ ends up on Alma₂’s personal records. Alma₂ meets them, and they tell their story. It appears that Alma₂ receives records from them that will tell the story.

When Mormon uses that separate source, he provides a chapter header to notify his readers that he is taking text from a source that was not on the large plates.

Alma 17:1–4

1 And now it came to pass that as Alma was journeying from the land of Gideon southward, away to the land of Manti, behold, to his astonishment, he met with the sons of Mosiah journeying towards the land of Zarahemla.

2 Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

3 But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.

4 And they had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites, having had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him.

Comments

These four verses form the transition from the stories about Alma₂ to the stories of his friends, the sons of Mosiah₂. Alma₂ is heading toward Manti when he meets the sons of Mosiah₂ returning from the lands of the Lamanites. It is not surprising that the sons of Mosiah₂ were coming from Manti, as that is the historically logical path between the Lamanite lands and the land of Zarahemla. It is important to know that Alma₂ meets them, for we need to know how their story becomes part of Alma₂'s record. It will become clear that there are different records of the brothers' labors among the Lamanites, but Mormon is accessing them through Alma₂'s records. This meeting put Alma₂ in a position to receive those records, whether that occurred at the time of this meeting, or sometime later.

Verses 2 through 4 have a similar function to the book headers that we see in Mormon's writings. Those headings provide the reader with information of what will occur in the book. The chapter headers appear to be used to mark the source of the text. However, Mormon provides the same kind of forward-looking synopsis as he does in the book headers, but here it is imbedded in the text itself.

We are given to know that we will learn of what happened in the fourteen years that they have been gone, and that during that time they taught with power and had success. Before beginning the story we know that it will have a good ending.

The Sons of Mosiah Go to Preach to the Lamanites

Alma 17:5–8

5 Now these are the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings, for they had many afflictions; they did suffer much, both in body and in mind, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, and also much labor in the spirit.

6 Now these were their journeyings: Having taken leave of their father, Mosiah, in the first year of the judges; having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people;

7 Nevertheless they departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and took their swords, and their spears, and their bows, and their arrows, and their slings; and this they did that they might provide food for themselves while in the wilderness.

8 And thus they departed into the wilderness with their numbers which they had selected, to go up to the land of Nephi, to preach the word of God unto the Lamanites.

Comments

The story returns to the beginning. In verse 2, Mormon had reminded his readers that the sons of Mosiah₂ had been with Alma₂ during his angelic conversion. The story that will be told doesn't move that far back in time, but that was the beginning of the journey.

We have an interesting doubling of the statement that Mormon will tell of their journeyings. In the first, in verse 5, we have another forward-looking statement. Although it is part of the introduction to the journeys themselves, it is both the ending of the previous outline as well as the beginning of the next phase. The content looks ahead.

Verse 6 begins the actual story of their journeyings, where the readers will see in a more chronological order the events that are briefly described in the synopsis given in verses 2 through 5.

Mormon places the timeframe for their departure in the first year of the reign of the judges. This confirms the fourteen-year absence, as the last sentence of the previous chapter (which was a chapter in the 1830 edition) indicated that Mormon is writing of events at the ending of the fourteenth year.

The brothers apparently take others with them, as suggested in verse 8, though we will hear very little about those others as the stories of the brothers are related.

Alma 17:9–10

9 And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

10 And it came to pass that the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted.

Comments

The only part of the brothers' concerns that is stated in verse 9 is that they desire to be effective missionaries. That very understandable prayer does not necessarily lead into verse 10's description of the Lord's response. The Lord tells them to be comforted. Why were concerns over being effective something that led to a need for comfort?

What is not stated is that this is a reasonably small band of armed Nephites entering into their mortal enemy's homeland. Verse 7 noted that they took weapons "that they might provide food." They took "swords, and their spears, and their bows, and their arrows, and their slings." Bows and slings could easily be used to kill game. Spears might, but swords were an unlikely hunting weapon. However, even if those were the only purposes, when Lamanites found them, they would certainly see armed invaders.

Thus, there was every reason to be uneasy. Although they were entering to preach, they were entering hostile territory, where they would not be able to predict the outcome. Clearly, comfort was applicable. Their faith allowed them to be comforted, on the Lord's declaration that they be comforted.

Alma 17:11–13

11 And the Lord said unto them also: Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word; yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls.

12 And it came to pass that the hearts of the sons of Mosiah, and also those who were with them, took courage to go forth unto the Lamanites to declare unto them the word of God.

13 And it came to pass when they had arrived in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, that they separated themselves and departed one from another, trusting in the Lord that they should meet again at the close of their harvest; for they supposed that great was the work which they had undertaken.

Comments

Bolstered by the Lord's blessing of comfort (verse 10), the brothers begin their missionary journey. Their mission was to take the gospel to the Lamanites, and there were many of them. They split up so that they could go to different people. This was done under inspiration, and the Lord knew both the different peoples that would receive the word as well as the fact that a much smaller group of men posed much less of a threat than the entire group of armed men who had come to the Lamanite lands.

When they say that they trusted that they should meet "at the close of their harvest," this means the end of their missionary journeys. The conversion of souls is often referred to as a harvest, and they are expecting that success, and that they will all survive to be reunited at some point when they have accomplished their mission.

Alma 17:14–17

14 And assuredly it was great, for they had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them; and their hearts were set upon riches, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, that they might not labor for them with their own hands.

15 Thus they were a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols, and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers; notwithstanding the promises of the Lord were extended unto them on the conditions of repentance.

16 Therefore, this was the cause for which the sons of Mosiah had undertaken the work, that perhaps they might bring them unto repentance; that perhaps they might bring them to know of the plan of redemption.

17 Therefore they separated themselves one from another, and went forth among them, every man alone, according to the word and power of God which was given unto him.

Comments

In verse 13 Mormon indicated that the brothers separated from one another. That information is repeated in verse 17. That repetition suggests that we look at verses 14–16 as information that Mormon inserted into the story as he found it in Alma₂'s records. That insertion suggests that the Nephite stereotyping of the Nephites persists into Mormon's day. They are not painted favorably at all.

What is most remarkable about this insertion is that the picture we will see of the Lamanites in the next several chapters is dramatically different from this stereotypical designation. It almost appears that Mormon understood that the story from the sons of Mosiah₂ would lead to different conclusions, and so he inserts that text to prejudice his readers to see the Lamanites in that less favorable light.

It is also important to note that Mormon believes that repentance would alter all the negative statements he has made about the Lamanites. In a sense, he is correct. Those who are converted will become Nephites, and therefore, leave behind the unfavorable descriptions that apply to Lamanites. These are ethnocentric descriptions, and the evidence of these chapters will underscore the fact that they should not be seen as complete historical facts.

Ammon Goes before King Lamoni

Alma 17:18–20

18 Now Ammon being the chief among them, or rather he did administer unto them, and he departed from them, after having blessed them according to their several stations, having imparted the word of God unto them, or administered unto them before his departure; and thus they took their several journeys throughout the land.

19 And Ammon went to the land of Ishmael, the land being called after the sons of Ishmael, who also became Lamanites.

20 And as Ammon entered the land of Ishmael, the Lamanites took him and bound him, as was their custom to bind all the Nephites who fell into their hands, and carry them before the king; and thus it was

left to the pleasure of the king to slay them, or to retain them in captivity, or to cast them into prison, or to cast them out of his land, according to his will and pleasure.

Comments

We begin with Ammon's story. He departs into the land of Ishmael. Little is known about the land of Ishmael. Verse 19 tells us that it was named after the sons of Ishmael, although, unless one of them was named Ishmael, it was named in honor of their father.

As Ammon enters the land, he is noticed and taken and bound. There was good reason for the sons of Mosiah₂ to be concerned for their safety in Lamanite lands. Ammon enters as a prisoner, one completely at the mercy of the king.

Alma 17:21–24

21 And thus Ammon was carried before the king who was over the land of Ishmael; and his name was Lamoni; and he was a descendant of Ishmael.

22 And the king inquired of Ammon if it were his desire to dwell in the land among the Lamanites, or among his people.

23 And Ammon said unto him: Yea, I desire to dwell among this people for a time; yea, and perhaps until the day I die.

24 And it came to pass that king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed; and he would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife.

Comments

Ammon presents us with an unusual set of events without any comment. He is presented before the king, who asks if he desires to dwell among the Lamanites. Since Ammon did not arrive with an army, it was possible that there was a sincere desire to settle in the lands. Ammon commits to living among them, perhaps until he died. That didn't happen, but Ammon was willing for it to happen.

Then things start to get interesting. King Lamoni agrees to let him live among his people and suggests that Ammon marry one of King Lamoni's daughters. That quick offer requires some background to be believable. It is possible that Ammon also provided his genealogy. That would not have been unusual, and even though he and his brothers had declined the throne, they were still related to a Nephite king. Perhaps that was the reason that King Lamoni sought to create a tighter alliance by offering a daughter in marriage.

Also plausible is that King Lamoni understood that Ammon would become his son-in-law, and therefore, under the will and power of Lamoni, with family obligations of obedience. It would have been

an extension of the idea of the alliance, but would assure that the Nephite, who had no allegiance to any Lamanite, had an important tie to the king.

Ammon Defends the Flocks

Alma 17:25–28

25 But Ammon said unto him: Nay, but I will be thy servant. Therefore Ammon became a servant to king Lamoni. And it came to pass that he was set among other servants to watch the flocks of Lamoni, according to the custom of the Lamanites.

26 And after he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the Lamanitish servants going forth with their flocks to the place of water, which was called the water of Sebus, and all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither, that they may have water—

27 Therefore, as Ammon and the servants of the king were driving forth their flocks to this place of water, behold, a certain number of the Lamanites, who had been with their flocks to water, stood and scattered the flocks of Ammon and the servants of the king, and they scattered them insomuch that they fled many ways.

28 Now the servants of the king began to murmur, saying: Now the king will slay us, as he has our brethren because their flocks were scattered by the wickedness of these men. And they began to weep exceedingly, saying: Behold, our flocks are scattered already.

Comments

Rather than accept a marriage, Ammon declares that he simply wants to be a servant. King Lamoni accepts and he sends Ammon on a perplexing task. The problem was not simply to take the flocks to water, but that the events that occurred were part of a pattern that surely the King understood would be repeated. Other Lamanites scatter the flocks. The other servants are concerned because they fear the king will slay them. He has done that with other servants to whom the same thing had happened.

The King certainly knew that the scattering of the flocks occurred and knew that he had executed other servants for their failure to protect the flocks. Ammon was intentionally sent on a mission where the outcome was probable that he would be executed.

As the story unfolds, it is important to remember that the flocks were scattered. There will be an insinuation that those doing the scattering were thieves, but their actions belie that idea. They didn't take the flocks away, but rather scattered them.

We may also ask what kind of flocks they were. Arnold Friberg's famous painting shows sheep, but sheep will move together rather than scatter, so they clearly were not sheep. If this were a Mesoamerican setting, a possibility is deer, which were known to have been kept. Deer would certainly scatter when frightened.

Alma 17:29–32

29 Now they wept because of the fear of being slain. Now when Ammon saw this his heart was swollen within him with joy; for, said he, I will show forth my power unto these my fellow-servants, or the power which is in me, in restoring these flocks unto the king, that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to believe in my words.

30 And now, these were the thoughts of Ammon, when he saw the afflictions of those whom he termed to be his brethren.

31 And it came to pass that he flattered them by his words, saying: My brethren, be of good cheer and let us go in search of the flocks, and we will gather them together and bring them back unto the place of water; and thus we will preserve the flocks unto the king and he will not slay us.

32 And it came to pass that they went in search of the flocks, and they did follow Ammon, and they rushed forth with much swiftness and did head the flocks of the king, and did gather them together again to the place of water.

Comments

Ammon is not party to the history of these raids on the king's flocks, and so he works to find a solution. One, which is simple, is that they go gather the flocks and bring them back. Either the other servants had never thought of such a thing, or they knew that it would simply result in the intruders scattering them again. In any case, they do not think to gather the flocks, but Ammon, who has no knowledge of the history of events, does so. They are able to assemble at least a reasonable number of the scattered animals, but the story is not over.

Alma 17:33–35

33 And those men again stood to scatter their flocks; but Ammon said unto his brethren: Encircle the flocks round about that they flee not; and I go and contend with these men who do scatter our flocks.

34 Therefore, they did as Ammon commanded them, and he went forth and stood to contend with those who stood by the waters of Sebus; and they were in number not a few.

35 Therefore they did not fear Ammon, for they supposed that one of their men could slay him according to their pleasure, for they knew not that the Lord had promised Mosiah that he would deliver his sons out of their hands; neither did they know anything concerning the Lord; therefore they delighted in the destruction of their brethren; and for this cause they stood to scatter the flocks of the king.

Comments

As Ammon and the other servants return with the flocks, Ammon has the other servants keep the animals together, and Ammon goes to deal with the men who appear to be ready to scatter them again.

Another clue that the intruders were not thieves is that they waited at the waters of Sebus to see what would happen again. They hadn't found some of the animals and taken off with them. They stayed, without any evident result of their raid.

They certainly see Ammon coming, but they know that they outnumber him, and so they are unafraid. The results of Ammon's defiance will be unexpected for all save perhaps Ammon himself, who appears to have gone forth in the knowledge and comfort that the Lord had already given him.

Alma 17:36–39

36 But Ammon stood forth and began to cast stones at them with his sling; yea, with mighty power he did sling stones amongst them; and thus he slew a certain number of them insomuch that they began to be astonished at his power; nevertheless they were angry because of the slain of their brethren, and they were determined that he should fall; therefore, seeing that they could not hit him with their stones, they came forth with clubs to slay him.

37 But behold, every man that lifted his club to smite Ammon, he smote off their arms with his sword; for he did withstand their blows by smiting their arms with the edge of his sword, insomuch that they began to be astonished, and began to flee before him; yea, and they were not few in number; and he caused them to flee by the strength of his arm.

38 Now six of them had fallen by the sling, but he slew none save it were their leader with his sword; and he smote off as many of their arms as were lifted against him, and they were not a few.

39 And when he had driven them afar off, he returned and they watered their flocks and returned them to the pasture of the king, and then went in unto the king, bearing the arms which had been smitten off by the sword of Ammon, of those who sought to slay him; and they were carried in unto the king for a testimony of the things which they had done.

Comments

Ammon is armed. There is no indication that any other of the servants were armed. He is armed with both a sling and his sword. Against him were a larger number of men, but without the typical weapons of war. They come at him with clubs. They had numbers, but inferior weapons.

Ammon kills six with the sling, and then turned to the sword. Clearly, Ammon was a skilled fighter and was certainly enhanced through God's power. However, the very fact that Ammon used weapons against the intruders was probably a surprise. Later we will learn that King Lamoni could have sent an armed guard with his servants, but did not do so, apparently sending men to their deaths rather than fight them.

There will be more clues later in this story, but the most logical explanation is that the intruders were a faction within King Lamoni's important families. They had been scattering flocks to embarrass the king, and as royalty, the servants could not fight against them. Ammon, however, was an outsider and didn't

know the subtle rules everyone else was following. Ammon surprised the intruders by fighting back. Perhaps King Lamoni intentionally sent an armed Ammon on this mission for just that reason. What was more surprising, however, was that he not only fought, but defeated the intruders. That was unexpected, and led to the next part of the story when they return to the king.

There is no chapter break at this location in the 1830 edition.

Alma 18

King Lamoni Fears Ammon Is More than a Man

Alma 18:1–2

1 And it came to pass that king Lamoni caused that his servants should stand forth and testify to all the things which they had seen concerning the matter.

2 And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders?

Comments

There is no surprise that the incident at the waters of Sebus was reported to the king. What is somewhat surprising is the king's response. How did the story move from a foreign servant to a servant being the Great Spirit?

The beginning of the positive impression is that it was a Nephite, an enemy, who was the one to preserve the flocks. That was shocking enough, but the fact that he was able to subdue so many intruders was probably made to be as impressive as possible. It certainly seemed to Ammon's fellow servants that he had done something extraordinary. When the king hears it, his first response is to suggest that Ammon was "more than a man." What does it mean to be "more than a man?"

First, it means that Ammon certainly appeared to be a man. Second, it means that he was not what he appeared to be. In many ancient cultures, and especially Mesoamerican ancient cultures, it was understood that sometimes the gods might walk on earth in the form of a man. They might be demigods, or part god and part man. Thus, the king believes that perhaps Ammon is such a semidivine being.

The term "Great Spirit" is likely due to the translation into English at a time when most Americans assumed that Native Americans believed in a Great Spirit, or that there was a Great Spirit taught to them by missionaries. We cannot know what the actual Nephite word was, or what it meant, but it is probable that it indicated a particular god that King Lamoni believed might have come to earth to appear in the guise of the man Ammon.

Alma 18:3–7

3 And they answered the king, and said: Whether he be the Great Spirit or a man, we know not; but this much we do know, that he cannot be slain by the enemies of the king; neither can they scatter the king's flocks when he is with us, because of his expertness and great strength; therefore, we know that he is a friend to the king. And now, O king, we do not believe that a man has such great power, for we know he cannot be slain.

4 And now, when the king heard these words, he said unto them: Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren. Now this is the Great Spirit of whom our fathers have spoken.

5 Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit. Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit, they supposed that whatsoever they did was right; nevertheless, Lamoni began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants; 6 For he had slain many of them because their brethren had scattered their flocks at the place of water; and thus, because they had had their flocks scattered they were slain.

7 Now it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being a practice of plunder among them.

Comments

The servants also experienced Ammon as a man, but a man who had performed a remarkable feat of defeating a larger group of attackers. They believed he could not be killed. While that was not a confirmation that Ammon was the Great Spirit, it certainly provided more evidence that it was possible.

Now we get the next fascinating statement from the king. "Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren." It is only at this point in the story that we learn the important information that these attacks have been going on for a long time, which is that they typically end in the execution of the servants. That requires more explanation. Why are the servants killed if they are sent unarmed to water the flocks and a larger number of armed men scatter them?

The final key to the puzzle still remains to be presented in a later part of the story, but as the story develops it becomes clear that there is a competing lineage attempting to embarrass the king. The servants were killed because the king had to save face, and the pretense that they were robbers and were killing the servants was a useful ploy.

However, the king clearly knew that this was a ploy, and that it was not the truth. Thus, when he believes that the Great Spirit has come to appear as a man and save the servants, he "began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants." Of course, he had done wrong. The fear

came in that this semidivine and unkillable “more than a man” had come to save the servants, indicating that Ammon was likely unhappy with the king’s actions. Certainly, the king feared retribution.

Alma 18:8–9

8 And it came to pass that king Lamoni inquired of his servants, saying: Where is this man that has such great power?

9 And they said unto him: Behold, he is feeding thy horses. Now the king had commanded his servants, previous to the time of the watering of their flocks, that they should prepare his horses and chariots, and conduct him forth to the land of Nephi; for there had been a great feast appointed at the land of Nephi, by the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

Comments

Ammon was preparing the king’s horses and chariots. On the simplest level, it is impressive that Ammon simply went back to work as if nothing amazing had happened. On the next level, however, the mention of horses and chariots had led to one of the more common criticisms of the Book of Mormon. Why horses and chariots, if no horses or chariots were known during this time period anywhere in the Americas?

It is important to remember that in one sense, there never were “horses” and “chariots,” because those are words in English, and English was not spoken in the Americas during Book of Mormon times. That isn’t simply dodging the question, it really is part of the answer. We have the Book of Mormon in translation. It is easy to believe that the words “horses” and “chariots” were translated into English, because there was a Nephite word that exactly corresponded to them on the plates. That is not typically the case in languages that are not similar and describe different worldviews.

How do you translate a word if that word doesn’t exist in the target language? How do you translate an animal if that animal doesn’t exist in the target language? Scholars understand that issue and have seen how that problem played out in the meeting of different cultures. Two methods are typically used. One is to borrow the original word into the target language. Thus, if an English speaker wanted to speak of an ocelot, they use a word borrowed from the Nahuatl [known historically as Aztec] language. However, sometimes the animal is described according to more common terms. Thus, the American bison was termed a buffalo, even though the great beast that roamed the North American plains is not really a buffalo. Similarly, the ancient Greeks saw an animal in the Nile and called it a “river horse,” or hippopotamus.

These translation issues are most likely behind the terms “horses” and “chariots.” The best question to ask is what might have been behind the translation. Depending upon the culture in which one sees the Book of Mormon peoples, the answers might differ. What we do know is that in the case of horses, they never do horse-like things. They do not change civilization. We only know that they eat and move. No other actions are described, and those are so vague that they don’t aid us in determining what animal

might have received the term “horse.” Even as a linguistic borrowing, it is unsure whether it was the Nephites or Joseph Smith who applied the term “horse” to the otherwise unknown animal.

Alma 18:10–11

10 Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of Ammon, saying: Surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them.

11 Now I surely know that this is the Great Spirit, and I would desire him that he come in unto me, but I durst not.

Comments

King Lamoni is astonished to know that Ammon is preparing the horses and chariots. It would be an understandable expectation that one who had accomplished some great feat might want recognition for it, might at least want to bask in victory for a while, rather than simply return to work. Ammon asked for no glory. He simply went to work on what was likely a reasonably menial task.

In verse 11, Lamoni desires that Ammon come to him, but “durst not.” As we learned in verse 5, King Lamoni was afraid that Ammon really was the Great Spirit come in anger over Lamoni’s actions. On the one hand, King Lamoni wants to know more of the powerful man, or “more than a man” in their midst. On the other hand, Lamoni likely fears that Ammon has come to do to him what Lamoni had done to previous servants at the waters of Sebus.

Ammon Teaches King Lamoni

Alma 18:12–14

12 And it came to pass that when Ammon had made ready the horses and the chariots for the king and his servants, he went in unto the king, and he saw that the countenance of the king was changed; therefore he was about to return out of his presence.

13 And one of the king’s servants said unto him, Rabbanah, which is, being interpreted, powerful or great king, considering their kings to be powerful; and thus he said unto him: Rabbanah, the king desireth thee to stay.

14 Therefore Ammon turned himself unto the king, and said unto him: What wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king? And the king answered him not for the space of an hour, according to their time, for he knew not what he should say unto him.

Comments

These verses set up the magnificent experience Ammon had with King Lamoni. The story is told in detail, and these introductory details are both important and very human. Ammon comes to the king at the end of his assigned labors, and “saw the countenance of the king was changed.” Something was very different, and from the previous verses, which underscored King Lamoni’s fear of Ammon, it was a concerned look on the king’s face. Ammon did not know why things had changed, but as with many who might approach a powerful authority figure who appears to be less than happy, he thought retreat was the best option.

At that point, the other servants tell him that the king wants him to stay. While the combination of that request and the king’s countenance might have suggested that Ammon might be in trouble, and therefore really wouldn’t want to be there, the servants do address with the honorific “Rabbanah.” That title suggested that something else was happening.

Ammon stays and asks the king what Ammon could do for him. The king continues to be perplexed. The tension in that room had to have been palpable as the king remained silent for a long time, translated as an hour. If the king did not speak, surely no one else spoke. We might picture a reception hall with a number of people, all standing as still as possible, and trying not to make a noise while they wait for the king. And the king was silent. For whatever long period of time it was, it was translated as an hour.

Alma 18:15–17

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto him again: What desirest thou of me? But the king answered him not.

16 And it came to pass that Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, therefore he perceived the thoughts of the king. And he said unto him: Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings?

17 I say unto you, what is it, that thy marvelings are so great? Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant; therefore, whatsoever thou desirest which is right, that will I do.

Comments

It is perhaps important to read the first sentence of verse 16 prior to verse 15. The reason is that it helps the reader understand why Ammon spoke. In most cultures with a king, or some similarly high position for the ruler, it is common that the king speaks first. That custom is at least implied in that Ammon, and certainly everyone else, had been silent for a very long time. Knowing that he spoke under inspiration, and that the inspiration also revealed the reason for the king’s silence, allowed Ammon to both speak and to say the words that would move the tense situation to an important and positive resolution.

What Ammon answers is: “Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant.” Certainly most people do not think it important to mention that they are human as part of addressing a king, but Ammon understood at least the fear that led Lamoni to wonder if Ammon were “more than a man” (see verse 2 in this chapter). Ammon knew, through inspiration, that Lamoni had the wrong impression of Ammon and the wrong reason that Ammon could do what he had done at the waters of Sebus. Declaring “I am a man” diffused the reason that Lamoni was fearful that Ammon had come to harm him. Ammon declared just the opposite. He was there to serve. The implication was that he was not there to exact vengeance.

Alma 18:18–19

18 Now when the king had heard these words, he marveled again, for he beheld that Ammon could discern his thoughts; but notwithstanding this, king Lamoni did open his mouth, and said unto him: Who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things?

19 Ammon answered and said unto him: I am not.

Comments

Ammon had correctly perceived that Lamoni needed to know that Ammon was just a man. This was confirmed when Lamoni finally spoke, and asked the question that formed his greatest fear: Was Ammon the Great Spirit? What is added was the idea that the Great Spirit would know all things. This becomes important as the conversation continues.

Ammon assuages the king’s fears. He is not the Great Spirit. That, of course, leaves open the question of how he has done things that it would be assumed only a semidivine being could do. Those issues come in the next verses.

Alma 18:20–23

20 And the king said: How knowest thou the thoughts of my heart? Thou mayest speak boldly, and tell me concerning these things; and also tell me by what power ye slew and smote off the arms of my brethren that scattered my flocks—

21 And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee; and if it were needed, I would guard thee with my armies; but I know that thou art more powerful than all they; nevertheless, whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee.

22 Now Ammon being wise, yet harmless, he said unto Lamoni: Wilt thou hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things? And this is the thing that I desire of thee.

23 And the king answered him, and said: Yea, I will believe all thy words. And thus he was caught with guile.

Comments

When Ammon broke the silence, he did so by addressing the very fears that had caused Lamoni to stay silent for what the translation called an hour. If Ammon was not the Great Spirit “who knows all things” (verse 18), then how did Ammon know the king’s thoughts?

Ammon does not tell the king immediately, but rather understands that he has both a teaching moment and an opportunity to usher a change in the king’s understanding and heart. Therefore, before beginning the explanation, he has the king commit to believing him if he explains it. The king essentially creates a covenant with Ammon. Ammon is to provide the secret, and the king will believe the explanation.

The statement “and thus he was caught with guile” does not sound very righteous. It sounds as though Lamoni was being tricked. That was certainly not the intent. The intent was to elicit a covenant and to commit the king to an action in exchange for information. On Ammon’s part, it was a commitment to teach about Yahweh, whose inspiration led to Ammon’s understanding Lamoni’s thoughts. For the king, it was a commitment to take the explanation seriously, and to believe.

While the “guile” might be that Ammon did not tell the secret before getting a commitment, it was nevertheless an important action, for it required the king to allow what Ammon said to touch him, and to change him. King Lamoni was “caught” in the sense that he was committed before truly understanding what the commitment would entail.

Alma 18:24–25

24 And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness, and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

25 And he answered, and said unto him: I do not know what that meaneth.

Comments

Ammon cannot explain how he knew Lamoni’s mind without an explanation of who God is. Because the original Nephite text was translated into English, some of what had to have happened in this conversation is obscured. The question “believest thou that there is a God?” is understandable to modern readers but wasn’t a question that would solicit Lamoni’s answer. The question had to have been more specific, perhaps invoking Yahweh directly, or at least a statement that there was only one God over all. It would be very unusual if King Lamoni didn’t know what gods were. He had already asked if Ammon were “more than a man,” and therefore, he clearly had some understanding of divine beings.

Ammon’s question is about the Nephite god, Yahweh. However that was phrased, that was the intent. Lamoni does not know anything about Yahweh.

Alma 18:26–31

26 And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great Spirit?

27 And he said, Yea.

28 And Ammon said: This is God. And Ammon said unto him again: Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth?

29 And he said: Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens.

30 And Ammon said unto him: The heavens is a place where God dwells and all his holy angels.

31 And king Lamoni said: Is it above the earth?

Comments

When Ammon discovers that Lamoni needs to understand the very basics, he begins with establishing a commonality. He certainly knows that Lamoni believes in a Great Spirit. Lamoni had asked if Ammon were that Great Spirit. Therefore, Ammon begins with Lamoni's current understanding. He uses Lamoni's understanding of the Great Spirit to begin teaching about Yahweh. In verse 28, Ammon states that the Great Spirit is Yahweh. While that might not have been technically correct, it was a starting point where King Lamoni could understand the importance of Yahweh relevant to other possible divine beings. Lamoni believed that the Great Spirit was over all other deities or semidivine beings. Ammon places Yahweh in that same exalted and important position.

The next task is to define the relationship of humankind to Yahweh. This continues with the relationship of God to creation. Ammon asks if Lamoni believes that the Great Spirit, or Yahweh, created the heavens and the earth. Lamoni's reply is interesting. His understanding of the Great Spirit included the creation of things on the earth, but he declares that he is unaware of the heavens. That statement is also interesting in that most cultures' origin stories create the earth, the world below, and the world above. Thus, it is possible that we have a translation issue again, where the word that Ammon used was different from whatever word Lamoni would have used to describe the heavens in his own belief system.

Ammon had to define heaven, and defines it as the place where Yahweh dwells. The addition of "all his holy angels" is probably added to give a comparable place to other divine beings that Lamoni might believe existed.

Alma 18:32–33

32 And Ammon said: Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.

33 And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God?

Comments

Ammon had established sufficient common grounds that he could begin to answer the question that Lamoni had asked about how Ammon knew the king's thoughts. The answer was that Yahweh is in heaven and looks down upon humankind. It is Yahweh who knows "all the thoughts and intents of the heart," since Yahweh was their creator.

Lamoni understood that his question had been answered, but only partially. Yahweh knew his thoughts, but how did Ammon? Thus, Lamoni asks if Ammon was sent by Yahweh. The implication may have been that Ammon might have been one of the angels that Ammon declared were in heaven with God. That hypothesis is perhaps confirmed in Ammon's response in the next verse.

Alma 18:34–35

34 Ammon said unto him: I am a man; and man in the beginning was created after the image of God, and I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true;

35 And a portion of that Spirit dwelleth in me, which giveth me knowledge, and also power according to my faith and desires which are in God.

Comments

The implication of Lamoni's question about Ammon being sent from God was clearly that Ammon might still be at least a semidivine person, if not the Great Spirit. Thus, Ammon has to repeat that "I am a man." What Ammon then does is link being a man to being a creation of Yahweh.

Next, Ammon introduces the concept of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't give much information, except that the Ammon declares that the Spirit is not God, even though it is called "his Holy Spirit." It was that Spirit that communicated with Ammon. Therefore, it was not Ammon who was sent from the presence of God, but rather it was "his Holy Spirit" that was sent to Ammon, who communicated with him according to God's will.

Alma 18:36–38

36 Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem.

37 And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth.

38 And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time.

Comments

This must have been a long instruction session, if Ammon began with the creation of the world and ended with the present time. That is a powerful amount of history. However, it was essential because he had established Yahweh as the creator of earth and the people on it, and the story from creation to the present was an important aspect of understanding how Yahweh worked with his children and particularly how it happened that Ammon represented Yahweh through his Spirit. Clearly, the recounting was abbreviated, and certainly focused on the divine guidance and protection of the Nephite people.

Bringing it to the present would certainly have included the story of the rebellion of the sons of Mosiah₂ and their conversion, since that led directly to Ammon standing before the king. Additionally, that story would tell King Lamoni that, even though Lamoni had not known Yahweh, repentance was still possible.

The Spirit Overcomes King Lamoni

Alma 18:39–43

39 But this is not all; for he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.

40 And it came to pass that after he had said all these things, and expounded them to the king, that the king believed all his words.

41 And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hast had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people.

42 And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead.

43 And it came to pass that his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed; and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights; and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss.

Comments

Of course, it was not secular history that Ammon recounted, but the sacred evidence of Yahweh's intentions for his children. The most important of those actions, after creation itself, was the plan of redemption. That plan is based on the mission of the coming Messiah, which became a fundamental element of Nephite belief, and the point where apostasy began, when people began to doubt that coming redemptive mission.

Lamoni had committed, and essentially covenanted, that when he learned Ammon's truth, that he would believe it. Lamoni perhaps believed the words, but it was important that he have more than an intellectual understanding. Therefore, Lamoni prayed according to his belief.

When Lamoni falls as though dead, we may see a parallel to Alma₂'s experience. It is quite plausible that Alma₂'s experience, which had occurred in Ammon's presence, was part of the history to the present time that Ammon had recounted. Thus, those who saw the king fall as dead did not immediately fall upon Ammon to harm him, but rather carried the king to his wife to be cared for.

His wife, sons, and daughters had apparently not been in the hall to hear what Ammon had said and therefore they mourned. That element enhances the continuing tension of the story, as it continues in the next modern chapter. There was no break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 19

Ammon Meets with the Queen

Alma 19:1–5

1 And it came to pass that after two days and two nights they were about to take his body and lay it in a sepulchre, which they had made for the purpose of burying their dead.

2 Now the queen having heard of the fame of Ammon, therefore she sent and desired that he should come in unto her.

3 And it came to pass that Ammon did as he was commanded, and went in unto the queen, and desired to know what she would that he should do.

4 And she said unto him: The servants of my husband have made it known unto me that thou art a prophet of a holy God, and that thou hast power to do many mighty works in his name;

5 Therefore, if this is the case, I would that ye should go in and see my husband, for he has been laid upon his bed for the space of two days and two nights; and some say that he is not dead, but others say that he is dead and that he stinketh, and that he ought to be placed in the sepulchre; but as for myself, to me he doth not stink.

Comments

It is unfortunate for the continuity of the story of Ammon and King Lamoni that there is a modern chapter break here. In 1830, this information followed immediately after the verses indicating that Lamoni was taken to his wife and that his family began to mourn him as though he were dead. It is important to the story that we readers understand that many believed that Lamoni had died.

It is for that reason that the queen (who remains unnamed) notes that there is some controversy over whether he is dead. Ancient peoples were often much more intimately familiar with death and dead family or friends than are modern peoples. Thus, the queen surely understood that after a time some decomposition would have set in if he truly were dead, and she declares, “as for myself, to me he doth not stink.” She believes that he lives, but how might he recover?

The story continues when the queen understands that Ammon is considered to have divine power, and therefore she calls for him to assist in returning Lamoni to his healthful and conscious self.

Alma 19:6

6 Now, this was what Ammon desired, for he knew that king Lamoni was under the power of God; he knew that the dark veil of unbelief was being cast away from his mind, and the light which did light up his mind, which was the light of the glory of God, which was a marvelous light of his goodness—yea, this light had infused such joy into his soul, the cloud of darkness having been dispelled, and that the light of everlasting life was lit up in his soul, yea, he knew that this had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God—

Comments

It is not clear who is writing this account. It is in the third person, so it was not Ammon. It was based on Ammon's record, which Alma₂ had. The two options are Alma₂ and Mormon. It is probable that this is Alma₂'s account, rather than Mormon's.

This verse might be the clue that shows us that it was Alma₂. Alma₂ had a similar experience with the spirit; this description of the war between darkness and light in Lamoni's mind has the feel of a lived experience. It feels like Alma₂ infusing Lamoni's experience with the similarities to his own experience.

Note the "dark veil of unbelief." For Lamoni, it was cultural and inherited. For Alma₂, it had been an intentional rejection of belief. Both led to a type of darkness. That darkness came into contact with "the light which did light up his mind." Perhaps Lamoni explained this to Ammon, who wrote it, and Alma₂ simply referenced it, but it still feels more like Alma₂ imputing his own dramatic experience to what was also a dramatic experience for Lamoni. The imagery of light infusing his soul with joy, that it was the "light of everlasting life," which "lit up his soul," has the feel of being written by one who really knew what Lamoni experienced.

Alma 19:7–8

7 Therefore, what the queen desired of him was his only desire. Therefore, he went in to see the king according as the queen had desired him; and he saw the king, and he knew that he was not dead.

8 And he said unto the queen: He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God, and on the morrow he shall rise again; therefore bury him not.

Comments

Ammon understands what Lamoni is undergoing, because he has seen his friend, Alma₂, undergo a similar process. This was a process of dramatic conversion, where a lifetime of beliefs and experiences and understandings had to be reversed and replaced with the knowledge of the gospel. The message of the coming Messiah was that repentance was possible, but being possible does not mean that it was simple or painless. The imagery of the king lying as though dead is one who is to be raised to a new life. While that

symbolism would be immediately recognized by modern Christians as echoing the death and resurrection of Christ and the symbolism of baptism, we do not see that explanation applied in this case. The reason is that Christ has not yet come, and the reality of this death and resurrection was never the New World symbol that it became after his resurrection in the Old World.

The important statement from Ammon to the queen is “he is not dead, but sleepeth in God.” Lamoni would rise, and God’s hand would be revealed.

Alma 19:9–11

9 And Ammon said unto her: Believest thou this? And she said unto him: I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said.

10 And Ammon said unto her: Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites.

11 And it came to pass that she watched over the bed of her husband, from that time even until that time on the morrow which Ammon had appointed that he should rise.

Comments

In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 46:13–14, we learn: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.” The experiences of King Lamoni and his wife beautifully illustrate that principle. Lamoni had a personal experience and would believe. The queen says: “I have had no witness save thy word, and the word of our servants; nevertheless I believe that it shall be according as thou hast said.” Both experiences are valuable and demonstrate faith that changes souls. One is not better than the other.

Perhaps the ability to believe on the word of another is the more difficult, however, for Ammon declares that the queen has demonstrated a level of faith that is greater than was had among the Nephites. That statement is important in the first part for demonstrating the saving power of being able to believe in another’s words, certainly believing in the words of a prophet which are true. The second part of the importance of the statement is that Ammon declares that a Lamanite woman has greater faith than any of the Nephites.

The typical Nephite perception of the Lamanites is that they are lazy and idol worshippers. They are considered unquestionably inferior to the Nephites. We saw that perspective starting with Nephi. In the small plates we see the Lamanites being more righteous than the Nephites, only when the intent is to show that the Nephites are even less righteous.

Here, however, is true faith. In Mormon’s edition of the plates and other records, we see a different view of the Lamanites. Although the ethnocentric descriptions continue, we see the Lamanites as not only

redeemable, but often as having greater faith than the Nephites after their redemption. Mormon writes of great hope for the Lamanites, where Nephi seemed to see only the pains of the final end of the Nephites at Lamanite hands.

The Spirit Overcomes All the King's Household

Alma 19:12–15

12 And it came to pass that he arose, according to the words of Ammon; and as he arose, he stretched forth his hand unto the woman, and said: Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou.

13 For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name. Now, when he had said these words, his heart was swollen within him, and he sunk again with joy; and the queen also sunk down, being overpowered by the Spirit.

14 Now Ammon seeing the Spirit of the Lord poured out according to his prayers upon the Lamanites, his brethren, who had been the cause of so much mourning among the Nephites, or among all the people of God because of their iniquities and their traditions, he fell upon his knees, and began to pour out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving to God for what he had done for his brethren; and he was also overpowered with joy; and thus they all three had sunk to the earth.

15 Now, when the servants of the king had seen that they had fallen, they also began to cry unto God, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them also, for it was they who had stood before the king and testified unto him concerning the great power of Ammon.

Comments

As Ammon had promised, Lamoni arose. Poignantly, he immediately took his wife's hand and declared that the name of God was blessed, and that she too was blessed. Although Lamoni was overpowered by the Spirit, that Spirit clearly communicated to him his wife's faith, based on Ammon's words, but perhaps with little actual instruction in the gospel.

When Lamoni awakens, he praises God, but specifically speaks of the Redeemer. It was the power of the redemption that allowed his great change of heart. He had understood the Nephite message and had experienced it directly. He was again overcome.

The picture in the room must have been both joyous and confusing. The king had awakened, praised God, and then had fallen again. Ammon and the queen are also overcome by the Spirit, and they too fall to the earth. The joy of seeing the king rise from a presumed death was quickly followed by confusion when the king, queen, and the mysterious Ammon, all fell to the earth.

Those in the room knew something important was happening, but probably didn't understand it. We can understand if they were confused by the range of emotions they would have had during this event.

Alma 19:16–17

16 And it came to pass that they did call on the name of the Lord, in their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth, save it were one of the Lamanitish women, whose name was Abish, she having been converted unto the Lord for many years, on account of a remarkable vision of her father—

17 Thus, having been converted to the Lord, and never having made it known, therefore, when she saw that all the servants of Lamoni had fallen to the earth, and also her mistress, the queen, and the king, and Ammon lay prostrate upon the earth, she knew that it was the power of God; and supposing that this opportunity, by making known unto the people what had happened among them, that by beholding this scene it would cause them to believe in the power of God, therefore she ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people.

Comments

These verses introduce us to one of the rare named women in the Book of Mormon. Her name may be significant. Rather than naming her, it may be describing her. The name appears to have Hebrew roots, and meant “father is a man,” or possibly “my father is a man.” If that is a correct reading, it may be Mormon’s play on words connecting Ammon who was “a man” to her father, who was similarly “a man,” but who was similarly the recipient of a “remarkable vision.”

This designation places Abish in a position to understand what was happening. She was already a believer in the Nephite religion, even though she lived as a Lamanite. Perhaps that was the reason that she was described as “Lamanitish,” as she lived politically as a Lamanite, but religiously as a Nephite believer.

Abish understands that great events are underway, and so she gathers nearby people to come to be witnesses to the power of the Lord.

Abish Raises the Queen

Alma 19:18–20

18 And they began to assemble themselves together unto the house of the king. And there came a multitude, and to their astonishment, they beheld the king, and the queen, and their servants prostrate upon the earth, and they all lay there as though they were dead; and they also saw Ammon, and behold, he was a Nephite.

19 And now the people began to murmur among themselves; some saying that it was a great evil that had come upon them, or upon the king and his house, because he had suffered that the Nephite should remain in the land.

20 But others rebuked them, saying: The king hath brought this evil upon his house, because he slew his servants who had had their flocks scattered at the waters of Sebus.

Comments

One of the subtle aspects of this story is that Abish gathered people who were close by. Unstated was that if one were living that close to the king, they were likely to have been relatives or otherwise important people. The poor typically do not reside that close to the king. Additionally, it is common to restrict those who might enter into the presence of the king. That these people were important adds significance to the next major event.

As the people gather, they do not know what has gone on before. They were not present when Lamoni awakened and praised God. They come and see three people lying as though dead. Seeing their king and queen lying as though dead was certainly shocking, and clearly led to the speculation that Ammon's presence must have caused this terrible condition. Some declared that the king had made a mistake by inviting a Nephite to be a servant. Others declared that it was the king himself who brought on evil by killing his servants at the waters of Sebus; even the king thought this was possible.

Alma 19:21–23

21 And they were also rebuked by those men who had stood at the waters of Sebus and scattered the flocks which belonged to the king, for they were angry with Ammon because of the number which he had slain of their brethren at the waters of Sebus, while defending the flocks of the king.

22 Now, one of them, whose brother had been slain with the sword of Ammon, being exceedingly angry with Ammon, drew his sword and went forth that he might let it fall upon Ammon, to slay him; and as he lifted the sword to smite him, behold, he fell dead.

23 Now we see that Ammon could not be slain, for the Lord had said unto Mosiah, his father: I will spare him, and it shall be unto him according to thy faith—therefore, Mosiah trusted him unto the Lord.

Comments

These events are being written in the third person, which is probably Alma₂ recording them in his personal record where Mormon found them and probably copied them, rather than rewriting them. Whether the text is due to Alma₂ or Mormon, either one was more interested in the miraculous aspects of the story than the specific details. Thus, we have the indication that some of the people who had come were the very ones who had scattered the flocks at the waters of Sebus, as noted in verse 21.

That statement, combined with the fact that the brother of one of the slain was present, confirms that the intruders were not thieves, but were powerful men in their own right. They lived near the king and were likely from a competing clan. Their identity was probably always known by both the king and the servants who had gone to the waters of Sebus, and because of their position and power, no one could move against them. Ammon, however, did not know. As an outsider who was not under the king's control (remembering that he had not married the king's daughter, which would have put him under the king's control), Ammon could disrupt the political game that they were playing. It is entirely possible that Lamoni sent Ammon to the waters of Sebus specifically to be that kind of a disruption.

The brother of a man who was slain attempted to kill Ammon, but he himself was stricken dead. The miracles continued, and for that one there was a large audience to attest that Ammon could not be killed.

Alma 19:24–27

24 And it came to pass that when the multitude beheld that the man had fallen dead, who lifted the sword to slay Ammon, fear came upon them all, and they durst not put forth their hands to touch him or any of those who had fallen; and they began to marvel again among themselves what could be the cause of this great power, or what all these things could mean.

25 And it came to pass that there were many among them who said that Ammon was the Great Spirit, and others said he was sent by the Great Spirit;

26 But others rebuked them all, saying that he was a monster, who had been sent from the Nephites to torment them.

27 And there were some who said that Ammon was sent by the Great Spirit to afflict them because of their iniquities; and that it was the Great Spirit that had always attended the Nephites, who had ever delivered them out of their hands; and they said that it was this Great Spirit who had destroyed so many of their brethren, the Lamanites.

Comments

Earlier, in verses 19–20 there were disputations over whether King Lamoni's state was due to Ammon or to the king's slaying of the servants. In this case, the focus is solely on Ammon, but the disputations about what was happening continue. It is clear that those present really didn't understand what they were seeing.

It is proposed that Ammon is the Great Spirit. The obvious fact that he was not killed, even though defenseless, added to the obvious divine intervention that killed the attacker instead; this would have made that a reasonable solution to their questions.

In verse 26, some say "that he was a monster." That is an interesting phrase, and one that is perhaps less understandable in translation than it might have been had we both the original language and cultural context in which to understand the term. In Mesoamerica, as well as in many other cultures, semidivine

beings were unpredictable. They were powerful, but capricious, and just as often detrimental as beneficial. Thus, it is probable that what the original intended to convey was not inhuman, but extra-human. If Ammon wasn't the Great Spirit, he might be a different type of divine, and one that could easily be there to harm them. That he could do so was evident in that, even while apparently unconscious, Ammon could have been seen to kill his attacker. That would also help explain his feat at the waters of Sebus. Saying that Ammon was a "monster" fits very well into that archaic worldview.

Ammon was also known to be a Nephite, and the typical fear of the enemy also fed the fear that this semidivine Nephite was there to torment them. After all, they knew he had killed many, and had been present as he apparently killed one of them even while unconscious. The idea that he was sent to avenge Nephites was a culturally reasonable conclusion. It was not correct, but understandable.

Alma 19:28

28 And thus the contention began to be exceedingly sharp among them. And while they were thus contending, the woman servant who had caused the multitude to be gathered together came, and when she saw the contention which was among the multitude she was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto tears.

Comments

It is fascinating that even though we were introduced to Abish by name earlier, when it comes to the most important part of her participation in this story, she loses her name. She is no longer Abish, but "the woman servant who had caused the multitude to be gathered." Certainly, the name was shorter, and perhaps the writer (presumably Alma₂) wanted to reiterate that she had gathered the multitude, but the reader is not so deep into the story that it is likely that she would have been forgotten. Unfortunately, we are dealing with a text from a very patriarchal society, where writing about the important actions focused on the role of men, with women only making rare appearances.

What this also suggests is that the presence of the name "Abish" really was intended as a signal for meaning in the story, rather than her personal name. If it had the meaning of "my father is a man," then ironically, even her name served a patriarchal function to identify her in relationship to her father's vision. Perhaps it may have been intended to parallel Ammon's statement that he was a man, thus suggesting that her father was also a believer in the Nephite religion.

What modern readers should understand as we read this ancient text is that while custom emphasized the men, it is obvious that the women played important roles in society, as well as in moving events ahead. Their absence in the text is because they were downplayed, not that they were not important. Abish is very important as she is the actor that brings the miracle to many influential people who needed to be impressed and to understand Lamoni's conversion.

Similarly, the queen is designated by title, rather than by name, and is seemingly pushed into the background. Nevertheless, it is also very clear that she was so crucial to the story that her part in the story could not be totally suppressed and needed to be told. Indeed, it is the queen's ability to believe Ammon's words that provides us with a more realistic model for how we typically accept the gospel, and it validates the true value of that seemingly simple, yet still powerful, conversion.

Those Overcome Rise and Preach

Alma 19:29–32

29 And it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

30 And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood; and when she had done this, she took the king, Lamoni, by the hand, and behold he arose and stood upon his feet.

31 And he, immediately, seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them, and to teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon; and as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord.

32 But there were many among them who would not hear his words; therefore they went their way.

Comments

Abish saw the contention and acted. She went first to the queen. She was the queen's servant, and it was a natural act. Abish probably did not understand how quickly the queen would revive to her touch, but it appears to have been immediate. The queen had been immersed in the Spirit, and therefore, rises with praise on her lips. Importantly, her praise of the "blessed God," would have meant Yahweh, not any of the gods that the Lamanites may have worshipped. She also mentions Jesus. Whether or not she knew of the name or we simply have that as the translation doesn't really matter. She knew of the mission of the Messiah and arose testifying to that uniquely Nephite religious teaching.

The queen then takes her husband's hand, and he too rises. Alma₂ doesn't give us what he said, but simply notes that Lamoni teaches what Ammon had taught him, but with the power of personal experience behind the words of the lesson. The effect is mixed. Some believe, and some do not. Agency is always operative, and even in the presence of the kinds of miracles that the gathered people had seen, some could accept the king's teaching, but others couldn't bring themselves to see those miracles in the context of Nephite religious teachings.

Alma 19:33–36

33 And it came to pass that when Ammon arose he also administered unto them, and also did all the servants of Lamoni; and they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil.

34 And behold, many did declare unto the people that they had seen angels and had conversed with them; and thus they had told them things of God, and of his righteousness.

35 And it came to pass that there were many that did believe in their words; and as many as did believe were baptized; and they became a righteous people, and they did establish a church among them.

36 And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name.

Comments

For those who did believe the king’s explanation, there was a mighty change of heart. In Mosiah 5:2, the people listening to Mosiah₂ declared that the Spirit had “wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil.” Now, these converted Lamanites are exactly parallel to the changed Nephites. They, too, found that: “their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil.”

It is subtle, but important, to note that the quality of the Lamanite conversion was no different from the Nephite conversion and covenant under Benjamin. Whatever ethnocentric opinions Nephites might have had about Lamanites, in the text that Mormon compiled we learn that the Lamanites are capable of true and complete conversion. Even though not all of those present had believed in the new manifestation of Yahweh, many did. Ammon’s missionary labors bore tremendous fruit.

Even though the story of the beginnings of missionary success is over, there are still important parts of the story of Ammon and Lamoni to come. They are covered in our chapter 20, but our chapters 17–20 were all part of the same original chapter. There is no break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 20

Ammon Confronts Lamoni's Father

Alma 20:1–3

1 And it came to pass that when they had established a church in that land, that king Lamoni desired that Ammon should go with him to the land of Nephi, that he might show him unto his father.

2 And the voice of the Lord came to Ammon, saying: Thou shalt not go up to the land of Nephi, for behold, the king will seek thy life; but thou shalt go to the land of Middoni; for behold, thy brother Aaron, and also Muloki and Ammah are in prison.

3 Now it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he said unto Lamoni: Behold, my brother and brethren are in prison at Middoni, and I go that I may deliver them.

Comments

There was no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. However, verse 1 is clearly a transition verse. The first part of the verse closes the story from the end of our chapter 19 where Ammon established the church. In fact, that very phrase was used in Alma 19:35, only two verses prior to this repetition. The second part of the verse moves to the next event with Lamoni.

This next event will close the story of Ammon and Lamoni and move to Ammon's brothers. To get them into the story, this event discusses how Ammon and Lamoni need to free them from prison. Alma₂ sets up not only the story of freeing the brothers, but eventually the meeting with Lamoni's father, and that sets up the story of Aaron and Lamoni's father.

The first verse tells us that Lamoni intended to take Ammon to his father. Ammon receives a revelation that such a visit would not be a good idea because Lamoni's father would seek Ammon's life. However, the Lord tells Ammon that his brothers need to be rescued. Therefore, he goes to Lamoni and suggests that rather than going to see Lamoni's father, Ammon needed to deliver his brothers in the land of Middoni.

Alma 20:4–7

4 Now Lamoni said unto Ammon: I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things. But behold, I will go with thee to the land of Middoni; for the king of the land of Middoni, whose name is

Antiomno, is a friend unto me; therefore I go to the land of Middoni, that I may flatter the king of the land, and he will cast thy brethren out of prison. Now Lamoni said unto him: Who told thee that thy brethren were in prison?

5 And Ammon said unto him: No one hath told me, save it be God; and he said unto me—Go and deliver thy brethren, for they are in prison in the land of Middoni.

6 Now when Lamoni had heard this he caused that his servants should make ready his horses and his chariots.

7 And he said unto Ammon: Come, I will go with thee down to the land of Middoni, and there I will plead with the king that he will cast thy brethren out of prison.

Comments

Verse 4 is one of the places where we learn a little about the way the Lamanite world in the land of Nephi is organized. We will soon learn that King Lamoni's father is also a king, but a king over all the land. In verse 4 we learn that Antiomno is the king in the land of Middoni. Thus, there are multiple kings over their own territory, and then an overking who governs over all of them.

This political organization differs from what we have seen in the land of Zarahemla. However, it is a known feature of the interrelationships of cities among the Maya. Each city and its land would have their ruler, their equivalent of a king, but those rulers were often beholden to another king who exercised influence over multiple cities. Thus, the Book of Mormon description of the Lamanite political situation reflects what is known of Mayan relationships. If the Book of Mormon is placed in Mesoamerica, then the fit continues to be demonstrated by the way known history appears to be reflected in the Book of Mormon text.

Although Antiomno might have been a friend to Lamoni, that doesn't mean that there is frequent communication. Lamoni appears not to have known that Ammon's brothers are in prison, and so he asks Ammon how it is that Ammon knew. The Lord had told him. Lamoni's response is not to ask further questions, but to accept that the information is both correct and that it is a situation that should be corrected. Lamoni declares that he will go.

We hear about horses and chariots again. Whatever the English words represented, the animals and conveyances appear to be intended for use in official visits. We will learn that Ammon was preparing the horses and chariots for a visit to Lamoni's father, but now we see them in the context of a visit to another king. Pictorial evidence from the Maya demonstrates that these visits were ceremonial and did include conveyances and symbols. Connecting the two requires that we see the translation into English as representing something other than the usual connotations of those words in English, but the situations are similar.

Alma 20:8–12

8 And it came to pass that as Ammon and Lamoni were journeying thither, they met the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land.

9 And behold, the father of Lamoni said unto him: Why did ye not come to the feast on that great day when I made a feast unto my sons, and unto my people?

10 And he also said: Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar?

11 And it came to pass that Lamoni rehearsed unto him whither he was going, for he feared to offend him.

12 And he also told him all the cause of his tarrying in his own kingdom, that he did not go unto his father to the feast which he had prepared.

Comments

As King Lamoni and Ammon are traveling with their entourage to Middoni, they meet Lamoni's father, who remains unnamed throughout the story. We learn that Lamoni was supposed to come to a feast with his father but did not attend. Although our record doesn't give the reason that Lamoni's father was on the road where he might meet Lamoni, we can make the reasonable assumption that he was on his way to see Lamoni in order to discern why Lamoni had not come. As the overking, Lamoni's father certainly expected his sons to come and, if they did not, it might signal the beginning of a rebellion—which would not have been tolerated. Therefore, verse 11 notes that Lamoni "feared to offend" his father.

Lamoni does explain why he did not go, and that explanation certainly had a lot to do with the reason that he was traveling with "this Nephite, who is one of the children of a liar." Lamoni's father's attitude is clear. This evidence does confirm what the Lord told Ammon, that if Ammon appeared in the overking's center of power, he likely would not have left it alive.

Alma 20:13–16

13 And now when Lamoni had rehearsed unto him all these things, behold, to his astonishment, his father was angry with him, and said: Lamoni, thou art going to deliver these Nephites, who are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property.

14 Now the father of Lamoni commanded him that he should slay Ammon with the sword. And he also commanded him that he should not go to the land of Middoni, but that he should return with him to the land of Ishmael.

15 But Lamoni said unto him: I will not slay Ammon, neither will I return to the land of Ishmael, but I go to the land of Middoni that I may release the brethren of Ammon, for I know that they are just men and holy prophets of the true God.

16 Now when his father had heard these words, he was angry with him, and he drew his sword that he might smite him to the earth.

Comments

Just as the Nephites had a rather standard way of referring to the Lamanites as lazy and bloodthirsty and other invectives, when we see Nephites describing the Lamanites, we learn here that the Lamanites also had a standard way of referring to the Nephites. According to the Lamanites, the Nephites were liars who had robbed their ancestors of a birthright. The mutual hatred festered over centuries and hardened into a reason so strong that it no longer even needed to be relevant or true.

King Lamoni's father hates Nephites in any case, but now has a reason to hate a specific Nephite who had prevented King Lamoni from performing his basic political duties. Therefore, the overking commands Lamoni to kill Ammon. He expected to be obeyed. Lamoni refused.

Lamoni had learned something about Ammon that his father didn't know. Lamoni had learned of the power of the Spirit, and his father had no experience with that Spirit, and therefore, didn't understand why Lamoni would refuse to kill Ammon. However, the refusal would have appeared to confirm fears of rebellion or betrayal. Therefore, the overking intended to kill his son, King Lamoni.

Alma 20:17–20

17 But Ammon stood forth and said unto him: Behold, thou shalt not slay thy son; nevertheless, it were better that he should fall than thee, for behold, he has repented of his sins; but if thou shouldst fall at this time, in thine anger, thy soul could not be saved.

18 And again, it is expedient that thou shouldst forbear; for if thou shouldst slay thy son, he being an innocent man, his blood would cry from the ground to the Lord his God, for vengeance to come upon thee; and perhaps thou wouldst lose thy soul.

19 Now when Ammon had said these words unto him, he answered him, saying: I know that if I should slay my son, that I should shed innocent blood; for it is thou that hast sought to destroy him.

20 And he stretched forth his hand to slay Ammon. But Ammon withstood his blows, and also smote his arm that he could not use it.

Comments

Ammon intervenes to save Lamoni. That does not assuage the overking's anger. Lamoni's father had already shown that he harbored a traditional hatred for the Nephites, and now expresses that hatred by claiming that Ammon, a Nephite, is really at the heart of Lamoni's disobedience and rebellion. In his mind, Ammon has led his son astray and has made him take part in a rebellion against his father and his heritage.

Undoubtedly, Lamoni knew that Ammon could not be killed. Ammon defeated the king and wounded him. That put Ammon in a position where he could easily kill the overking. He did not, and that will set up the next important missionary story.

Ammon's words to the overking demonstrate the nature of his teaching and of Lamoni's transformation. Ammon declared, in verse 17, that even should Lamoni be killed, it would be better for Lamoni than his father. Lamoni had repented. Ammon's view of the world saw past the boundaries of mortality. Were this mortality all that there was, dying would be an almost ultimate tragedy. If, however, there was a continuation of life in another realm, as Ammon had taught and Lamoni had briefly experienced, then a mortal death was not the tragedy that living unrepentant and therefore, unprepared for that other realm would be.

Alma 20:21–25

21 Now when the king saw that Ammon could slay him, he began to plead with Ammon that he would spare his life.

22 But Ammon raised his sword, and said unto him: Behold, I will smite thee except thou wilt grant unto me that my brethren may be cast out of prison.

23 Now the king, fearing he should lose his life, said: If thou wilt spare me I will grant unto thee whatsoever thou wilt ask, even to half of the kingdom.

24 Now when Ammon saw that he had wrought upon the old king according to his desire, he said unto him: If thou wilt grant that my brethren may be cast out of prison, and also that Lamoni may retain his kingdom, and that ye be not displeased with him, but grant that he may do according to his own desires in whatsoever thing he thinketh, then will I spare thee; otherwise I will smite thee to the earth.

25 Now when Ammon had said these words, the king began to rejoice because of his life.

Comments

Lamoni's father clearly feared for his life and pleaded for it. Ammon used that fear to extract a promise that he would free his brothers from prison in Middoni. That statement tells us that Ammon understood that the overking had influence over other kings in the land. It confirms the picture of the king over lesser kings that we have been drawing.

The king is desperate enough that, rather than only agreeing to free the brothers, he offers an even greater reward; up to half of his kingdom. Rather than ask anything for himself, Ammon removes the threat to Lamoni, and then asks for his brothers' release.

Alma 20:26–27

26 And when he saw that Ammon had no desire to destroy him, and when he also saw the great love he had for his son Lamoni, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Because this is all that thou hast

desired, that I would release thy brethren, and suffer that my son Lamoni should retain his kingdom, behold, I will grant unto you that my son may retain his kingdom from this time and forever; and I will govern him no more—

27 And I will also grant unto thee that thy brethren may be cast out of prison, and thou and thy brethren may come unto me, in my kingdom; for I shall greatly desire to see thee. For the king was greatly astonished at the words which he had spoken, and also at the words which had been spoken by his son Lamoni, therefore he was desirous to learn them.

Comments

Whether it was part of what Ammon had hoped for or not, certainly the Lord used the occasion to set up the meeting between Aaron and the overking that would lead to perhaps an even greater conversion of Lamanites than what Ammon had achieved. Lamoni's father is impressed when Ammon asks for much less than he could have, and that the requests had nothing to do with his personal success. Of course, the overking would have assumed that Ammon's definition of personal success would have been wealth and power, where this true motivation was bringing souls to God.

Lamoni's father confirms that he had had control over his son, even though his son was a king. He frees him to reign on his own, and then declares that the brothers would be freed. Witnessing the Spirit's hand in this process, he also requests that someone come to him in his own land to teach him about the things that had so remarkably changed his son, Lamoni. Although unstated, it is possible that Lamoni's father might have some wonder if Ammon were not "more than a man," just as his son had originally feared.

Ammon's Brothers Are Freed

Alma 20:28–30

28 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni proceeded on their journey towards the land of Middoni. And Lamoni found favor in the eyes of the king of the land; therefore the brethren of Ammon were brought forth out of prison.

29 And when Ammon did meet them he was exceedingly sorrowful, for behold they were naked, and their skins were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords. And they also had suffered hunger, thirst, and all kinds of afflictions; nevertheless they were patient in all their sufferings.

30 And, as it happened, it was their lot to have fallen into the hands of a more hardened and a more stiffnecked people; therefore they would not hearken unto their words, and they had cast them out, and had smitten them, and had driven them from house to house, and from place to place, even until they had arrived in the land of Middoni; and there they were taken and cast into prison, and bound with strong cords, and kept in prison for many days, and were delivered by Lamoni and Ammon.

Comments

Ammon's brothers had received a very different reception. They did not find a way to work past the hard hearts that they found in the people to whom they preached. They had been cast into prison and treated poorly. Nevertheless, with the orders of the overking, Lamoni and Ammon were able to free them.

This ends the chapter that discussed the story of Ammon and Lamoni. In the next chapter we move to a new story.

Alma 21

Imprisonment of Aaron and His Brothers

Alma 21: Header

An account of the preaching of Aaron, and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites.

Comments

Mormon includes chapter headers when he begins sections that change sources. In this case, the ultimate source changed from Ammon to Aaron and Muloki. Their story had to have been recorded separately from Ammon's, but the most logical explanation of where Mormon got these stories continues to be Alma₂'s personal record. Just as Mormon included stories from other sources in the book he created, Alma₂ took the stories he either read, or heard, from the sons of Mosiah₂ and added them into his personal record. As with the story of Ammon and King Lamoni, when the narration happens in the third person, it is probable that we are seeing Mormon copying what Alma₂ had written.

Alma 21:1–3

1 Now when Ammon and his brethren separated themselves in the borders of the land of the Lamanites, behold Aaron took his journey towards the land which was called by the Lamanites, Jerusalem, calling it after the land of their fathers' nativity; and it was away joining the borders of Mormon.

2 Now the Lamanites and the Amalekites and the people of Amulon had built a great city, which was called Jerusalem.

3 Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder; therefore they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts, that they should wax strong in wickedness and their abominations.

Comments

The story of Aaron's missionary labors obviously began when he, Ammon, and the others separated and went different ways. That event was recorded in Ammon's story (see Alma 17:17). It is told in less detail

here, not because Aaron didn't say anything about it, but because Alma₂ knew he had already described it. The mention here is to situate this story as happening parallel to Ammon's story. Therefore, Alma₂ notes that they start at the same time.

Aaron has a different experience because he goes not to just Lamanites, but also to apostate Nephites who had become Lamanites. The Amalekites were dissenters from the Nephites, and the people of Amulon followed the man who was once priest under King Noah. Mormon will consistently paint the Lamanites as enemies but will just as consistently suggest that the worst enemies were those who had once been Nephites and consciously turned their backs on Nephite beliefs.

Alma 21:4–6

4 And it came to pass that Aaron came to the city of Jerusalem, and first began to preach to the Amalekites. And he began to preach to them in their synagogues, for they had built synagogues after the order of the Nehors; for many of the Amalekites and the Amulonites were after the order of the Nehors.

5 Therefore, as Aaron entered into one of their synagogues to preach unto the people, and as he was speaking unto them, behold there arose an Amalekite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people?

6 Thou also sayest, except we repent we shall perish. How knowest thou the thought and intent of our hearts? How knowest thou that we have cause to repent? How knowest thou that we are not a righteous people? Behold, we have built sanctuaries, and we do assemble ourselves together to worship God. We do believe that God will save all men.

Comments

The last time we saw the Order of the Nehors was in the story of Alma₂ and Amulek in Ammonihah. Although this story occurs almost fourteen years before the events in Ammonihah, they nevertheless deal with the same type of Nephite religious apostasy. The Amalekites and Amulonites “were after the Order of the Nehors,” even though there is no way that the priests of Noah would have known anything about Nehor. While Mormon may have assigned Nehor's name to the set of religious beliefs, it is pretty clear that this particular form of Nephite apostasy had existed prior to Nehor and was represented by the priests in the court of Noah, even if not originally among the Amalekites. The general teachings of the Order of the Nehors represent the most common way that Nephites apostatized from their religion.

One of the common expressions of the apostasy was the idea that Yahweh would save all men. That contrasts with the Nephite teaching that an atoning Messiah would be required. That is the last part of the statement that we see in verse 6. The rest of this introduction simply has the people denying that there was a need for Aaron to teach them anything.

When King Lamoni had asked how Ammon knew what he was thinking, Lamoni had reason to believe that Ammon had already discerned his thoughts. The people in the city of Jerusalem had no such sincere question. Their question was one of disbelief. How did he know what they thought? How did Aaron know that they should repent? Hadn't the people in this Jerusalem built sanctuaries and worshipped God?

Alma 21:7–10

7 Now Aaron said unto him: Believest thou that the Son of God shall come to redeem mankind from their sins?

8 And the man said unto him: We do not believe that thou knowest any such thing. We do not believe in these foolish traditions. We do not believe that thou knowest of things to come, neither do we believe that thy fathers and also that our fathers did know concerning the things which they spake, of that which is to come.

9 Now Aaron began to open the scriptures unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and that there could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood.

10 And it came to pass as he began to expound these things unto them they were angry with him, and began to mock him; and they would not hear the words which he spake.

Comments

Aaron understood precisely where the people of the city of Jerusalem differed from what he knew Yahweh wanted them to understand. They had said that Yahweh would save everyone, and that statement clearly indicated that they rejected the coming Messiah. Nevertheless, Aaron asks to have them commit to their belief.

When Aaron asks if they believe that the Son of God would come to redeem mankind, they respond that Aaron could not know that since it was in the future. Those things promised in the far distant future did not seem real to them. Thus, this Jerusalem expelled a prophet teaching about the coming Messiah, even as the Old World Jerusalem had expelled Lehi, a prophet teaching about the coming Messiah.

Alma 21:11–14

11 Therefore, when he saw that they would not hear his words, he departed out of their synagogue, and came over to a village which was called Ani-Anti, and there he found Muloki preaching the word unto them; and also Ammah and his brethren. And they contended with many about the word.

12 And it came to pass that they saw that the people would harden their hearts, therefore they departed and came over into the land of Middoni. And they did preach the word unto many, and few believed on the words which they taught.

13 Nevertheless, Aaron and a certain number of his brethren were taken and cast into prison, and the remainder of them fled out of the land of Middoni unto the regions round about.

14 And those who were cast into prison suffered many things, and they were delivered by the hand of Lamoni and Ammon, and they were fed and clothed.

Comments

Aaron leaves the city of Jerusalem after having no success. He meets with others from the original party, including two of his brothers, and finds that they have had no success either. All of them travel to Middoni to try again. This time they are imprisoned. We are not told how long they were in prison, but they were released when Lamoni and Ammon arrived. At this point, Alma₂ has caught his readers up to the point in the story where Lamoni and Ammon's story ended. Thus, this part is no longer the flashback to the parallel timing of the missions but has caught up to the main story line. Indeed, the story of Lamoni and Ammon set up this next major missionary success, and the story of Aaron, up to this part, has been one of missionary frustration, rather than success.

Alma 21:15–17

15 And they went forth again to declare the word, and thus they were delivered for the first time out of prison; and thus they had suffered.

16 And they went forth whithersoever they were led by the Spirit of the Lord, preaching the word of God in every synagogue of the Amalekites, or in every assembly of the Lamanites where they could be admitted.

17 And it came to pass that the Lord began to bless them, insomuch that they brought many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, they did convince many of their sins, and of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct.

Comments

As the story is shifting, Alma₂ gives us the general story of all the brothers, and then returns to finish Lamoni and Ammon's story. For the imprisoned brothers, they were delivered. The text doesn't dwell on what they had suffered, but reading between the lines indicates that it was hardly a pleasant experience. Nevertheless, they continued their preaching and began to have some success, even in the Amalekite synagogues.

Ammon and Lamoni Return to the Land of Ishmael

Alma 21:18–23

18 And it came to pass that Ammon and Lamoni returned from the land of Middoni to the land of Ishmael, which was the land of their inheritance.

19 And king Lamoni would not suffer that Ammon should serve him, or be his servant.

20 But he caused that there should be synagogues built in the land of Ishmael; and he caused that his people, or the people who were under his reign, should assemble themselves together.

21 And he did rejoice over them, and he did teach them many things. And he did also declare unto them that they were a people who were under him, and that they were a free people, that they were free from the oppressions of the king, his father; for that his father had granted unto him that he might reign over the people who were in the land of Ishmael, and in all the land round about.

22 And he also declared unto them that they might have the liberty of worshiping the Lord their God according to their desires, in whatsoever place they were in, if it were in the land which was under the reign of king Lamoni.

23 And Ammon did preach unto the people of king Lamoni; and it came to pass that he did teach them all things concerning things pertaining to righteousness. And he did exhort them daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God.

Comments

The conclusion to the story of Ammon and Lamoni has them return together. While Ammon was willing to continue as a servant, Lamoni elevated his position. The Nephite church was established. The fact that a church was established suggests that the conversion was not universal. The function of the church among the Nephites was to establish a separation of religious beliefs, allowing for at least two different beliefs in the same city. That appears to be what happens here as well. Many are converted. Some number are not. Churches allowed for both types of religious believers to exist in the same community.

There is no chapter break at this point. This part of the story is the setup to the story of Aaron and Lamoni's father. That story begins in earnest in the next modern chapter, but it was part of the same chapter in 1830.

Alma 22

Aaron Goes before the King of All the Land (Lamoni's Father)

Alma 22:1–2

1 Now, as Ammon was thus teaching the people of Lamoni continually, we will return to the account of Aaron and his brethren; for after he departed from the land of Middoni he was led by the Spirit to the land of Nephi, even to the house of the king which was over all the land save it were the land of Ishmael; and he was the father of Lamoni.

2 And it came to pass that he went in unto him into the king's palace, with his brethren, and bowed himself before the king, and said unto him: Behold, O king, we are the brethren of Ammon, whom thou hast delivered out of prison.

Comments

The division into a separate chapter at this point makes it more difficult to see the function of the beginning of verse 1. In the original longer chapter, it was the transition to move from the ending of the events of Ammon and Lamoni to the beginning of the story of Aaron and Lamoni's father. Alma₂ had interwoven the ending of Ammon and Lamoni's story with the freeing of the brothers from Middoni and some of the events that happened to both those who had been imprisoned and Ammon. The very last was about Ammon and Lamoni, and therefore, Alma₂ notes that "we will return to the account of Aaron and his brethren."

Although this beginning makes it clear that Aaron and his brothers, and perhaps others, were part of the beginning of this story, it will quickly concentrate only on Aaron. Nevertheless, Alma₂ clearly notes that all the brothers, save Ammon, appear before the overking in the land of Nephi: "we are the brethren of Ammon."

Alma 22:3–6

3 And now, O king, if thou wilt spare our lives, we will be thy servants. And the king said unto them: Arise, for I will grant unto you your lives, and I will not suffer that ye shall be my servants; but I will

insist that ye shall administer unto me; for I have been somewhat troubled in mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon; and I desire to know the cause why he has not come up out of Middoni with thee.

4 And Aaron said unto the king: Behold, the Spirit of the Lord has called him another way; he has gone to the land of Ishmael, to teach the people of Lamoni.

5 Now the king said unto them: What is this that ye have said concerning the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, this is the thing which doth trouble me.

6 And also, what is this that Ammon said—If ye will repent ye shall be saved, and if ye will not repent, ye shall be cast off at the last day?

Comments

Aaron, Omner, and Himni present themselves to Lamoni's father using the same offer that Ammon had. They offer to be servants. The overking is beyond that. He had already had an encounter with Aaron that left him with questions, and the overking left Aaron with the request that Ammon visit him in the land of Nephi. Ammon wasn't there, but the overking hopes that Ammon's brothers might be similar to Ammon.

The king has questions. When the story was given of Ammon's meeting and conflict with Lamoni's father on the road to Middoni, we were told that Lamoni had told his father "all the cause of his tarrying in his own kingdom, that he did not go unto his father to the feast which he had prepared" (Alma 20:12). Few details of what he said were recorded at that time, but the story must have included some of Ammon's teachings, for Lamoni's father poses questions that he indicates came from Ammon's teaching. Specifically, the overking does not understand the Spirit's ability to communicate with Ammon, and he does not understand the principle of repentance.

This last sentence should be interpreted. It certainly was not true that Lamoni's father would not understand that someone might do something wrong and be sorry for it, and then change. That part of repentance is human and universal. What he did not understand was the role of the coming Messiah in creating the conditions whereupon repentance could enact a removal of the stain of sin and could create the condition that would allow one to not be "cast off at the last day."

Alma 22:7

7 And Aaron answered him and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? And the king said: I know that the Amalekites say that there is a God, and I have granted unto them that they should build sanctuaries, that they may assemble themselves together to worship him. And if now thou sayest there is a God, behold I will believe.

Comments

The beginning of the discussion with Lamoni's father is essentially the same as the beginning of Ammon's discussion with Lamoni. The lesson begins with the question: "Believest thou that there is a God?" See Alma 18:24 for Ammon's very similar question to Lamoni.

There is an interesting side note to the story of the overking's conversion. The overking's answer is different from Lamoni's. Where Lamoni had not believed in God, but in a Great Spirit, his father understands that there is a god named Yahweh. The issue is not a belief in any divine being, but rather in a specific one. Ammon and Aaron asked if they believed in Yahweh. Lamoni was unfamiliar with Yahweh. Lamoni's father is familiar with Yahweh, because Yahweh was the God of the Amalekites. They, and the followers of the priests of Noah, followed the Order of the Nehors, which did believe that Yahweh was their God. Thus, Lamoni's father had familiarity because he had allowed the Amalekites to have their own form of worship.

This tells us that even though there might have been some Lamanites who remembered something of the law of Moses, it was not the most common religion in the land. It was apostate Nephites, not the typical Lamanite, who believed in Yahweh.

The very last sentence is critical to the story. While Lamoni's father does not believe in Yahweh, he is willing to accept that Yahweh exists. At this point, however, it does not mean that the overking accepts Yahweh as the sole God, but rather that he is a god among many. That change is yet to come. At this point, it is a willingness to believe that is important.

Alma 22:8–11

8 And now when Aaron heard this, his heart began to rejoice, and he said: Behold, assuredly as thou livest, O king, there is a God.

9 And the king said: Is God that Great Spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem?

10 And Aaron said unto him: Yea, he is that Great Spirit, and he created all things both in heaven and in earth. Believest thou this?

11 And he said: Yea, I believe that the Great Spirit created all things, and I desire that ye should tell me concerning all these things, and I will believe thy words.

Comments

To this point, the conversation between Aaron and Lamoni's father proceeds much as did the conversation between Ammon and Lamoni. Aaron declares that there is a God, meaning Yahweh. As did Lamoni, his father equates Yahweh with "that great Spirit that brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem." The heritage was not lost, but the name of God was.

As did Lamoni, his father is willing to understand that Yahweh is the God who the Lamanites understood as the Great Spirit. Lamoni's father expresses the willingness to believe Aaron's words. This willingness is likely still based on his remarkable experience with Ammon on the road to Middoni.

Alma 22:12–14

12 And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.

13 And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.

14 And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.

Comments

When Aaron sees that the overking is willing to believe, Aaron understands that what is required is the foundation upon which lies the essential understanding of Yahweh, and especially of the Messiah, who will be Yahweh come to earth. Therefore, Aaron lays out the scriptures. Why begin with the fall of Adam? The requirement for a redeemer was part of the plan that included the fall from Eden. Death of the body and spirit required a redeemer who could remove those two penalties that resulted from the fall.

Since man cannot redeem himself, the Messiah (Yahweh), who will condescend to come to earth, is required to create the redemption. Only this God on earth could rob the grave and reverse the separation from God caused by sin.

The Spirit Overcomes the King

Alma 22:15–17

15 And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.

16 But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

17 And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

Comments

The overking's willingness to believe led him to see the answer to the question that he had asked in verse 6. He wanted to know what it meant that one could be saved upon repentance. Now he had the scriptural basis for that understanding, and therefore, he sincerely asks: "what shall I do that I may be born of God." There are many who may ask that question and receive an answer. In Lehi's dream, there were those who ate of the fruit and still eventually walked away. What Lamoni's father will demonstrate is that his question was sincere, and his willingness to do what was required was not only sincere, but strong.

Aaron informs the overking that he must pray for a remission of sins. In modern conversion processes, we would also include baptism as a requirement for the remission of sins. While the sons of Mosiah₂ certainly understood that aspect of baptism, it is still preceded by the process of sincere repentance. Therefore, the requirement is not baptism, but a prayer which will lead to the understanding that one's life should change. The overking offers a prayer.

Alma 22:18

18 O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

Comments

In Alma 32:27, Alma₂ will teach that the beginning of faith is to "exercise a particle of faith, ye even if ye can no more than desire to believe." Lamoni's father exemplifies the nature of a "particle of faith," as well as what it means to exercise it.

The very beginning of the prayer is: "God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me." What a small particle of faith it is to pray, solely upon the word of another. In this case, the overking doesn't even know if there is a God such as Aaron has described, or if the God to whom he is praying really is that God. There is no knowledge here. There is a large amount of doubt, or at least a lack of confirmation.

What is important, however, is that the overking was willing to exercise that particle of faith. To what extent? "I will give away all my sins to know thee." That was clearly not an idle promise. When threatened

with his mortal life, he was willing to give Ammon half of his kingdom. When he learned that his immortal life was threatened, he was willing to give away all his sins.

As with other powerful spiritual experiences in the Book of Mormon, the overking “was struck as if he were dead.” His experience followed that of his son, and the queen.

Alma 22:19

19 And it came to pass that his servants ran and told the queen all that had happened unto the king. And she came in unto the king; and when she saw him lay as if he were dead, and also Aaron and his brethren standing as though they had been the cause of his fall, she was angry with them, and commanded that her servants, or the servants of the king, should take them and slay them.

Comments

When the queen sees her husband, she sees only the apparently dead king and Nephites in his presence. Clearly, the Nephites must have been the cause. Rather than be converted as was her daughter-in-law, this queen orders that Aaron and his brothers be taken and executed.

Alma 22:20–23

20 Now the servants had seen the cause of the king’s fall, therefore they durst not lay their hands on Aaron and his brethren; and they pled with the queen saying: Why commandest thou that we should slay these men, when behold one of them is mightier than us all? Therefore we shall fall before them.

21 Now when the queen saw the fear of the servants she also began to fear exceedingly, lest there should some evil come upon her. And she commanded her servants that they should go and call the people, that they might slay Aaron and his brethren.

22 Now when Aaron saw the determination of the queen, he, also knowing the hardness of the hearts of the people, feared lest that a multitude should assemble themselves together, and there should be a great contention and a disturbance among them; therefore he put forth his hand and raised the king from the earth, and said unto him: Stand. And he stood upon his feet, receiving his strength.

23 Now this was done in the presence of the queen and many of the servants. And when they saw it they greatly marveled, and began to fear. And the king stood forth, and began to minister unto them. And he did minister unto them, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord.

Comments

There are clear parallels between the story of Ammon and Lamoni and Aaron and Lamoni’s father. However, they are not exactly parallel, for this queen cannot be pacified. Even though those who had witnessed

what had happened to the overking were in fear of Aaron and his brothers, the queen is adamant that the Nephites should be killed.

The solution, however, is similar. The king was awakened from the spiritual trance in which he had fallen. As with Lamoni, upon rising from his trance, his father also let his conversion be known. The details are not given, but the result was the same. Many were also converted, including his whole household, which we may presume included his wife, the queen.

Alma 22:24–26

24 Now there was a multitude gathered together because of the commandment of the queen, and there began to be great murmurings among them because of Aaron and his brethren.

25 But the king stood forth among them and administered unto them. And they were pacified towards Aaron and those who were with him.

26 And it came to pass that when the king saw that the people were pacified, he caused that Aaron and his brethren should stand forth in the midst of the multitude, and that they should preach the word unto them.

Comments

The process of conversion extended beyond the king's household that was mentioned in verse 23. The queen had commanded that others be gathered, and while those others may not have witnessed the apparent miracle, they did hear their king teach them. Many were converted. The result is that the king allows the brothers to teach. He had earlier permitted the Amalekites to have their synagogues, so he was not averse to having a different religion preached among his people. The difference in this case is that, where the Amalekites were permitted to have their own separate religion, Aaron and his brothers were allowed to preach to all the Lamanites. The Lamanites were free to choose how to believe, and they were given the opportunity.

The King Sends a Proclamation

Alma 22:27

27 And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land, who were in all the regions round about, which was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west, and which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west, and round about on the borders of the seashore, and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west—and thus were the Lamanites and the Nephites divided.

Comments

This verse begins with the overking sending a proclamation. The story of the proclamation will pick up again in chapter 23:1. The material in between is Mormon's insertion into the text. What happens in these inserted verses is Mormon's description of the relative Lamanite and Nephite geography. Although it was probably triggered by the need to explain the extent to which the proclamation was sent, Mormon uses this insertion to extend the picture in order to give his readers a more general idea of the lay of the land discussed in the Book of Mormon.

This is a case of repetitive resumption. The exit text is found in Alma 22:27, where the proclamation is sent, and then it returns with two statements. The first is Alma 22:35 where Mormon indicates that he is returning to the story, and then in Alma 23:1 we have the repetition of the proclamation, and the story associated with the proclamation.

Although most of these chapters have been copied from Alma₂'s personal record, and the narration is attributable to Alma₂, the repetitive resumption highlights that verses 27 through 34 are an insertion into Alma₂'s text, and therefore we may confidently attribute them to Mormon. In addition to the repetitive resumption, there was no reason for Alma₂ to describe the lands as he knew them. Only Mormon knew that he was writing for a future audience that would not know the extent of the lands.

The geography lesson begins with the description of lands beholding to Lamoni's father, the overking. Mormon specifically notes that the proclamation was sent to "all his people who were in all his land."

That land was bordered by the sea on the west and on the east. Thus, Lamanite territory covers all the land between two seas. For those attempting to use this information to find Book of Mormon lands on a map, that suggests that the east-west dimensions from sea to sea cannot be that large. Very few ancient civilizations could cover extensive territories, and those known from the New World postdate the Book of Mormon.

The next geographic clue is the dividing line between Lamanite and Nephite lands. The Nephite lands are represented only by the land of Zarahemla at this point, though Mormon will add other descriptions that fit his later time, rather than this date. The dividing line is called a wilderness. Other texts tell us that the land of Nephi is at a higher elevation than the lands of Zarahemla.

Mormon mentions Manti which is "by the head of the river Sidon." The phrase "running from the east towards the west" is anomalous in that it might describe the river Sidon, or it might describe the wilderness line itself. In any case, the typical understanding of the head of the Sidon is that it represents the source of the river. This reading is not only based on the common meaning of the "head" of the river, but also the fact that the Land of Nephi is higher and the land of Zarahemla lower. With the wilderness between, it is reasonable that at least some of that wilderness is also higher than Zarahemla. The Sidon is never mentioned in the land of Nephi and is associated with the land and city of Zarahemla. The property of water has it flowing downhill, therefore confirming the reading of it not only beginning in the strip of wilderness, but also that it flows roughly northward (reading the east to west phrase as referring to the wilderness rather than the river).

Mormon intentionally includes Manti because that is the typical route taken between the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla, and certainly was the reason that the city of Manti was built in that strategic location.

Mormon Provides a Geographical Overview

Alma 22:28–29

28 Now, the more idle part of the Lamanites lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents; and they were spread through the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their fathers' first inheritance, and thus bordering along by the seashore.

29 And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them. And thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites; nevertheless the Nephites had taken possession of all the northern parts of the land bordering on the wilderness, at the head of the river Sidon, from the east to the west, round about on the wilderness side; on the north, even until they came to the land which they called Bountiful.

Comments

It is difficult to know how historically accurate Mormon's description of the idle Lamanites in the wilderness might have been. Certainly, there could have been, but the descriptions of Lamanite culture we see during the mission of the sons of Mosiah₂ to the Lamanites do not describe any such idleness. The Lamanites that the sons of Mosiah₂ encountered were anything but idle, based on the clues we have in the text. However, it is also possible that, since it is Mormon providing this information, he is describing what he understands from perhaps six hundred years after the mission of the sons of Mosiah₂.

What Mormon describes is a time when there are not only Lamanites in the south, but also to the west and east of the Nephites. That description also appears to apply to later times. To this point in Nephite history, we have not seen evidence of Lamanites on the west and east. They seem to arrive through the pass near Manti on the south of Nephite lands.

Alma 22:30–31

30 And it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla, it being the place of their first landing.

31 And they came from there up into the south wilderness. Thus the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come from the land northward for food.

Comments

Understanding verse 30 requires recalling the final statement of verse 29: “on the north, even until they came to the land which they called Bountiful.” Nephite lands were bounded on the north by the land called Bountiful. On the other side, farther north, was the land called Desolation. Although Mormon is ostensibly outlining Lamanite and Nephite lands, he has another purpose in mind. The land Desolation plays no part in this earlier history of the Nephites, but it will be important later. The name, however, is one that Mormon has already used in connection with Ammonihah, which he called the “desolation of the Nehors” (see Alma 16:11).

The important part of the desolation of the Nehors was the destruction of Ammonihah, and that “their lands remained desolate” (Alma 16:11). The important definition of the land Desolation was “the land which had been peopled and been destroyed.” Mormon associates the land northward not only with the Jaredites, but specifically with destroyed Jaredites. This verse is here for Mormon’s literary purposes, not to further the information about the story of the sons of Mosiah₂ in Lamanite lands.

Verse 31 tells modern readers that the desolation of destroyed Jaredites is contrasted with the bountiful nature of the land under the righteous Nephites. In Mormon times, the Nephites will physically, and symbolically, move into the northern lands, into Desolation. It will be a time when they will have left behind their covenant to follow God, and thus they will move from God’s Bounty to the Jaredite Desolation, where the Nephites will also be destroyed.

Alma 22:32

32 And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward.

Comments

Verse 32 may be the most well-known geographic reference in the Book of Mormon. There was “a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward.” That definition is also given as the line between Desolation and Bountiful. Thus, this narrow neck is the northern reach of Nephite lands until the ending years when the Nephites are pushed north into the land northward, or Desolation. The two names may be seen as representing the physical direction (northward) and the spiritual state (Desolation).

The narrow neck is only “the distance of a day and a half’s journey for a Nephite.” What that means is not precise. It is also difficult to interpret in light of Helaman 4:7 remarking that “And there they did fortify against the Lamanites, from the west sea, even unto the east; it being a day’s journey for a Nephite, on the line which they had fortified and stationed their armies to defend their north country.” It is possible that the difference is that one is the defended line, and the longer distance measures something more than the defended line.

Also of note is that neither of the two references (verse 32 and Helaman 4:7) says that the line is from sea to sea, even though that might be implied. In both statements, the west sea is mentioned, but some other point on the east boundary does not have a sea associated with it. It is possible that the distance to measure begins at or near the west sea, but that it does not extend all the way to the east sea. That would suggest that there was some impassible part of the small neck on the east, between the measured line and the east sea.

Alma 22:33–35

33 And it came to pass that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from the east unto the west sea, and thus the Nephites in their wisdom, with their guards and their armies, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, that thereby they should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward.

34 Therefore the Lamanites could have no more possessions only in the land of Nephi, and the wilderness round about. Now this was wisdom in the Nephites—as the Lamanites were an enemy to them, they would not suffer their afflictions on every hand, and also that they might have a country whither they might flee, according to their desires.

35 And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren.

Comments

Mormon sees three lands that might be conceptually seen as layers, although the geography itself would not be so neatly represented. At the far south was the land of the Lamanites, including the land of Nephi, which was Nephite territory until Mosiah¹, the father of King Benjamin, left for the land of Zarahemla.

The next layer is the Nephite lands, bounded on the south by the narrow wilderness, and on the north to the line in the small neck which was also called the land Bountiful. It is interesting that in verse 33, Mormon notes that the Lamanites “should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward.” In this case, “the land northward” is only a relative direction. It is not the land of Desolation, but rather the Nephite lands themselves, those lands being northward of the Lamanite lands.

The final layer was the land Desolation. Note that in verse 34, the Nephites are protecting the land Bountiful so “that they might have a country whither they might flee.” The Nephites do not see heading south as any kind of salvation. Indeed, when forced to flee, they flee northward from their lands into Desolation, above the small neck.

Our current chapters 21 and 22 were a single chapter in 1830. That chapter ends at this point. Even though there is a chapter break, the story of the sons of Mosiah₂ among the Lamanites is far from ended.

Alma 23

Converted Lamanites Name Themselves Anti-Nephi-Lehies

Alma 23:1–3

1 Behold, now it came to pass that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation among all his people, that they should not lay their hands on Ammon, or Aaron, or Omner, or Himni, nor either of their brethren who should go forth preaching the word of God, in whatsoever place they should be, in any part of their land.

2 Yea, he sent a decree among them, that they should not lay their hands on them to bind them, or to cast them into prison; neither should they spit upon them, nor smite them, nor cast them out of their synagogues, nor scourge them; neither should they cast stones at them, but that they should have free access to their houses, and also their temples, and their sanctuaries.

3 And thus they might go forth and preach the word according to their desires, for the king had been converted unto the Lord, and all his household; therefore he sent his proclamation throughout the land unto his people, that the word of God might have no obstruction, but that it might go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers, and that they might be convinced that they were all brethren, and that they ought not to murder, nor to plunder, nor to steal, nor to commit adultery, nor to commit any manner of wickedness.

Comments

Verses 1 and 2 pick up the story that was interrupted in Alma 22:27. The first thing that the repetitive resumption does is to get the text back to the story that was interrupted. Thus, the idea that a proclamation was sent is repeated from Alma 22:27. The second aspect of the resumption is to tell why the proclamation was sent, which was not told before the inserted material on the geography of Lamanite and Nephite lands. The proclamation provided safety for the sons of Mosiah₂ and for those with them in order to preach among the Lamanites. In Alma 22:26, Alma₂ had told of the overking allowing the brothers to preach to those present, and this part of the story extends that permission to the whole of the territory over which the overking had control.

Verse 3 ends the part of the story that would have ended the previous chapter. In Mormon's writings, it is not unusual for something to trigger him to end a chapter. When that happens, it also often happens

that the story that would have ended the chapter isn't over. That is the case here. Verse 3 summarizes the proclamation and concludes that part of the story. The story will shift away from the overking and on to the next part of the missionary work, beginning in the next verse.

Alma 23:4–7

4 And now it came to pass that when the king had sent forth this proclamation, that Aaron and his brethren went forth from city to city, and from one house of worship to another, establishing churches, and consecrating priests and teachers throughout the land among the Lamanites, to preach and to teach the word of God among them; and thus they began to have great success.

5 And thousands were brought to the knowledge of the Lord, yea, thousands were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites; and they were taught the records and prophecies which were handed down even to the present time.

6 And as sure as the Lord liveth, so sure as many as believed, or as many as were brought to the knowledge of the truth, through the preaching of Ammon and his brethren, according to the spirit of revelation and of prophecy, and the power of God working miracles in them—yea, I say unto you, as the Lord liveth, as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never did fall away.

7 For they became a righteous people; they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion, that they did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren.

Comments

With the overking's protection, the missionary work could begin in earnest. No longer threatened with imprisonment as had occurred in Middoni, many could hear their message. That the overking and King Lamoni had both been converted to this message about Yahweh certainly assisted in opening many minds and hearts.

Very important is the last line of verse 6. Those who were converted "never did fall away." This was a sincere conversion. There is no indication of whether this part of the text was original to Alma₂'s record, or if it is Mormon's insertion. Even if it were copied from Alma₂'s text, however, it served Mormon's purposes to include it. Mormon wants to show that the Lamanites can be redeemed, and that they may be truly converted. Doubtless, some of this message is aimed at the Lamanites to whom Mormon is writing. He wants them to know that, despite the traditions of their fathers, they are able to come to Yahweh and be truly converted. The idea that they never did fall away is certainly limited to the individuals who were converted and not to all their descendants, but it is still an important implication of the redeemability of the Lamanites.

Verse 7 uses the phrase "lay down the weapons of their rebellion." This phrase is repeated in verse 13 below, where it clarifies that these were weapons of war. That is also a characteristic of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. It appears that this laying down of weapons was somehow part of their repentance process. The possible reason will be discussed when we examine the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Alma 23:8–15

8 Now, these are they who were converted unto the Lord:

9 The people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Ishmael;

10 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Middoni;

11 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the city of Nephi;

12 And also of the people of the Lamanites who were in the land of Shilom, and who were in the land of Shemlon, and in the city of Lemuel, and in the city of Shimnilom.

13 And these are the names of the cities of the Lamanites which were converted unto the Lord; and these are they that laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war; and they were all Lamanites.

14 And the Amalekites were not converted, save only one; neither were any of the Amulonites; but they did harden their hearts, and also the hearts of the Lamanites in that part of the land wheresoever they dwelt, yea, and all their villages and all their cities.

15 Therefore, we have named all the cities of the Lamanites in which they did repent and come to the knowledge of the truth, and were converted.

Comments

The conversions are listed by their land. Typically, there is a city that gives its name to the surrounding land. There is a city of Nephi in the land of Nephi. When verse 12 lists the land of Shemlon, it lists two particular cities, the city of Lemuel and the city of Shimnilom. That might suggest that there were other cities in the land that were not converted, but that is speculation. There is no real information here to understand much more than what is written.

What is important in this list is the culminating statement in verse 13. These cities were converted, and they “laid down the weapons of their rebellion, yea, all their weapons of war.” As noted in the previous verses, this will become an important feature of the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Either Mormon or Alma₂, since the author is unclear, underscore that all these conversions were Lamanites. Mormon would have either added that line or made sure to copy it to make certain that his future readers, whom he assumed would be Lamanites, understood that they, too, were capable of faithful conversion and redemption. This section of the story ends by noting that the Amalekites, who were apostate Nephites, were not among the converts. It is another theme Mormon emphasizes, that the worst and most implacable enemies were those who apostatized.

Alma 23:16–18

16 And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted

with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished.

17 And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites.

18 And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them.

Comments

Those who were converted were from multiple cities and lands, but they were considered Lamanites. After their conversion, there was nothing different about their genetic makeup, but they wanted to create a separation from the Lamanites who were not converted. Rather than be understood as a people of a certain city or land, they wanted to be known by their devotion to Yahweh. They name themselves Anti-Nephi-Lehies, and “were no more called Lamanites.”

Verse 18 continues the theme of complete conversion. They were no longer Lamanites, and therefore, no longer the lazy stereotype. There is no indication that any of these people changed their ways of growing food, but the phrase is included to show that there is a dramatic change. It is written from the perspective of the Nephites. Thus, these Anti-Nephi-Lehies became the opposite of Lamanites. Although they are not called Nephites directly, they are at least symbolic Nephites. Even “the curse of God did no more follow them.”

There have been times in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when the removal of the curse suggested a change in skin pigment. That should be seen as an old cultural misunderstanding of the text. The curse removed the reason for not being able to intermarry with Nephites. There is no evidence in the actions seen in the text that allow the interpretation that there was a skin color difference between Lamanites and Nephites.

There is no known reason for the name Anti-Nephi-Lehies. What can be said is that the “Anti” part of the name does not come from the Greek prefix that meant “against.” There is a city named Ani-Anti (Alma 21:11), which tells us that it is a name, and not a prefix. It certainly had some important meaning, and certainly invoked the fact that they followed the religious teachings of Nephi and his father, Lehi. More than that, there is no definitive answer.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. The story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies continues immediately.

Alma 24

Alma 24:1–4

1 And it came to pass that the Amalekites and the Amulonites and the Lamanites who were in the land of Amulon, and also in the land of Helam, and who were in the land of Jerusalem, and in fine, in all the land round about, who had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, were stirred up by the Amalekites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren.

2 And their hatred became exceedingly sore against them, even insomuch that they began to rebel against their king, insomuch that they would not that he should be their king; therefore, they took up arms against the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

3 Now the king conferred the kingdom upon his son, and he called his name Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

4 And the king died in that selfsame year that the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of God.

Comments

In historical documents that suggest that everyone did one thing, or that all members of another group did something else, we should understand that the actual historical example was not as exclusive as the statements would indicate. Thus, it is probable that at least some Amalekites and Amulonites might have been converted. It is probable that in the lands mentioned in Alma 23:9–12 there were some who were not converted. The specifics and the details of those conversions and non-conversions are not the point of the text. What is important in the writing of the story is that there was a division between those who did convert to the Nephite religion and those who did not. That was a fact, and it was a critical fact.

In the writing of the story, while the writer (Alma₂ or Mormon, as there is no real clue as to who wrote these verses) does mention unconverted Lamanites, it is the Amalekites and the Amulonites who are mentioned first. Perhaps Mormon's emphasis on the role of apostate Nephites would suggest that it is Mormon writing this section.

It is also part of history that the overking names one of his sons as his successor. That son had also been converted, and he took the name Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Thus, there was a people with that name, and a king

who took that as his throne name. This sets up a major conflict between those who were converted and represented by the king, and those who had not been converted and who were determined to claim the kingship through war against Anti-Nephi-Lehi and his people who had taken that name.

Alma 24:5–6

5 Now when Ammon and his brethren and all those who had come up with him saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren, they came forth to the land of Midian, and there Ammon met all his brethren; and from thence they came to the land of Ishmael that they might hold a council with Lamoni and also with his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi, what they should do to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

6 Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren; nay, they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not.

Comments

The coming conflict sees all the brothers gathered together in the land of Midian, which is still a land within the Lamanite controlled land of Nephi. The signs were clear that there would be a war, but the resolution of the council was perhaps unexpected. In verse 6 we learn that “there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren.” Indeed, that remarkable position appeared to have been a major part of their conversion process. It was specifically mentioned in Alma 23:7 and Alma 23:13.

The next verses begin to explain why that might have been an integral part of their conversion. It will become an integral part of the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the coming war with the unconverted Lamanites who had made no such covenant.

Anti-Nephi-Lehies Bury Their Weapons of War

Alma 24:7–8

7 Now, these are the words which he said unto the people concerning the matter: I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers.

8 And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites.

Comments

Verse 6 noted that their king, now named Anti-Nephi-Lehi, had prohibited the converted people who had taken that same name from taking up weapons. In verse 7 Alma₂ begins to record that king's speech to his people that is meant to reinforce and perhaps explain that command that they should not take up weapons of war.

As Anti-Nephi-Lehi begins, he gives thanks for the blessings that have come from understanding Yahweh's covenants and gospel. Those who have been converted have become convinced of the "traditions of our wicked fathers." That language doesn't mean that all Lamanites were wicked in the sense of individual choices, but rather that their traditions opposed Yahweh's gospel. In the black and white world of Nephite scripture, Yahweh's gospel clearly represented good, and any who opposed it were wicked by definition, regardless of personal actions.

Anti-Nephi-Lehi also notes that the Spirit has softened their hearts. It is what that softening led to that requires a little explanation. The king says that having their hearts softened "opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites." In Webster's 1828 dictionary that probably represents the meaning of words as Joseph Smith and his contemporaries knew them, the first meaning is "relation; fitness; congruity; mutual adaptation of one thing to another." The other meanings would be more familiar to modern readers, dealing with communication at a distance, such as through letters. In this verse, however, the meaning really should be read as that first meaning. What was opened was their hearts to a conformity with what the Nephite brothers had taught. It was a relationship with what these brothers had taught them and had nothing directly to do with the larger Nephite population in the land of Zarahemla.

Alma 24:9–10

9 And behold, I also thank my God, that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins, and of the many murders which we have committed.

10 And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.

Comments

One of the important principles of the gospel was an understanding of one's relationship with Yahweh. In particular, sin removed one from God's presence. In the Nephite teaching, this became a personal, rather than communal, sin, and depended upon the coming Messiah's atoning sacrifice to cleanse. Even though the act was in the future, the benefit of the promised act was available to all who believed. Thus, Yahweh "hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things."

Of what did they repent? What did they consider to be so serious? Anti-Nephi-Lehi lays out the crucial sins: “the many murders which we have committed.” In verse 10 he reiterates that: “He hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed.”

The importance of repenting of the many murders becomes the reason that they should no more take up weapons of war in the next verses.

Alma 24:11–13

11 And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain—

12 Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren.

13 Behold, I say unto you, Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren; for perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.

Comments

The conversion of King Lamoni and his father were miraculous, and we have no details of what they underwent while overcome by the Spirit. Nevertheless, those had to have been unusual experiences. King Anti-Nephi-Lehi says: “It has been all that we could do . . . to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed.” That definition expands to all who were converted. It clearly repeats the phrase “the many murders.”

That creates an interpretive problem. It might have been possible that the men had been in military actions and had killed, but what about the women and children? In war, killing occurs, but it is typically justified in some sense and not considered murder. Nevertheless, the king declares that after working so hard to repent, they must not stain their swords again with blood, “that they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God.”

Under what condition would Christ’s atonement no longer allow repentance? This answer is speculative and depends upon placing the Book of Mormon in a Mesoamerican setting. While speculative, that setting will provide a context that will help make the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies more intelligible.

Mesoamerican peoples had a religion that included a cult of war. As part of the warfare, captives would be taken and brought back for sacrifice. Thus, war and human sacrifice were intertwined and understood through a religious interpretation and justification. Therefore, it is possible that it was the participation in this cult of war and human sacrifice that lay behind the declaration that these people had committed

many murders. Upon conversion to the Nephite religion, their actions had lost their religious underpinnings, and were now seen as contrary to Yahweh's will. Therefore, they had taken an oath to no longer participate in that cult of war, to lay down their weapons of war, and therefore, no longer partake in that cultural enterprise.

Some sins have a stronger hold on our minds and souls than others. We understand that, in the case of addictive substances, the body can learn to overcome the addiction, but that overcoming often requires complete abstinence. That abstinence from engaging in the cult of war appears to have been the solution elected at conversion and then through command of their king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

Alma 24:14–16

14 And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations.

15 Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby.

16 And now, my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords, yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright, as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day; and if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved.

Comments

King Anti-Nephi-Lehi reiterates the mercy of God in forgiving these sins that they felt most grievous. That understanding of forgiveness is due to their belief in the coming Messiah. Nevertheless, even though the Messiah enabled the forgiveness of sins, they had to go through the process of repentance. For them, it was not easy. It was “as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright.” The difficult sin of which they all had to repent is embodied in the metaphor of the swords. While it was their souls that were made clean, the metaphor is that their swords were made bright.

The difficulty of repentance of their actions in the cult of war meant that they should not return to weapons and actions of war. They believed that should they do so, they would have violated a covenant that they had made. If only modern readers undertook their covenants as seriously as did the Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Since they did not want to even be tempted to sin with their weapons, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi declared that they should “bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright.” The importance of their covenant to lay down their arms is reiterated, and now literally enacted by burying them.

Alma 24:17

17 And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth.

Comments

It has been suggested that this might have been the origin of the concept of burying the hatchet as a symbol of peace. It was not. The symbolism is dramatically different. In the burying of the hatchet, the two sides symbolically buried a weapon. The Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s buried all their weapons, with no acquiescence from their enemy that there would be peace. Burying the hatchet was a bilateral action. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies enacted a unilateral action that reinforced their covenant with God, not an agreement with an enemy.

This is also an action that resonates with Mesoamerican cultures. There was a widespread practice of burying symbolic artifacts in the earth. They were done both to commemorate beginnings and endings. In this case, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies might have seen this burial as either a beginning of a covenant, or the ending of the practice that they had worked so hard to repent of.

Alma 24:18–19

18 And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands.

19 And thus we see that, when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, they were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace.

Comments

These two verses finish the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehite covenant to lay down their arms. The confirmation that this was part of a covenant is underscored in verse 18: “this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives.” This was

an extension of the covenant they originally entered into. The first covenant of their conversion was to lay down their weapons of war that they might be forgiven of their “many murders.” This covenant strengthened that resolve and declared that they would not take up weapons even to defend themselves against the Lamanites who were, even at that time, preparing to come to war against them.

It is important to remember that this was a covenant related to repentance, and not a declaration of pacifism. This same people will later move to the land of Zarahemla, and in a time of need will consider violating this oath so that they might assist in the protection of the Nephites. Helman will not allow them to, “lest by so doing they should lose their souls; therefore all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wad through their afflictions, in their dangerous circumstances at this time” (Alma 53:15).

At the end of the section, it is again reiterated that they laid down their weapons, though in this case it is specifically that those weapons were buried. That burial only symbolically removed any temptation, for surely they knew where they had buried them should they want them again. This was a burial that offered the weapons to God as a representation of their covenant.

Unconverted Lamanites Attack the Anti-Nephi-Lehies

Alma 24:20–22

20 And it came to pass that their brethren, the Lamanites, made preparations for war, and came up to the land of Nephi for the purpose of destroying the king, and to place another in his stead, and also of destroying the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi out of the land.

21 Now when the people saw that they were coming against them they went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in this attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them, and began to slay them with the sword.

22 And thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God.

Comments

This part of the story should be read in two ways. The first is as a demonstration of the power of their covenant. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies kept their covenant. Even though this is often told as a story of faith, that does not accurately represent what happened. The term “faith” is most often understood from its New Testament meaning. It does not appear that often in the Old Testament. There, their concept is actually the same, but it is translated as “loyalty” or “faithfulness.” That is the type of “faith” that we see here. It is not the belief as much as it is the faithfulness to the covenant. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies made a covenant, and they kept faith with that covenant even though it led to the death of a thousand of them.

The second level of the story has to do with the political actions that surround this story and the reason it works out as it does. The first element is that the Lamanites have come “for the purpose of destroying the king, and to place another in his stead.” This is an overthrow of the government and the seating of a new king from among the Lamanite unconverted.

The next important part of the story is that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did not resist. The combination of that description with the need to seat a new king will explain the next set of events.

Alma 24:23–27

23 Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right hand or to the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—

24 Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the things which they had done.

25 And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.

26 And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.

27 And there was not a wicked man slain among them; but there were more than a thousand brought to the knowledge of the truth; thus we see that the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people.

Comments

In this part of the story, some of the Lamanites cease to kill the unarmed Anti-Nephi-Lehies. They were then also killed by the more hard-hearted of the Lamanites. The point here is to note that while there were many who had died, they were all redeemed. Those who had covenanted and kept their covenant, God would reward them. Others appeared to have become at least sympathetic, if not converted. Therefore, “we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.” Even amidst the terrible carnage, “the Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation of his people.” Importantly, that salvation is ultimately eternal, rather than temporal.

Alma 24:28–30

28 Now the greatest number of those of the Lamanites who slew so many of their brethren were Amalekites and Amulonites, the greatest number of whom were after the order of the Nehors.

29 Now, among those who joined the people of the Lord, there were none who were Amalekites or Amulonites, or who were of the order of Nehor, but they were actual descendants of Laman and Lemuel.

30 And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things.

Comments

These verses are most likely written by Mormon. They serve as the moral to the story. Even in the terrible circumstances, an important lesson could be learned. It is a lesson that Mormon emphasizes in other stories as well: “Thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things.” For Mormon, the most dangerous enemies were not the Lamanites, but rather the apostate Nephites.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The next chapter begins with Ammon speaking in the aftermath of this terrible slaughter.

Alma 25

Lamanites Attack Ammonihah

Alma 25:1–2

1 And behold, now it came to pass that those Lamanites were more angry because they had slain their brethren; therefore they swore vengeance upon the Nephites; and they did no more attempt to slay the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi at that time.

2 But they took their armies and went over into the borders of the land of Zarahemla, and fell upon the people who were in the land of Ammonihah and destroyed them.

Comments

At this point it is highly likely that we are seeing Mormon's synopsis of the information in Alma₂'s record. Neither Alma₂ nor Mormon would have known the reason that the Lamanites ceased to kill the Anti-Nephi-Lehies but instead chose to attack Ammonihah in Nephite lands. The idea that it was because they were "more angry because they had slain their brethren, therefore they swore vengeance upon the Nephites," does not make much historical sense.

Mormon has already told Alma₂'s Nephite side of the story of the destruction of Ammonihah, and now Mormon makes certain to include that destruction in its Lamanite context. He will explain it in terms of what it meant to the Nephites, but he may not have understood what it meant to the Lamanites. We now have the information we need to provide the Lamanite context for the raid on Ammonihah. The essential elements are:

1. The Lamanites were attempting to install a new king. Alma 24:20.
2. The Anti-Nephi-Lehites did not resist. Alma 24:22.
3. It was a surprise raid on Ammonihah. Alma 16:2–3.
4. In the raid on Ammonihah, the Lamanites didn't attempt to establish a tribute relationship, but did attempt to take back captives. Alma 16:3.

All these aspects of the Lamanite actions fit together if we place them in Mesoamerica. The first important piece of information is that the Lamanites wanted to seat a new king. Certainly, they were able to remove the previous king, because they fought and won.

Maya art contains depictions and texts of the later seating of kings, and what has been learned is that it is part of the ceremony to sacrifice captives who were taken in battle. This underscores the Lamanite problem when the Anti-Nephi-Lehies did not resist. They were certainly available captives, but they hadn't fought back.

In later Maya art and texts, it is discovered that in many cases, the new king conducted a lightning raid on an unsuspecting city so that captives might be acquired. This gives ample reason for the attack on Ammonihah, even though the Lamanites would not have understood that they were fulfilling prophecy by doing so.

Thus, these events, that might otherwise be difficult to explain, are easily understood as part of the common story of the seating of a new king in at least the Maya regions of Mesoamerica.

Alma 25:3–6

3 And after that, they had many battles with the Nephites, in the which they were driven and slain.
4 And among the Lamanites who were slain were almost all the seed of Amulon and his brethren, who were the priests of Noah, and they were slain by the hands of the Nephites;
5 And the remainder, having fled into the east wilderness, and having usurped the power and authority over the Lamanites, caused that many of the Lamanites should perish by fire because of their belief—
6 For many of them, after having suffered much loss and so many afflictions, began to be stirred up in remembrance of the words which Aaron and his brethren had preached to them in their land; therefore they began to disbelieve the traditions of their fathers, and to believe in the Lord, and that he gave great power unto the Nephites; and thus there were many of them converted in the wilderness.

Comments

Mormon finished this part of the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies but continues with the story of later conflicts with the Nephites. This part of the story fits well with Mormon's larger picture of Nephite history, but it is also connected to Alma₂'s father, whose conversion led to his separation from the priests of Noah. Therefore, this discussion of the "seed of Amulon," who was the leader of Noah's priests, would have been interesting to Alma₁'s son, Alma₂.

This part of the story will continue to emphasize Mormon's contention that apostate Nephites are the most dangerous enemies. When some of those associated with the Amulonites began to be converted they suffered retribution, as will be seen in the next verses.

Alma 25:7–8

7 And it came to pass that those rulers who were the remnant of the children of Amulon caused that they should be put to death, yea, all those that believed in these things.

8 Now this martyrdom caused that many of their brethren should be stirred up to anger; and there began to be contention in the wilderness; and the Lamanites began to hunt the seed of Amulon and his brethren and began to slay them; and they fled into the east wilderness.

Comments

The Amulonite rulers caused that those who were converted to the Nephite gospel be put to death. This caused a rebellion and the people turned on their leaders and hunted them. Either Alma₂ or Mormon included this information to set up the next verses which will testify to a fulfilled prophecy.

Alma 25:9–12

9 And behold they are hunted at this day by the Lamanites. Thus the words of Abinadi were brought to pass, which he said concerning the seed of the priests who caused that he should suffer death by fire.

10 For he said unto them: What ye shall do unto me shall be a type of things to come.

11 And now Abinadi was the first that suffered death by fire because of his belief in God; now this is what he meant, that many should suffer death by fire, according as he had suffered.

12 And he said unto the priests of Noah that their seed should cause many to be put to death, in the like manner as he was, and that they should be scattered abroad and slain, even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts; and now behold, these words were verified, for they were driven by the Lamanites, and they were hunted, and they were smitten.

Comments

These verses are included to show that prophecy is fulfilled. Abinadi had prophesied that the seed of the priests who caused that Abinadi should suffer death by fire should themselves suffer death by fire. Verse 12 specifically notes that many were put to death by fire, thus fulfilling the prophecy. Nevertheless, not all were. Many were simply hunted and then killed, “even as a sheep having no shepherd is driven and slain by wild beasts.”

More Lamanites Join the Anti-Nephi-Lehies

Alma 25:13–14

13 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that they could not overpower the Nephites they returned again to their own land; and many of them came over to dwell in the land of Ishmael and the land of Nephi, and did join themselves to the people of God, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

14 And they did also bury their weapons of war, according as their brethren had, and they began to be a righteous people; and they did walk in the ways of the Lord, and did observe to keep his commandments and his statutes.

Comments

Verse 13 states: “when the Lamanites saw that they could not overpower the Nephites they returned again to their own land.” It is not clear how that statement relates to the death of the Amulonites. However, it was a part of the story that Mormon intended to tell. We will see the repetition of this story at the beginning of chapter 27, verses 1 through 3. In Alma 28:10 we will learn that there were many battles between the first and fifteenth year of the reign of the judges. It appears that Mormon is attempting to connect this story with what was happening with the Nephites but does so without sufficient details to be clear.

The converted Lamanites joined with the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and accepted their covenant of burying their weapons of war. The result was that they were truly converted. They “did observe to keep [Yahweh’s] commandments and his statutes.”

Alma 25:15–17

15 Yea, and they did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them.

16 Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come.

17 And now behold, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and Himni, and their brethren did rejoice exceedingly, for the success which they had had among the Lamanites, seeing that the Lord had granted unto them according to their prayers, and that he had also verified his word unto them in every particular.

Comments

Keeping Yahweh’s commandments and statutes meant keeping the law of Moses. The statement that “they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled,” is almost certainly Mormon’s text. Since Mormon lived after that fulfillment, he was more aware of the differences than Alma₂ would have been. Alma₂ would have kept the law of Moses and looked forward to the Messiah but would not have understood the ways in which the gospel of Christ superseded the law of Moses.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Therefore, there was no division between verse 17 and the next verse, Alma 26:1. Verse 17 is the introduction to Ammon's discourse and sets the stage for it. It would really be best to read this verse as being part of the next chapter rather than the end of this one.

Alma 26

Ammon Rejoices in God

Alma 26:1–4

1 And now, these are the words of Ammon to his brethren, which say thus: My brothers and my brethren, behold I say unto you, how great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started from the land of Zarahemla that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?

2 And now, I ask, what great blessings has he bestowed upon us? Can ye tell?

3 Behold, I answer for you; for our brethren, the Lamanites, were in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God! And this is the blessing which hath been bestowed upon us, that we have been made instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work.

4 Behold, thousands of them do rejoice, and have been brought into the fold of God.

Comments

This part of the record is copied from Alma₂'s personal record. Even though Alma₂ recorded it, Mormon still had to decide to put it into his record. This chapter is a discourse that Ammon gave “to his brethren.” It was given to more than his brothers, as he begins “My brothers and my brethren.” Ammon is speaking to some gathered group of Anti-Nephi-Lehies, as well as to his brothers. He reflects on the results of the brothers' mission to the Lamanites.

Their mission was far more successful than they could have imagined, and Ammon notes that when he states: “could we have supposed when we started from the land of Zarahemla that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?” Few of us are able to see God's full plan for us before it completely unfolds. Small events, and what appear to be simple circumstances, can add up to major changes in our lives, and we can recognize God's hand only in retrospect.

One of the reasons that Mormon includes this particular discourse is that it allows him to provide confirmation for his theme that the Lamanites are redeemable and can become very righteous. This is confirmed when Ammon notes that the Lamanites “were in darkness,” but were “brought to behold the marvelous light of God.”

Alma 23:9–12 listed four named lands and three named cities which had been converted. Now, in verse 4, we are told that “thousands of them do rejoice, and have been brought into the fold of God.” It is unlikely that there had been a distinct count, but if that many cities and lands had every inhabitant converted, we would expect perhaps tens of thousands, rather than only thousands of converts. There were clearly a very large number of converts, but likely less than all the inhabitants of those lands and cities.

Alma 26:5–7

5 Behold, the field was ripe, and blessed are ye, for ye did thrust in the sickle, and did reap with your might, yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves! And they shall be gathered into the garners, that they are not wasted.

6 Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

7 But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day.

Comments

Verse 5 underscores that the translation of the Book of Mormon was not only into English, but that it was a translation that converted certain concepts, as well as words, from one language to another. Verse 5 invokes a very specific agricultural metaphor that can be found in Revelation 14:15: “And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

This is an image that relates to a people very familiar with the harvesting of grain, and certainly by Joseph Smith’s time would have been comparable to the harvesting of wheat. Neither that grain, nor the sickle used to harvest it, was part of New World agricultural activities. There existed an important maize (type of grain) crop, but sickles were not used. Even the verb “harrowed up” refers to an implement that turns over the soil. While that is a powerful image, it was not available to the original writers of the Book of Mormon. What that means is that, in addition to giving us a text in English, the Book of Mormon converted cultural metaphors into language that would be understood by modern readers, rather than replicate a metaphor that the original writers might have understood, but which would have less meaning for the modern audience for whom it was translated. This is not an unusual feature of some styles of translation.

Nevertheless, the idea that wheat, or even maize, might be beaten down by storms is a very understandable metaphor for both ancient writers and modern readers.

Alma 26:8–11

8 Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever.

9 For if we had not come up out of the land of Zarahemla, these our dearly beloved brethren, who have so dearly beloved us, would still have been racked with hatred against us, yea, and they would also have been strangers to God.

10 And it came to pass that when Ammon had said these words, his brother Aaron rebuked him, saying: Ammon, I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.

11 But Ammon said unto him: I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God.

Comments

In verse 10, Aaron says what many modern readers might be thinking: “I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.” It does appear to be a version of “aren’t we great?” There is a difference between suggesting that such a great success was due to Ammon and his brothers’ actions and declaring that it was the hand of the Lord. Ammon makes it clear that he understands the difference. He says that “I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom.” Ammon understands that he and his brothers have been instruments that the Lord used for his own purposes. The conversion of so many was through the Spirit, not through the sons of Mosiah.

This discourse of Mormon reminds his readers that God cares for all, even those who have at one time fallen from their covenants to the house of Israel. When those who had been lost have the opportunity to be touched by the Spirit, they may enter the covenant again and be exemplary members of the house of Israel.

Alma 26:12–15

12 Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever.

13 Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has he loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice?

14 Yea, we have reason to praise him forever, for he is the Most High God, and has loosed our brethren from the chains of hell.

15 Yea, they were encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, he has brought them into his everlasting light, yea, into everlasting salvation; and they are encircled about

with the matchless bounty of his love; yea, and we have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work.

Comments

Ammon continues to emphasize that the conversion of the Lamanites was God’s work, and that he and his brethren “have been instruments in his hands of doing this great and marvelous work” (verse 15).

The imagery used in the translation of verse 13 echoes terms with which people in Joseph Smith’s time would have been familiar. The idea of “singing redeeming love,” as well as “loosed from the pains of hell,” were phrases that were familiar in sermons of the era. That does not suggest that there was no translation, but only that, in a similar way to the presence of western European wheat agriculture imagery, some of the language used in translation was familiar.

The meaning behind the words represents the heart of Nephite teachings. The coming Messiah would redeem his people from both spiritual and temporal death. An early Christian document describes Christ coming to Hell to break down the gates that kept humankind trapped in death. That is the image here. The coming Messiah will redeem us from death and Hell.

In 2 Nephi 9:8–9 Lehi, had taught that if there were no atoning Messiah: “O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself.”

That is the teaching that is behind verse 15, when it says that the Lamanites were “encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction.” It was not that they were irredeemably in that state, but rather, without a proper understanding and faith in the coming Messiah, that would become their fate.

Alma 26:16–20

16 Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

17 Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

18 Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

19 Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

20 Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

Comments

In verse 15 Ammon had noted that the Lamanites had been: “encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction; but behold, [God] has brought them into his everlasting light.” Ammon understands that sense of redemption on a very personal level. Just as the Lamanites had fought against the Nephites, Ammon and his brothers had fought against the Nephite religion. He and his brothers had gone “forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.”

The mercy that Yahweh had shown the Lamanites was an extension of the very same mercy that he had shown to Alma₂ and to the sons of Mosiah₂. The conversion of those friends had not come through their prior repentance, but rather in the depths of their rebellion. In that sense, the Lamanites had been in a better position to receive mercy, for Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ had willfully rebelled against their religion, a religion intimately connected to their righteous fathers.

Ammon understood that their redemption was exceptional. It can teach modern readers that God sees very few as being beyond hope, but our hope may be more similar to the Lamanite redemption. Few people see an angel to turn them around. Many more, like the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, did not have a direct experience, but were touched in a way that allowed them to believe in the words of another. Doctrine and Covenants 46:14 explicitly describes the ability to believe on the words of others as a gift of the Spirit.

Alma 26:21–22

21 And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

22 Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance, even as it has been given unto us to bring these our brethren to repentance.

Comments

The phrase “natural man” occurs in 1 Corinthians 2:14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

We see it again in Mosiah 3:19: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth

off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.”

Both of those verses use the term “natural man” as the opposite of the “spiritual man.” The concept has nothing to do with a person’s nature, only that it is possible to exist as either one who has been touched by the Spirit, or one who has not.

In this context, the Lamanites had been “natural men,” in that they did not know God. The sons of Mosiah₂ had been “natural men” in that they did not recognize God correctly. How then can one move from being a “natural man” to a “spiritual man”? Ammon declares “there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.” One must repent.

Note in verse 22 that Ammon does not say that one must “have” faith. Rather, one must “exercise” faith. True faith motivates us to act according to gospel principles and laws. True faith moves us to “bring forth good works.”

Alma 26:23–26

23 Now do ye remember, my brethren, that we said unto our brethren in the land of Zarahemla, we go up to the land of Nephi, to preach unto our brethren, the Lamanites, and they laughed us to scorn?

24 For they said unto us: Do ye suppose that ye can bring the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth? Do ye suppose that ye can convince the Lamanites of the incorrectness of the traditions of their fathers, as stiffnecked a people as they are; whose hearts delight in the shedding of blood; whose days have been spent in the grossest iniquity; whose ways have been the ways of a transgressor from the beginning? Now my brethren, ye remember that this was their language.

25 And moreover they did say: Let us take up arms against them, that we destroy them and their iniquity out of the land, lest they overrun us and destroy us.

26 But behold, my beloved brethren, we came into the wilderness not with the intent to destroy our brethren, but with the intent that perhaps we might save some few of their souls.

Comments

Ammon provides information about the decision that the sons of Mosiah₂ made to leave the land of Zarahemla and that Mormon did not give us when describing that event. Mormon told only of their petition to their father (see Mosiah 28:1–3). In this account we learn that their decision was more openly discussed and that there were many who did not believe that it was a wise decision. “They laughed us to scorn.”

The Nephite hatred of the Lamanites was reciprocated by the Lamanites toward the Nephites. The clear enmity suggested that there would be no expectation of success. The Nephite “suggestion” was that,

rather than preach to them, the sons of Mosiah₂ should “destroy them.” None of that information was part of the original story as Mormon told it.

Alma 26:27–29

27 Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said: Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success.

28 And now behold, we have come, and been forth amongst them; and we have been patient in our sufferings, and we have suffered every privation; yea, we have traveled from house to house, relying upon the mercies of the world—not upon the mercies of the world alone but upon the mercies of God.

29 And we have entered into their houses and taught them, and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues and taught them; and we have been cast out, and mocked, and spit upon, and smote upon our cheeks; and we have been stoned, and taken and bound with strong cords, and cast into prison; and through the power and wisdom of God we have been delivered again.

Comments

Modern readers focus on the success that the sons of Mosiah₂ achieved. Ammon is clearly focusing on their successes, but Ammon understands that the successes did not arrive without trials. Ammon notes that “our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back.” Only here do we clearly hear the voice of the brothers’ despair. We hear of the degradations that three of the brothers suffered in Middoni, but we read about that only after the miraculous success Ammon had with King Lamoni. For those brothers, however, it was the opposite of success.

Even when those brothers are released from prison and learned of King Lamoni’s conversion, they had little success. It was only after going to the overking that their fortunes changed. Up to that time, it was all disappointment.

Perhaps modern readers would be wise to read this part of Ammon’s message more frequently. Perhaps there is an important lesson about the nature of hope in Christ that could support us when our hearts are depressed. God promises redemption through our hope in Christ, but even Paul noted that “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). We can have success in our earthly labors. Sometimes they will appear to come quickly and miraculously, as Ammon’s story seems to say. Sometimes we may be more like the brothers who were thrown in prison, and who “were about to turn back” because of the lack of success.

Nevertheless, Ammon declares that there is light after the darkness of depression. He doesn’t promise when, nor that, there would be no pain; only that the light will come.

Alma 26:30–34

30 And we have suffered all manner of afflictions, and all this, that perhaps we might be the means of saving some soul; and we supposed that our joy would be full if perhaps we could be the means of saving some.

31 Now behold, we can look forth and see the fruits of our labors; and are they few? I say unto you, Nay, they are many; yea, and we can witness of their sincerity, because of their love towards their brethren and also towards us.

32 For behold, they had rather sacrifice their lives than even to take the life of their enemy; and they have buried their weapons of war deep in the earth, because of their love towards their brethren.

33 And now behold I say unto you, has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites.

34 For behold, they would take up arms against their brethren; they would not suffer themselves to be slain. But behold how many of these have laid down their lives; and we know that they have gone to their God, because of their love and of their hatred to sin.

Comments

Ammon notes that when they began their mission, they had hopes of converting a few. Perhaps after the difficult times mentioned in the preceding verses, a few might have been optimistic. Nevertheless, they were able to convert large numbers, far beyond what they had expected.

The most important statement is found in verse 33, that these converted Lamanites, now known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, showed greater love for God than even the Nephites. This is an important theme for Mormon, as he is writing at a time when he knows his Nephites will be destroyed. He knows that it will be future Lamanites who will read what he writes. He wants those future Lamanites to see themselves similarly to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who were able to turn to repentance after a long history of traditional teachings, and not only accept the Nephite teaching of the gospel but do so in such a way that they could be seen as more righteous than the Nephites.

Alma 26:35–37

35 Now have we not reason to rejoice? Yea, I say unto you, there never were men that had so great reason to rejoice as we, since the world began; yea, and my joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name.

36 Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast; for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo. Yea, blessed is the name of my God, who has been mindful

of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land; yea, I say, blessed be the name of my God, who has been mindful of us, wanderers in a strange land.

37 Now my brethren, we see that God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth. Now this is my joy, and my great thanksgiving; yea, and I will give thanks unto my God forever. Amen.

Comments

Ammon ends his discourse by reflecting on the accusation that he was boasting. His statement is: “now if this is boasting, even so will I boast.” Ammon has declared that it was not through individual merit that the mission succeeded, but it was because of God’s plans. It is also important that Ammon understands that this story of the conversion of the “natural man” Lamanites into the “spiritual man” Anti-Nephi-Lehies can be a lesson for all the earth: “God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth.”

Ammon ends with the testificatory *Amen*. That is the trigger that ended this chapter. As an *Amen* ending, it did end a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 27

Anti-Nephi-Lehies Are Given the Land of Jershon

Alma 27:1–3

1 Now it came to pass that when those Lamanites who had gone to war against the Nephites had found, after their many struggles to destroy them, that it was in vain to seek their destruction, they returned again to the land of Nephi.

2 And it came to pass that the Amalekites, because of their loss, were exceedingly angry. And when they saw that they could not seek revenge from the Nephites, they began to stir up the people in anger against their brethren, the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; therefore they began again to destroy them.

3 Now this people again refused to take their arms, and they suffered themselves to be slain according to the desires of their enemies.

Comments

Verse 1 picks up the thread of a story from Alma 25:13–14 (see the comments on those verses for a possible reason for these related, but slightly different, stories). In those verses, Mormon had indicated that Lamanites had gone to war against Nephites and returned without success. The result of the failed raids is different here from the context in Alma 25:13–14. In those verses, the failure caused some of the Lamanites to join with, and become, Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

In verse 2, those raids anger those who wanted to defeat the Nephites, and they turn their anger on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies are shown to be faithful to their covenants, and they do not take up arms. This sets up the crisis that will cause the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to flee to Zarahemla, as explained in the next verses.

Although Mormon continues to tell the ending of the story that he took from the record of the sons of Mosiah₂, which was from Alma₂'s personal record, he is shifting away from that record and returning to the story that had to have come from the Nephite large plates. He has not finished with Alma₂'s record but is temporarily moving back to his main source of historical information. Our chapter 28, which was part of the original chapter, will see a return to Alma₂'s personal record for information and quotations.

Alma 27:4–7

4 Now when Ammon and his brethren saw this work of destruction among those whom they so dearly beloved, and among those who had so dearly beloved them—for they were treated as though they were angels sent from God to save them from everlasting destruction—therefore, when Ammon and his brethren saw this great work of destruction, they were moved with compassion, and they said unto the king:

5 Let us gather together this people of the Lord, and let us go down to the land of Zarahemla to our brethren the Nephites, and flee out of the hands of our enemies, that we be not destroyed.

6 But the king said unto them: Behold, the Nephites will destroy us, because of the many murders and sins we have committed against them.

7 And Ammon said: I will go and inquire of the Lord, and if he say unto us, go down unto our brethren, will ye go?

Comments

The original attack on the Anti-Nephi-Lehies may be ascribed to the overthrow of the government and the seating of the new king. Because that had already happened, perhaps the Anti-Nephi-Lehies felt that any great threat was behind them. This more recent attack proved that they were in grave danger. Therefore, Ammon and his brothers believe that their only salvation was to leave the land. They had already become a different type of people from the Lamanites, believing more like their enemy, the Nephites. Now they were to become Nephites not only in belief, but in land and political affiliation.

The king, Anti-Nephi-Lehi, is fearful because all understood that there was hatred on both sides of the Lamanite-Nephite divide. He would correctly fear that “the Nephites will destroy us.” It is the reverse of the fear that Ammon and his brothers would have had as they entered Lamanite lands.

Ammon asks if they will go to Zarahemla if the Lord tells them to. For a people who were willing to lay down their lives for the covenants that they had made to follow God, that would have been an easy answer. Of course, they would go.

Alma 27:8–12

8 And the king said unto him: Yea, if the Lord saith unto us go, we will go down unto our brethren, and we will be their slaves until we repair unto them the many murders and sins which we have committed against them.

9 But Ammon said unto him: It is against the law of our brethren, which was established by my father, that there should be any slaves among them; therefore let us go down and rely upon the mercies of our brethren.

10 But the king said unto him: Inquire of the Lord, and if he saith unto us go, we will go; otherwise we will perish in the land.

11 And it came to pass that Ammon went and inquired of the Lord, and the Lord said unto him:
12 Get this people out of this land, that they perish not; for Satan has great hold on the hearts of the Amalekites, who do stir up the Lamanites to anger against their brethren to slay them; therefore get thee out of this land; and blessed are this people in this generation, for I will preserve them.

Comments

Verse 10 confirms that if the Lord told the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to go to Zarahemla, they would go. However, there wasn't much that could be done to calm their fears. When the king says that they might be slaves to the Nephites, it was not significantly different than the offer Ammon and Aaron made to become a servant. Even that option was not open to them. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies again were required to live their faith. This is the definition of exercising faith: the doing of what God asks, even when we do not fully understand it.

Ammon asks. Yahweh answers: "get this people out of this land . . . I will preserve them." With the strength of their faith, that was answer enough for them to leave, even if they still feared to hope for mercy from a people who had been a sworn enemy.

Alma 27:13–16

13 And now it came to pass that Ammon went and told the king all the words which the Lord had said unto him.

14 And they gathered together all their people, yea, all the people of the Lord, and did gather together all their flocks and herds, and departed out of the land, and came into the wilderness which divided the land of Nephi from the land of Zarahemla, and came over near the borders of the land.

15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto them: Behold, I and my brethren will go forth into the land of Zarahemla, and ye shall remain here until we return; and we will try the hearts of our brethren, whether they will that ye shall come into their land.

16 And it came to pass that as Ammon was going forth into the land, that he and his brethren met Alma, over in the place of which has been spoken; and behold, this was a joyful meeting.

Comments

Even though God had promised that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies would be preserved, Ammon and his brothers return to the land of Zarahemla to prepare for them to come. That preparation was perhaps not only to let the people of Zarahemla know that the former Lamanites were coming, but also to prepare a place for them. There were apparently thousands who were coming, and that would mean that thousands had to be fed and housed while they were building their lives and farms in a new land.

It is at this point that the flashback story catches up with the departure point. The meeting between the sons of Mosiah₂ and Alma₂ was told in Alma 17:1–4. Although Mormon still uses Alma₂'s personal

record for his information, it is Mormon who has constructed this method of adding the events into the Book of Mormon, and it is Mormon's descriptions, which are based on Alma₂'s record, that we will see in the next verses.

Alma 27:17–19

17 Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God, even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth.

18 Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness.

19 Now the joy of Alma in meeting his brethren was truly great, and also the joy of Aaron, of Omner, and Himni; but behold their joy was not that to exceed their strength.

Comments

When Mormon originally told of this meeting in Alma 17:1–4, he mentioned Alma₂'s response, but did not give us Ammon's response. Ammon was as joyful as Alma₂, but to the point where that joy "exhaust[ed] his strength; and he fell again to the earth." This is the powerful presence of the Spirit that Alma₂ had felt in his experience with the angel, and which King Lamoni, the queen, and later, Lamoni's father, had felt.

In this occasion, Ammon is overcome. Mormon mentions that his brothers were not overcome in the same way but gives no explanation for the difference. Modern readers may simply imply that different people feel the Spirit in different ways, and that there is no single way to demonstrate that what one feels is truly the Spirit.

Alma 27:20–24

20 And now it came to pass that Alma conducted his brethren back to the land of Zarahemla; even to his own house. And they went and told the chief judge all the things that had happened unto them in the land of Nephi, among their brethren, the Lamanites.

21 And it came to pass that the chief judge sent a proclamation throughout all the land, desiring the voice of the people concerning the admitting their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi.

22 And it came to pass that the voice of the people came, saying: Behold, we will give up the land of Jershon, which is on the east by the sea, which joins the land Bountiful, which is on the south of the land Bountiful; and this land Jershon is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an inheritance.

23 And behold, we will set our armies between the land Jershon and the land Nephi, that we may protect our brethren in the land Jershon; and this we do for our brethren, on account of their fear to take

up arms against their brethren lest they should commit sin; and this their great fear came because of their sore repentance which they had, on account of their many murders and their awful wickedness. 24 And now behold, this will we do unto our brethren, that they may inherit the land Jershon; and we will guard them from their enemies with our armies, on condition that they will give us a portion of their substance to assist us that we may maintain our armies.

Comments

The question of what to do with the Anti-Nephi-Lehies is taken to the Chief Judge, Nephiah (see Alma 4:17). A proclamation is sent out. Modern readers easily assume that this was written out and that individuals would read it. It is more likely that the ability to read was restricted to a few in the upper classes, as was common in most ancient cultures. Thus, it was probable that the proclamation was indeed written, but that a messenger would read it to gathered groups of people.

The decision is made to place the Anti-Nephi-Lehies in Jershon. Giving them land meant that they were given a way to sustain themselves. Although they were being brought into Nephite lands and society, it was also understood that they had made a covenant not to take up arms. The Nephite people understand the importance of a covenant with God, and therefore, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies are given a land that is deeper into Nephite territory, where it will be easier to defend themselves against a future Lamanite incursion. In exchange, the Nephites do not ask them to violate their covenant, but only to support those who will defend them so that they need not break the covenant.

Alma 27:25–30

25 Now, it came to pass that when Ammon had heard this, he returned to the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, and also Alma with him, into the wilderness, where they had pitched their tents, and made known unto them all these things. And Alma also related unto them his conversion, with Ammon and Aaron, and his brethren.

26 And it came to pass that it did cause great joy among them. And they went down into the land of Jershon, and took possession of the land of Jershon; and they were called by the Nephites the people of Ammon; therefore they were distinguished by that name ever after.

27 And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end.

28 And they did look upon shedding the blood of their brethren with the greatest abhorrence; and they never could be prevailed upon to take up arms against their brethren; and they never did look upon

death with any degree of terror, for their hope and views of Christ and the resurrection; therefore, death was swallowed up to them by the victory of Christ over it.

29 Therefore, they would suffer death in the most aggravating and distressing manner which could be inflicted by their brethren, before they would take the sword or cimeter to smite them.

30 And thus they were a zealous and beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord.

Comments

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies happily accept the Nephite proposal and leave their homes and ancestral lands for a new place among a people who had once been their enemies. They elect to change their name. The name Anti-Nephi-Lehi had some important distinction in the land of the Lamanites, identifying them as religious followers of Nephi and Lehi, although politically still Lamanites. After moving to Nephite lands, the distinctive naming was no longer useful.

The former Anti-Nephi-Lehies had been numbered among the church, and no longer needed to distinguish their beliefs. They take upon themselves Ammon's name, becoming the people of Ammon, or Ammonites. Although verse 30 is certainly the ending of this story, we will see the Ammonites again in Alma 56:57, where we will read the story of the "stripling Ammonites."

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. The information that the Ammonites were given the land of Jershon will lead into the next story that Mormon is telling.

Alma 28

Many Thousands Die in Battle with the Lamanites

Alma 28:1–3

1 And now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, and a church also established in the land of Jershon, and the armies of the Nephites were set round about the land of Jershon, yea, in all the borders round about the land of Zarahemla; behold the armies of the Lamanites had followed their brethren into the wilderness.

2 And thus there was a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem; yea, and tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad.

3 Yea, and also there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi; nevertheless, the Lamanites were driven and scattered, and the people of Nephi returned again to their land.

Comments

The latter part of the book of Alma is well known for its description of war and tactics. That long military narrative arc might lead a reader to assume that Mormon, as a military general, was very interested in war and therefore, spent time in it. There must be a different explanation, for in these verses we learn that there was a terrible war in the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges (see verse 7). It was “a tremendous battle; yea, even such an one as never had been known among all the people in the land from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.” The greatest battle in Nephite history up to that point is described in just two verses.

Mormon includes no tactics, no descriptions of valor, and no stories of inspirational faithfulness. He simply says that “tens of thousands of the Lamanites were slain and scattered abroad,” and that “there was a tremendous slaughter among the people of Nephi.” That is the whole story of the most devastating battle in Nephite history up to that point.

While Mormon certainly was a general, and obviously admired Captain Moroni, Mormon’s interests in war had more to do with the people and their decisions than the battles themselves. This battle doesn’t involve personalities that interest him or move his purposes along, so he gives only the abbreviated indication of what happened.

Alma 28:4–6

4 And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi—

5 Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain.

6 And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer.

Comments

Mormon spends more time on the human aftermath of the war than he does on the war itself. It was a time of “great mourning and lamentation.” Although Mormon is looking at this record from a time period some five hundred years later, he can relate to and empathize with the human suffering that accompanied the battle. The “cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother” were emotions with which Mormon was personally familiar. His emotional involvement in the terrible aftermath of this battle is clear.

This empathy leads into Mormon inserting his reaction to this war. We see Mormon caring much more about the people who were left after the destructive battle than for any of the events or people who had participated in the battle.

Alma 28:7–10

7 And thus endeth the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi;

8 And this is the account of Ammon and his brethren, their journeyings in the land of Nephi, their sufferings in the land, their sorrows, and their afflictions, and their incomprehensible joy, and the reception and safety of the brethren in the land of Jershon. And now may the Lord, the Redeemer of all men, bless their souls forever.

9 And this is the account of the wars and contentions among the Nephites, and also the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites; and the fifteenth year of the reign of the judges is ended.

10 And from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass the destruction of many thousand lives; yea, it has brought to pass an awful scene of bloodshed.

Comments

In three verses, Mormon mentions the “fifteenth year” of the reign of the judges three times. We saw very little of the counts of the years in the material Mormon selected from Alma₂’s personal record. However, the dating by years is a hallmark of the organizational structure of the large plates, beginning with the book of Alma. Nevertheless, stating the fifteenth year this frequently is unusual.

Mormon is combining information from two records, Alma₂'s personal record and the large plates. He is also inserting his own opinions as well as copying Alma₂'s statements. What we are seeing in these verses appears to be a transition from Mormon using the large plates to a return to copying from Alma₂'s personal record.

What we will see is more than a repetition of the year, but a repetition of the aftermath of the terrible war. First, Mormon gave his reaction. Now Mormon will return to Alma₂'s reaction. Although the dating by years is not a feature of Alma₂'s personal record, Alma₂ does mention the years from time to time. In this case, we are probably seeing the shift in Mormon's use of the sources between verses 8 and 9.

The story of the sons of Mosiah₂ began in the first year of the reign of the judges, and Mormon has been telling a story that occurred in Lamanite lands and according to a record that wasn't part of the large plates. Here, he reconnects the story of the sons of Mosiah₂ not only with their meeting with Alma₂, but with what has happened in the time that they were gone. Not only were there Lamanite incursions that Mormon somewhat awkwardly mentioned in Alma 25:13 and again in Alma 27:1, but here Mormon indicates that there were many wars in those fifteen years. It appears that Mormon had also attempted to include some of this information from the large plates as he was discussing the story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies but did so in an incomplete manner.

Alma 28:11–14

11 And the bodies of many thousands are laid low in the earth, while the bodies of many thousands are moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth; yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo.

12 While many thousands of others truly mourn for the loss of their kindred, yet they rejoice and exult in the hope, and even know, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are raised to dwell at the right hand of God, in a state of never-ending happiness.

13 And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men.

14 And thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord; and thus we see the great reason of sorrow, and also of rejoicing—sorrow because of death and destruction among men, and joy because of the light of Christ unto life.

Comments

Verse 11 repeats that terrible destruction from the end of the war that Mormon recorded in verses 3 and 4. Here, we are probably getting the information from Alma₂'s personal record. There is no chapter

break at this point in the 1830 edition. The next modern chapter begins with Alma₂'s great soliloquy. There is no introduction to who is speaking, which is unusual in Mormon's use of sources. However, working from the clear indications that it is Alma₂ giving the soliloquy, we can move back to this part of the text and see that it is part of what Mormon was copying from Alma₂, including the moralizing statements in verses 12 through 13. Those statements are the ones that shift from pure lament to Alma₂'s soliloquy.

Alma 29

Alma₂'s Soliloquy

Alma 29:1–2

1 O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

2 Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

Comments

Alma₂'s soliloquy is a moving expression, and its elegance makes the assignment to a separate chapter understandable. However, it also cuts it off from its context. Why does Alma₂ wish that he were an angel? Verse 2 tells us that it is so “that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.” Why was that his concern?

That is the context that is lost in the modern chapter division. These are the verses that provide the background:

“And from the first year to the fifteenth has brought to pass the destruction of many thousand lives; yea, it has brought to pass an awful scene of bloodshed. And the bodies of many thousands are laid low in the earth, while the bodies of many thousands are moldering in heaps upon the face of the earth; yea, and many thousands are mourning for the loss of their kindred, because they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo.” (Alma 28:10–11)

In the previous chapter, which was originally all part of the same 1830 chapter, both Mormon and Alma₂ spoke of the terrible costs of that particular war. Both Mormon and Alma₂ lamented the great loss of lives. The slight difference between what Mormon said and what Alma₂ said was that Alma₂ was concerned not only for those who mourned, but that “they have reason to fear, according to the promises of the Lord, that they are consigned to a state of endless wo.” That is the reason that Alma₂ wishes that he could preach with the power of an angel, to save the souls that might have reason to mourn even above the awful loss of life.

Alma 29:3–4

3 But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.

4 I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

Comments

Alma₂ is not an angel. He is aware of his human frailties, and one of them is wishing that he could do more than what he is able to do. Although he is contemplating the results of the sadness that resulted from the loss of life in the war, and the loss of the opportunity to repent (at least in this life), Alma₂ also understands that God requires no more of him than that he is able to do.

Our modern understanding of the ability to continue to learn and repent after this life does not appear to have been part of Alma₂'s understanding. Alma₂ appears to have understood God's laws as applicable to mortality and having some finality with the end of mortality. That is what he is saying when he says, "I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life." There are two choices, eternal life in God or eternity without God, or spiritual death.

Alma₂ understands and asserts our essential agency. God's decrees are unalterable, but our responses to them depend upon our own wills. Our choices will determine whether we are ultimately saved or destroyed. Alma₂ understands, and writes, in terms of opposites: black or white; salvation or destruction; and spiritual life or spiritual death.

Alma 29:5–8

5 Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

6 Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?

7 Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?

8 For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.

Comments

Alma₂ continues his reflection on his life and spiritual mission. He has noted that while God is constant, humankind's agency allows us our own choices, and sometimes those choices are not wise in their eternal consequences. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore the reality that it is given to humanity to know the difference between good and evil, and to be free to choose between those two options. Alma₂ does note that there may be a condition where one might not know good from evil. That condition may apply to young children, or to other circumstances. However, to most it is given that we may choose "good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience." Agency requires choice, and Alma₂ defines those choices as polar opposites for the purposes of teaching the principle.

Why then should Alma₂ desire that he were an angel? That rhetorical question returns to the beginning of this lament and answers that Alma₂ should be satisfied with what he is able to do. Perhaps as an angel he could override agency, but that would contravene Yahweh's plan for humankind. Alma₂ understands that God gives to humankind that for which we are ready and gives us our agency that we may understand our choices and freely make them.

Alma 29:9–13

9 I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me; yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy.

10 And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me.

11 Yea, and I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage, and by this did establish his church; yea, the Lord God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did deliver them out of bondage.

12 Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage.

13 Yea, and that same God did establish his church among them; yea, and that same God hath called me by a holy calling, to preach the word unto this people, and hath given me much success, in the which my joy is full.

Comments

Alma₂'s comment: "I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me," echoes Ammon's statement in Alma 26:12: "I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God." Alma₂ had recorded those words, and perhaps subconsciously echoed them here. His point is that there are

many things that have happened that are good in spite of the terrible aftermath of the war. Even though Alma₂ lamented those who died unrepentant, he recognizes that there have been many who have repented and come to God.

What Alma₂ is doing in these verses is contextualizing the very real sadness associated with devastation with those things in which one might rejoice. There were many who died unrepentant, but there were many who came to God, and who would not have without the ministrations of the sons of Mosiah₂.

Their fathers were in captivity, a thing to be lamented. Yahweh saved them, something to be praised. The God of the Old World fathers delivered them from bondage to Egypt; that same God still has power to deliver them from bondage. While that happens at times as a release from physical bondage, the gospel also comes to release humankind from the bondage of sin that separates us from God.

Alma 29:14–17

14 But I do not joy in my own success alone, but my joy is more full because of the success of my brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi.

15 Behold, they have labored exceedingly, and have brought forth much fruit; and how great shall be their reward!

16 Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy.

17 And now may God grant unto these, my brethren, that they may sit down in the kingdom of God; yea, and also all those who are the fruit of their labors that they may go no more out, but that they may praise him forever. And may God grant that it may be done according to my words, even as I have spoken. Amen.

Comments

This outpouring of emotion begins with the awful sadness of the destruction of war and the loss of husbands, fathers, and sons. It ends with the hope of the successes of the sons of Mosiah₂ in the land of Nephi. While it might not appear that the two are linked, Alma₂ makes the connection because many of the dead did not have the chance to learn of God, and therefore, they faced a spiritual death after the temporal death. That is contrasted to the success in leading many of the Lamanites to God and therefore, giving them the chance at spiritual life, even though some of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies also lost their lives.

The presence of the testificatory *Amen* brings this chapter to a close.

Alma 30

Alma 30:1–5

1 Behold, now it came to pass that after the people of Ammon were established in the land of Jershon, yea, and also after the Lamanites were driven out of the land, and their dead were buried by the people of the land—

2 Now their dead were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered—but it came to pass after they had buried their dead, and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer, (and it was in the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) there began to be continual peace throughout all the land.

3 Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.

4 And thus the people did have no disturbance in all the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

5 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace.

Comments

As with many other cases where a testificatory *Amen* occasioned the close of a chapter, the beginning verses of this next chapter finish the story of the previous chapter. That chapter centered on the story of the Ammonites, and Mormon needs to conclude those events.

Even though the immediate story of the Ammonites has ended, this will not be the end of their importance to the overall Nephite story. They are established in Jershon and protected, but this original 1830 chapter (which covers the modern chapters 30–25) will set up conditions that will directly threaten Jershon. In keeping with the message of Alma₂'s soliloquy in Alma 29, even though there will be temporal causes and reasons for the threat to Jershon, it will ultimately be a spiritual threat.

The original 1830 chapter deals with Nephite apostasy. We will get two stories: the first of Korihor and the second of the Zoramites. In both cases, Mormon will continue to underline his theme that the most dangerous enemies are those who were once Nephites.

Korihor Preaches against the Coming Messiah

Alma 30:6–8

6 But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

7 Now there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

8 For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

Comments

Mormon is clearly the narrator here. Verse 6 introduces the story of Korihor, but verses 7 and 8 are an aside discussing the nature of Nephite law. Nephite law comes into play in the story but would not have been a topic on the plates. Only Mormon's understanding that his future audience would not know Nephite law explains why verses 7 and 8 are included.

The introduction to Korihor is that "there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ." Due to modern perceptions of the term "anti-Christ," it is too easy to erroneously read this as saying that he was *an* anti-Christ. That isn't the meaning here. The meaning is that he is "against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ." His teachings were, therefore, very similar to the teachings of previous apostate Nephites, including Sherem, Nehor, and the priests of Noah; they taught that one did not need to look forward to a coming Messiah.

Mormon adds verses 7 and 8 so that his readers will understand why Korihor was allowed to preach at all. There was no law against what a person might believe. It is interesting that Mormon should note that the law was supported by scripture. It was an interpretation of scripture, to be sure, but it was scripture, nevertheless. The reference is to Joshua 24:15: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." The reference is to a choice between serving Yahweh or the gods of Egypt, but it was used to bolster any choice of religious belief that a Nephite might understand.

Alma 30:9–11

9 Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him.

10 But if he murdered he was punished unto death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished.

11 For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

Comments

Verses 9–11 continue the legal explanation of Korihor’s story. While verses 7 and 8 clarified that Korihor could believe as he wished, verses 10–11 make certain that Mormon’s readers understand that the laws were not overly permissive. Not prosecuting for one’s belief was different from not prosecuting for specific crimes. “There was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes.” Crimes were defined, but what a person believed was not defined by law.

In the ancient world, it was typical that the entire community had a single belief. Nephite society had been that type of community prior to merging with the people of Zarahemla. It was after that point, where there had been a merger between two peoples who had different religions (see Omni 1:17), when social conditions required that the law be defined to allow the different religions. In the situation where people came from different backgrounds and believes, this allowed “all men [to be] on equal grounds.”

Alma 30:12–16

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying:

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

Comments

Mormon repeats that Korihor is anti-Christ, and that there was nothing illegal about that. Having reiterated those points, Mormon provides an example of his teachings. The arguments are not significantly different than any other anti-Christ. Korihor isn’t anti-Yahweh (as God), but rather anti-Messiah. The phrase “which is to come” becomes associated with the coming Messiah in the Book of Mormon. King Benjamin told his people “I have things to tell you concerning that which is to come” (Mosiah 3:1). Benjamin then taught about the Messiah and the atonement. Alma 5:44 sees Alma₂ teaching: “I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.” It should, therefore, be very clear that, when Korihor states that one cannot know of that which is to come, it is not a condemnation of all prophecy, but is very particularly about the coming atoning mission of the Messiah.

What becomes the issue is seen in verse 16. Korihor objects to the idea that one must “look forward” to a remission of sins. His implication is that such a future atonement would do them no good as they are living now, not in that future time. Korihor is preaching a religion focused on the present, rather than some future event.

Alma 30:17–18

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

Comments

The problem of the Nephite teaching of a future atonement is that it would seem to require that humankind had to wait upon the ability to repent. If the Messiah was so far in the future, it did no good for those living in that present time. Therefore, humankind lived according to the laws that they knew.

One place where Korihor appears to differ in his preaching is that he was not only anti-Christ, but also anti-Law of Moses. Korihor does not preach a return to what others had taught, which was that the Law of Moses was sufficient, but rather that “whatsoever a man did was no crime.” This took the concept of the lack of a current atonement (and only one that was expected in the future) to a rather extreme end. If atonement only happened in the future, then it really was not needed, and it was not needed because, without an atonement, it didn’t matter what one did.

Where the typical anti-Christ at least taught that an understanding of Yahweh’s laws was important, Korihor appears to preach that religion itself was not required. He taught that there was no future atonement, and no existence after death that one had to take into account in guiding one’s mortal life.

Alma 30:19–21

19 Now this man went over to the land of Jershon also, to preach these things among the people of Ammon, who were once the people of the Lamanites.

20 But behold they were more wise than many of the Nephites; for they took him, and bound him, and carried him before Ammon, who was a high priest over that people.

21 And it came to pass that he caused that he should be carried out of the land. And he came over into the land of Gideon, and began to preach unto them also; and here he did not have much success, for he was taken and bound and carried before the high priest, and also the chief judge over the land.

Comments

At the beginning of this chapter, Mormon noted that the Ammonites were in the land of Jershon. Korihor goes to Jerson to preach among the people of Ammon. Mormon has already recounted their great faith, and now reiterates it: “they were more wise than many of the Nephites.” It may not have been a crime to believe what one wanted to believe, and even perhaps to preach it. It does not appear that there was any requirement that one must listen, and Mormon underscores the righteousness of these recently converted Lamanites. They are even more righteous than many Nephites. That is an important aspect to their conversion, and an important message Mormon wanted to demonstrate to his future Lamanite audience.

The Ammonites expel Korihor, who then travels to Gideon. As Mormon included Alma₂'s sermon to the people of Gideon, he made it clear to his readers that they, the people of Gideon, were righteous people. Significantly, although they were of Nephite heritage, they were most recently from Lamanite lands. It appears possible that Korihor thought that his message would be better received by those who had been most influenced by Lamanites. He was wrong. Korihor is brought before the chief judge over the land of Gideon.

Alma 30:22–23

22 And it came to pass that the high priest said unto him: Why do ye go about perverting the ways of the Lord? Why do ye teach this people that there shall be no Christ, to interrupt their rejoicings? Why do ye speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?

23 Now the high priest's name was Giddonah. And Korihor said unto him: Because I do not teach the foolish traditions of your fathers, and because I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads, but be brought down according to thy words.

Comments

By being presented before the land's chief judge, Korihor is put on trial. With the law stating that one might believe as they wished, on what charge could he be brought to trial? John W. Welch suggests that it is for violating the prohibition against lying. In Alma 1:17 it was noted: “Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.” Thus, Korihor is not on trial for what he believes, but for what he preaches.

In that context Giddonah asks “why do ye speak against all the prophecies of the holy prophets?” For Giddonah, the scriptures declare truth, and if Korihor speaks against the scriptures, he is therefore lying.

In his defense, Korihor sidesteps the entire issue by declaring that he doesn’t teach those scriptures, because the *scriptures* are lying. He states that they were “laid down by the ancient priests,” rather than prophets, and that the scriptures keep people in ignorance, rather than teaching them truths.

This conflict is no longer about Korihor, but it is about the source and nature of truth. That point makes Korihor’s case important. Mormon wants his readers to know from the beginning what the outcome will be, and so he makes certain that Korihor has a Jaredite name (see the reference to the name Corihor, in Ether 7:3–4). Most people with Jaredite names in Mormon’s writings are dangerous to the Nephite way of life.

Alma 30:24–28

24 Ye say that this people is a free people. Behold, I say they are in bondage. Ye say that those ancient prophecies are true. Behold, I say that ye do not know that they are true.

25 Ye say that this people is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent. Behold, I say that a child is not guilty because of its parents.

26 And ye also say that Christ shall come. But behold, I say that ye do not know that there shall be a Christ. And ye say also that he shall be slain for the sins of the world—

27 And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.

28 Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do according to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God—a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

Comments

As Korihor builds his defense, he continues with the theme that it is the Nephite religious tradition that is lying, rather than what he preaches. In verse 24, he lays it out clearly: “Ye say that those ancient prophecies are true. Behold, I say that ye do not know that they are true.” Korihor is putting the definition of truth on trial, and at the heart of the Nephite definition of truth is the scriptures. To put the important Nephite perspective on this accusation, Korihor is declaring that there is no inherent value in the brass plates, which not only formed an essential part of the Nephite origin story but are included among the

sacred relics that defined and declared the Nephite right to rule. Beyond religion, Korihor is declaring the Nephite right to rule as illegitimate. No wonder he was considered dangerous.

Verse 25 shows how a smart argument can make a position questionable. Modern readers will read Korihor's declaration that "a child is not guilty because of its parents" and have a hard time disagreeing. However, Korihor uses that argument to suggest that there is no guilt. By attaching it to the argument about "a guilty and a fallen people," Korihor is attempting to erase the meaning of the Fall from the Garden of Eden.

There is no need for Christ's atonement if there were no Fall. If we are to be judged according to our own works and not our parents, or their parents, then the Fall would have no meaning and there would be nothing for the atonement to fulfill. Many arguments can sound logical, appearing to support God's truths, while ultimately contradicting them.

Korihor Brought before Alma₂

Alma 30:29–31

29 Now when the high priest and the chief judge saw the hardness of his heart, yea, when they saw that he would revile even against God, they would not make any reply to his words; but they caused that he should be bound; and they delivered him up into the hands of the officers, and sent him to the land of Zarahemla, that he might be brought before Alma, and the chief judge who was governor over all the land.

30 And it came to pass that when he was brought before Alma and the chief judge, he did go on in the same manner as he did in the land of Gideon; yea, he went on to blaspheme.

31 And he did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers, accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people.

Comments

Giddonah does not pass judgment, but sends Korihor to Alma₂, the chief priest as well as to the chief judge (this is clarified in verse 51). Korihor is not simply a man who might be guilty of lying, but a man who was subversive to the entire Nephite way of life.

When Korihor comes before Alma₂, he continues the same arguments that he had used in Gideon. There are two aspects to Korihor's accusations against the Nephite religion. The first is that they do not teach truth, but rather "the silly traditions of their fathers." This repeats the argument that it is the scriptures that lie, not Korihor. The second accusation is that the reason for Nephite religion is so that the priests can "[glut themselves] on the labors of the people."

Since Korihor is a man who came into the land of Zarahemla (see Alma 30:6), it is possible that he was from some non-Nephite land and was not aware of the fact that it was an important Nephite teaching that the priests labor with their own hands for their support. Alma₂ will make certain to bring that up as part of the revelation of Korihor's lies.

Alma 30:32–36

32 Now Alma said unto him: Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people.

33 And notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor; neither has any of my brethren, save it were in the judgment-seat; and then we have received only according to law for our time.

34 And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren?

35 Then why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? And now, believest thou that we deceive this people, that causes such joy in their hearts?

36 And Korihor answered him, Yea.

Comments

The easiest lie to disprove is Korihor's accusation that Nephite priests glut themselves on the labor of others. Alma₂ puts it to him directly and clearly declares that Korihor is lying: "thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people." Alma₂ presents himself as the most important case in point. If there were any priest who should have been supported by the people, it was he. However, Alma₂ declares that he has never received wages as the chief priest, even though he had received wages when he was the chief judge (verse 33).

To make certain that this point is clear, Alma₂ asks Korihor if he believes that the priests deceive the people to get gain, even though he knows they do not? Korihor answers that he does, thus declaring himself a liar. He is preaching something he knows to be false. While that declaration makes him guilty, it is the lesser of the dangers in his preaching. Korihor has also preached that the scriptures are false and therefore, Korihor threatens the very foundations of Nephite society. Therefore, even though Korihor has already declared himself guilty, the trial continues.

Alma 30:37–43

37 And then Alma said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God?

38 And he answered, Nay.

39 Now Alma said unto him: Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come.

40 And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only.

41 But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true?

42 Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God.

43 And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

Comments

Alma₂ begins by asking Korihor if he believes that there is a God. He says no. He will later clarify this to indicate that he believes in a god, but not in the Nephite God (see verse 48). Korihor may have responded similarly to how King Lamoni and Lamoni's father responded to a similar question asked by the sons of Mosiah₂. They were not atheists, but did not recognize Yahweh as God.

The case now revolves around proof. Alma₂ declares that Alma₂ knows that there is a God, just as Korihor declares that Korihor does not believe there is one. Only one of the two can be correct. Alma₂ testifies that he knows that "these things are true," that "there is a God, and also that Christ shall come." The problem is that we still have only Alma₂'s word against Korihor's word. Although the scriptures should have been the standard upon which truth was judged, Korihor has declared that the scriptures themselves are not true and that, therefore, it is simply a matter of what two different people believe, with no way of proof.

Korihor suggests that there is a way to prove truth. He suggests that Alma₂ create a sign that will cause belief. That is a wonderful way to end the argument because it suggests that truth is dependent upon Alma₂'s ability to invoke God to a specific action. Most understand that such things do not happen often. Korihor certainly appears to be in a strong position.

Alma 30:44–47

44 But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets?

The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.

45 And yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? And he said: Yea, I will deny, except ye shall show me a sign.

46 And now it came to pass that Alma said unto him: Behold, I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed.

47 But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction, by thy lying and by thy flattering words; therefore if thou shalt deny again, behold God shall smite thee, that thou shalt become dumb, that thou shalt never open thy mouth any more, that thou shalt not deceive this people any more.

Comments

Alma₂ attempts to use the scriptures as the foundation for truth, but, ultimately, he understands that Korihor has undermined the ability of the scriptures to be used as the standard of truth. Therefore, Korihor is particularly dangerous. When he is “leading away the hearts of this people,” he isn’t simply preaching a different religion, but he is undermining the entire Nephite way of life.

Alma₂ sees that there is such danger in Korihor’s words that he declares: “I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed. But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction.” Alma₂ believes that he must choose between the destruction of the Nephites or the destruction of Korihor. Alma₂ chooses the Nephite people.

Alma₂ gives Korihor one last chance. Alma₂ specifically says that “if thou shalt deny again, behold God shall smite thee, that thou shalt become dumb.” Korihor will respond with, in essence, “go ahead.”

Alma 30:48–50

48 Now Korihor said unto him: I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe.

49 Now Alma said unto him: This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance.

50 Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma.

Comments

Korihor clarifies that he believes in a god, but not in Alma₂'s God, Yahweh. He continues to declare that he will not believe without a sign. The importance of this case is such that Yahweh does provide the sign that Alma₂ had vowed would happen. Korihor was struck dumb.

Korihor's sin was lying, and by striking him dumb, he was made unable to continue preaching his lies, which were dangerous to not only the Nephite religion, but also to their entire political and social structure.

Alma 30:51–53

51 And now when the chief judge saw this, he put forth his hand and wrote unto Korihor, saying: Art thou convinced of the power of God? In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign? Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign? Behold, he has showed unto you a sign; and now will ye dispute more?

52 And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak; and I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God.

53 But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown God. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me.

Comments

Alma₂ has been in charge of this trial up to this point. Now the chief judge enters the picture to pronounce the obvious final judgment. The chief judge asks if Korihor now believes that he received the sign that he requested. Korihor clearly must declare that he has, and that, therefore, there must be a God, i.e, Yahweh.

What follows is a confession. Korihor declares that he did indeed lie, and that he did so because he believed that the devil had come to him in the form of an angel. Therefore, he was not really lying so much as he was lied to. Perhaps by deflecting the cause of his lies to another entity, he believed that he might escape punishment. Nevertheless, his confession has to declare that the punishment is just, for "I have brought this great curse upon me."

Alma 30:54–55

54 Now when he had said this, he besought that Alma₂ should pray unto God, that the curse might be taken from him.

55 But Alma said unto him: If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people; therefore, it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will.

Comments

Perhaps because Korihor defended his actions as the result of the devil being in the form of an angel who lied to him, he hoped that Alma₂ would lift the curse. Alma₂ declines. Korihor had admitted to being a liar, and not only a liar in small things, but also with respect to essential elements of Nephite politics and religion. He had been influential, and therefore, dangerous.

As a liar, Alma₂ could not trust him to cease lying. It is also likely that the very obvious punishment of being struck dumb would stand as a permanent declaration that he had indeed lied, and that that would begin to heal any of the damage that he might have caused. Korihor had been clearly given ample opportunity, even the opportunity to reverse his lies, knowing what the sign would be. He didn't, and Alma₂ saw no reason to reverse the curse.

Korihor Dies Begging for Food in Antionum

Alma 30:56–58

56 And it came to pass that the curse was not taken off of Korihor; but he was cast out, and went about from house to house begging for his food.

57 Now the knowledge of what had happened unto Korihor was immediately published throughout all the land; yea, the proclamation was sent forth by the chief judge to all the people in the land, declaring unto those who had believed in the words of Korihor that they must speedily repent, lest the same judgments would come unto them.

58 And it came to pass that they were all convinced of the wickedness of Korihor; therefore they were all converted again unto the Lord; and this put an end to the iniquity after the manner of Korihor. And Korihor did go about from house to house, begging food for his support.

Comments

Verse 57 provides the most important result of Korihor's trial. He had had some success, and the news of his dramatic conviction at God's hands demonstrated that he had lied. Thus, the chief judge sends a proclamation out to the people to let them know of the results of the trial, and that if they had believed Korihor, they must swiftly repent, "lest the same judgments would come unto them." This demonstrates

that Korihor’s teachings were deemed extremely dangerous. It was not simply a question of what he might have believed, but that what he was teaching was essentially sedition. The result is that the people are convinced and “converted again unto the Lord.”

Korihor does not die. While it would have been understandable to put a traitor to death, the obvious result of God’s curse made him more valuable as a living symbol, rather than a possible martyr. However, not being able to speak, and the ignominy of his judgment, reduced him to begging. Mormon will use that part of Korihor’s story to move to the next story that he wants to tell about apostate Nephites.

Alma 30:59–60

59 And it came to pass that as he went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram—and as he went forth amongst them, behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.

60 And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

Comments

Verse 59 is the transition between the story of Korihor and the next story about the Zoramites. Korihor ends up among a people where he might have had some influence had he preached there, but he now shows up as a beggar. Those who follow Zoram have their own issues, and treating the poor kindly was not one of their defining traits. Therefore, Korihor was “run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.”

Mormon ends Korihor’s story with a short moralizing statement about the faithfulness of Yahweh contrasted with the unfaithfulness of the devil. While this ends a chapter in our modern text, the 1830 chapter continues without a break.

Alma 31

Alma₂ and Others Go to the Zoramites

Alma 31:1–2

1 Now it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

2 For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

Comments

When Orson Pratt divided this chapter for the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon, he clearly made the division because there was a shift from the story of Korihor to the story of the Zoramites. Verse 1 highlights that transition. What the division doesn't do, however, is retain the close association between Korihor's death at the hands (or perhaps, more literally, the feet) of the Zoramites (see Alma 30:59).

Korihor's story is one of a threat to the Nephite religious and political order. The Zoramites are also a threat, but perhaps an even greater one. Mormon notes that the Zoramites have moved away from the Nephite religion by stating that they had begun to "bow down to dumb idols." That was sufficient for Alma₂ to understand that they were in apostasy, but the real danger was "the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites." The nature of this separation, and the danger it posed, are described in the next verses.

Alma 31:3–4

3 Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites.

4 Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites.

Comments

The real danger of the Zoramite separation from the Nephites had to do with their location, which Mormon makes certain his readers understand in verse 3. Antionum is a buffer zone between the Lamanites in the south wilderness and the interior of Nephite lands, specifically Jershon. Mormon expects his readers to remember that Jershon is where the Ammonites, the former Anti-Nephi-Lehies, have settled. These were people who were given the land for their protection, so that they wouldn't need to take up arms again. A major line of defense was the land of Antionum, that was located between Jershon and the Lamanites.

With the defection of the Zoramites from the Nephite religion, the fear was that they would also defect from Nephite political influence and turn to the Lamanites. That would mean that there was a major hole in the Nephite defensive positions, and that the next land in line was one that was inhabited by a people who had taken an oath not to fight. It was therefore possible that opening Antionum to the Lamanites would allow a very deep incursion into Nephite territory. This was a very dangerous position.

When verse 4 speaks of the Zoramites entering into a correspondence with the Lamanites, the intent is not to describe an exchange of letters, but rather an alignment of religion and politics. That kind of correspondence would lead to the Zoramites *becoming* Lamanites, and therefore enemies to the Nephites.

This story is interesting for its system of naming people. The first person named Zoram in Nephite history was a servant who accompanied Lehi's family. Although we hear little of his tribe, it is associated with the Nephites. The name had a positive connotation, until now.

The second interesting name is Antionum, which so clearly includes the root *antion*, an intentional metonym. An *antion* was a measure of gold (Alma 11:19) and therefore, a designation of a city that was concerned for personal wealth. Taken together, it would appear that Mormon is using these names to first tell his readers that the Zoramites in Antionum have rejected the Nephite principle of equality and looked to the elevation of wealth. That implication from the name alone will be born out as we read about their practices.

The name Zoram is certainly not intended to be seen in a favorable light. What it might suggest is that these were Nephites who have now apostatized. That certainly fits the religious and political position of Antionum, but the transition of the name itself from basically good to a representation of the opposite of Nephite ideals may be Mormon's way of reinforcing the lesson that apostate Nephites are the most dangerous of enemies.

Alma 31:5–7

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.

6 Therefore he took Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons.

7 Now the eldest of his sons he took not with him, and his name was Helaman; but the names of those whom he took with him were Shiblon and Corianton; and these are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites, to preach unto them the word.

Comments

Although Mormon suggests, in verse 5, that Alma₂ preaches because it is the most effective way of changing hearts, it disguises the probability that Alma₂ had no other option. Although the Zoramites were living according to a different religion, it was the voice of their people that supported that religion, and therefore was not contrary to Nephite law. There was no legal recourse that could compel the Zoramites to return to religious fealty. The only way to use force was to declare war, which would certainly force the Zoramites into Lamanite hands, which was something Alma₂ hoped to avoid. Therefore, attempting to convert them was the best option.

Alma₂ formed a missionary group that consisted of three of the sons of Mosiah₂ and two of his sons. The three sons of Mosiah₂ were Ammon, Aaron, and Omner. He took his sons Shiblon and Corianton. His oldest son, Helaman, remained in Zarahemla with Himni (one of the sons of Mosiah₂).

Alma₂ and the three sons of Mosiah₂ were seasoned missionaries. We do not learn much of Shiblon and Corianton at this point, but their experiences in Antionum will arise when Alma₂ blesses his sons (Alma 38–42).

Alma 31:8–11

8 Now the Zoramites were dissenters from the Nephites; therefore they had had the word of God preached unto them.

9 But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses.

10 Neither would they observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation.

11 Yea, in fine, they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances; therefore, for this cause, Alma and his brethren went into the land to preach the word unto them.

Comments

Mormon clarifies the religious issues among the Zoramites. The very first is that they had previously had the word of God (the Nephite religion) preached to them. They were not sinning in ignorance, but rather had intentionally left the Nephite religion.

In addition to leaving Nephite theology, they had left the law of Moses. This makes the Zoramite apostasy different from other Nephite apostasies such as Nehorism. Where that apostasy removed the Messiah but retained the law of Moses, the Zoramite apostasy removed both. They were not just apostate, but they were really apostate.

In such a dramatic state of religious separation from the Nephites, it is not surprising that it was assumed that a political separation was imminent. Religion and politics were not completely separable in the ancient world where one might rule only according to God's will and support. This reiterates the fear expressed in verse 4, that "the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites."

Alma 31:12–14

12 Now, when they had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld;

13 For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person.

14 Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying:

Comments

When Alma² and his fellow missionaries enter the land, they are not so much surprised that there are synagogues, but rather the way in which they were built. The Zoramite synagogues were designed for a very un-Nephite type of worship. When the Zoramites gathered for worship, their devotions were centered on "a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person." This is an important description because it allows us to understand more of what Zoramite worship was about.

Most important was that the prayer might be repetitive, and different people might give it, but only one at a time. One person had to stand above all others and loudly recite the prayer. This practice focuses the attention of the entire congregation on one person at a time, and places them in a very public place where they are the only one to be seen at one time. It is a very literal rejection of Nephite principles that did not exalt one person above another.

Alma 31:15–18

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

Comments

The Zoramite prayer provides significant information to allow us to reconstruct the nature of both their religion and the way that it intended to contrast itself to Nephite worship. First, they direct the prayer to God. Although it is possible that they worshipped a God other than Yahweh, the Book of Mormon uses God as the designation for Yahweh. Thus, the Zoramites would have thought themselves as still believing in the true God, but perhaps as a reformation of religious practices.

When they call Yahweh a spirit, modern readers might see that as a rejection of the divine corporeality of God. However, at this time, Yahweh had not yet come to earth, and therefore a description of Yahweh as a spirit was not inappropriate. However, it is also likely that the emphasis came from contact with the Lamanites, who believed in a Great Spirit (as we saw in the mission of the sons of Mosiah₂ among the Lamanites). This may be a sign of some incorporation of Lamanite ideas into their religion, a process known as syncretism, where two different belief systems are combined along lines of similarity but resulting in something new to both of the two original systems.

Verse 16 confirms that the Zoramites see themselves as separate from the Nephites. The language where they reject the “childishness of their fathers” would appear to replicate Lamanite ideas, further suggesting a syncretism with Lamanite ideas and religion.

The prayer also confirms their rejection of crucial Nephite beliefs in social equality and in the coming Messiah. While both ideas are rejected, the Zoramite method of worship exalts the visual display of wealth or personal power. There was a reason that Mormon used the name Antionum for them (see Alma 11:19 for the definition of an *antion*).

Alma 31:19–23

19 Now it came to pass that after Alma and his brethren and his sons had heard these prayers, they were astonished beyond all measure.

20 For behold, every man did go forth and offer up these same prayers.

21 Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand.

22 Now, from this stand they did offer up, every man, the selfsame prayer unto God, thanking their God that they were chosen of him, and that he did not lead them away after the tradition of their brethren, and that their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about.

23 Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.

Comments

Alma₂, his brethren, and his sons “were astonished beyond all measure,” and with reason. Although Antionum was nominally part of the Nephite political hegemony, it was far separated from what Alma₂ and his companions knew to be the core of Nephite religion and therefore, politics.

The fact that each person said the same prayer allowed them to declare their solidarity with others who offered the prayer. It was less a devotion to God than devotion to a particular community. There is no way to know if Mormon’s conclusion in verse 23, that the Zoramites spoke no more of God until the next gathering day, was in Alma₂’s record or not. It could have been, or Mormon could have added it as his own summary of their lack of true devotion to God. Regardless, the Zoramite religious practices were constructed to show a devotion to others of the same believing community, rather than to God, or to specific religious principles.

Alma 31:24–25

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

Comments

These verses set up the Alma₂’s prayer that is recorded in the next verses. The prayer is triggered by seeing that the Zoramites were so completely removed from the foundational tenets of Nephite belief. In keeping with Mormon’s use of Antionum as the name for the city, Alma₂ notes that “their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.” This is the first aspect of Nephite apostasy throughout the Book of Mormon, and the Zoramites are far beyond only beginning to set their hearts upon wealth and status. They are “lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.”

The fact is that they were wealthy. It wasn’t that the wealth was bad, but that they had made the social differences into a religion that emphasized the visible worship of wealth and status. We will learn how that affected those who did not have that wealth in the next chapter.

Although it may or may not have been intentional, it is highly appropriate that the Zoramites be described as being “lifted up unto great boasting,” as their boasting was literally done at the top of a stand that lifted them above the rest of the congregation.

Alma₂ Prays for the Zoramites

Alma 31:26–30

26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men?

27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

30 O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul.

Comments

Alma₂'s prayer has two parts. These five verses are the first part of the prayer, where Alma₂ describes to God the visible and audible sins of the Zoramites. The description of their sins is bracketed by Alma₂ asking how long the Lord will suffer such wickedness to continue. We see that phrase in verse 26 and then later in verse 30.

In between, Alma₂ reiterates the major problem that he sees with Zoramite worship: they are prideful, as manifest in their costly apparel. As in other uses of “costly apparel” in the Book of Mormon, it is a sign of apostasy. The problem is not so much the wealth that allows it, but rather that the costly apparel signals a visual distinction between those who have and those who have not, and that visual distinction leads to the presumption of a real distinction, where pride dictates that those who can have the costly apparel are therefore better than those who do not.

Of course, the Zoramite rejection of the coming Messiah is an important concern, and therefore, Alma₂ mentions it specifically in verse 29.

Alma 31:31–35

31 O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people.

32 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me—yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, and also my two sons—yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ.

33 Wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people.

34 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ.

35 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

Comments

The second part of the prayer is Alma₂'s desire to do something about the Zoramite apostasy. Therefore, he begins with his motivation, which is that “my heart is exceedingly sorrowful.” He is seeing a people who have left the true way, and therefore, he sorrows that they have lost their way. What he desires is comfort to his soul, but a comfort that comes from being successful in teaching and turning their hearts back to the true way of Yahweh, and of course, to the true understanding of the necessity of the atoning Messiah.

Verse 35 indicates not only that Zoramite souls are precious, but also that “many of them are our brethren.” In the original manuscript, the phrase is “many of them are our near brethren.” That is an interesting distinction. It removes the concern for the Zoramites as being simply generic brethren and suggests that there might be many among them who were even relatives. The idea that there were “near brethren” among the Zoramites makes Alma₂ concern even more understandable.

Alma 31:36–38

36 Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

Comments

One modern commentator on the Book of Mormon reads verse 36 as simply Alma₂ placing his hands on his brethren. That they were filled with the Spirit seems to fit that modern context and fits our understanding of “laying on of hands.” However, it doesn’t really explain why the word *clapped* was used rather than *placed*.

There is no answer to that. A possibility is the fact that the process of clapping generates a movement of air. Also, both the Hebrew and Greek words, that are translated to *spirit*, had the meaning of “wind.” As a representation of something that was real, and yet not seen, wind and spirit were appropriate terms. If that meaning is behind the action of clapping, then there is a symbolic act that the clapping generated the “spirit,” that was then infused into his companions. That is not to suggest that clapping was necessary, but only that it was an appropriate symbol.

When they have the spirit, they become missionaries, “taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.” That phrase intentionally echoes Luke 12:22 where the Lord says to the disciples: “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.” That phrase is also seen in Matthew 6:25 and 6:31, and it represents the context for the disciples that is more appropriate for this occasion at the beginning of their missionary effort.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 32

Alma₂ Preaches to the Poor among the Zoramites (Chapters 32–34)

Alma 32:1–3

1 And it came to pass that they did go forth, and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets.

2 And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the poor class of people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel—

3 Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness; therefore they were poor; yea, they were esteemed by their brethren as dross; therefore they were poor as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart.

Comments

Alma₂ and his companions begin to have some success, but not among those who were the adamant adherents to the Zoramite religion. They did not touch the hearts of those who used the synagogues as places to display their wealth, but rather they touched those among the poor, those who “were not permitted to enter into their synagogues.” Not only were the poor deemed lesser than those with displayable wealth, but they were “esteemed as filthiness.” The sad end result of social elitism can be the labeling of those who do not fit as “something or other”; they are labeled as “something less.” In this case, they were “esteemed as filthiness.” In many similar situations, they are considered less than human.

The problem is not really wealth, but the separation into different types of people, where some consider themselves so much better than others that the others can be routinely ignored, or even worse, oppressed. However, it is also among such people that their hearts might be more susceptible to God’s words. When verse 3 says that the poor were “poor in heart,” it refers to their lack of pride and therefore, the lack of that great obstacle to repentance.

Alma 32:4–6

4 Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking, of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world.

5 And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?

6 And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word.

Comments

Mormon sets the stage for Alma₂'s sermon on faith by introducing the vast difference between the Zoramites in their synagogues and those who they would not allow in the synagogues. Mormon doesn't give us much information about the people to whom he was preaching on the hill Onidah, save that there came to him a contingent of those poor that Mormon had mentioned who were poor in heart due to their circumstances.

Their chosen spokesperson approaches Alma₂ and explains both their problem and their desire. The problem is not the lack of wealth. They probably thought that wealth was impossible for them. What they desired was not money or prestige, but communion with their God. They were excluded from the synagogues and therefore had "no place to worship our God."

Alma₂ recognized that this was a teachable people. Therefore, he taught them.

Alma 32:7–11

7 Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them:

8 I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye.

9 Behold thy brother hath said, What shall we do?—for we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God.

10 Behold I say unto you, do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only?

11 And moreover, I would ask, do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week?

Comments

Alma₂ “stretched forth his hand.” Mormon didn’t feel he needed to explain what that meant, although it would be helpful for the modern reader. Perhaps it was a gesture of formal discourse, such as was found in many Old World cultures. The orator had specific gestures that would add particular meaning to his words. In this case, it is possible that the gesture was intended either to include this group of poor in heart, or possibly as a representation of one who could speak with authority. That Mormon includes the gesture suggests that it had meaning, but we do not have enough information to know what that meaning was.

The Zoramite synagogues were used once a week for their worship service, and there was no worship outside the synagogue (Alma 31:23 notes that they did not speak of God on the other days). Thus, one of the problems these poor had was the assumption that they were barred from worshipping God. It is for that reason that Alma₂ asks “do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only?”

That question is significant because it suggests that devotion to God does not require a particular sacred space. Any place can be made at least temporarily sacred if we use it to worship. Similarly, it does not matter the day. Although Christian tradition worships on Sunday, there are countries where the prevailing religion or practices make it more appropriate for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to worship on a day other than Sunday. The worship is much more important than the day on which it takes place.

Alma 32:12–15

12 I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble.

13 And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved.

14 And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word?

15 Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.

Comments

Alma₂ declares that good has come from being cast out of the synagogues. It has allowed them to be humble. While it is true that their circumstances in life were humble, Alma₂’s message is more than being

humble because they were poor. The fact that they were cast out of the synagogues places them in diametric opposition to those who attended the synagogues, to those whose costly apparel and actions loudly proclaimed that they were proud, not humble.

Alma₂ is setting up a dichotomy. There are those who worship in the Zoramite synagogues in the Zoramite way, and there are those who are truly humble, and whose humility not only has them cast out of those synagogues, but which truly do not belong in a synagogue dedicated to pride rather than Godly humility.

This is good, because they have had to learn that they are humble, as opposed to prideful, and that humility “seeketh repentance.” When Alma₂ says that they are blessed because they were compelled to be humble, he is referencing their expulsion from the synagogues. When he says that “they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word,” he is telling them that they can receive even more blessings by listening to the word that Alma₂ will declare to them.

We should not read this contrast between being compelled to be humble and willingly humbling ourselves as an either/or condition. In the way Alma₂ is using it, it is a progression. They were compelled to be humble and, in that humility, are willing to repent and accept more of the Lord’s word.

Alma 32:16–20

16 Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe.

17 Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe.

18 Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it.

19 And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression?

20 Now of this thing ye must judge. Behold, I say unto you, that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other; and it shall be unto every man according to his work.

Comments

Alma₂ uses the dichotomy between being humble and being compelled to be humble to begin his explanation of faith. Those who are humble are able to accept God’s word “without stubbornness of heart.” Those who are required to be humble may be among those who ask for a sign, or other proof before they will believe.

In verse 18, Alma₂ begins to define faith. The first element in understanding faith is understanding what it is not. It is not knowing a thing of surety: “for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe,

for he knoweth it.” This puts faith and knowledge on two different and opposed positions. Nevertheless, there is a relationship between faith and knowledge, and that will be part of Alma₂’s continued explanation.

One of the differences is that “more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not.” While Alma₂ suggests that there is a greater punishment if we *know* and do not *do*, as opposed to believing and not doing, that will not put faith in the lesser position that it might appear to be. Faith is not knowledge. Although there are important similarities, there are also important differences, as Alma₂ will elaborate in this discourse.

Alma 32:21

21 And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

Comments

The similarities and differences between faith and knowledge are repeated themes throughout Alma₂’s sermon. Alma₂ never said that knowledge was bad, only that it differed from faith. In this case, he defines faith as a “hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” Those words reflect Romans 8:24: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” As with many other times where the language of the Book of Mormon reflects language or phrases from the New Testament, the similarity of words is dependent upon the translator. In this case, Joseph used familiar King James Version words for a similar thought in the text he was translating.

The same underlying Greek text was translated in the Revised English Bible as: “It was with this hope that we were saved. Now to see something is no longer to hope: why hope for what is already seen?” While the meaning is transmitted in both renditions, the Book of Mormon clearly uses the KJV vocabulary to translate that meaning.

What does it mean, then? Alma₂ is explaining that both knowledge and faith are principles upon which we may act. If we know something, we can, and will, act upon it. If we see a physical chair, we assume we can sit in it. If we know simple arithmetic, we exchange money for goods and expect correct change if we present more than is needed. Those are things that we can know.

However, there are things that we cannot know, that we cannot see. When we perform our devotions to God, we hope and have faith in their effectiveness, but cannot act upon knowledge. We don’t have it. What we have is the ability to act when we otherwise would not. In the secular realm, we prefer to act upon knowledge. In the spiritual realm we require a firm foundation to our actions, but it must be something other than knowledge. That is the realm of faith.

Alma 32:22–26

22 And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word.

23 And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned.

24 And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye are afflicted and cast out—now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true—

25 For I do not mean that ye all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves; for I verily believe that there are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might.

26 Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.

Comments

Verses 21 and 26 both declare that faith is not to have a perfect knowledge. That repetition might signal repetitive resumption. However, in repetitive resumption, the intervening material is inserted. In this case, it is not necessarily inserted, but is another approach to the same information. This is a repetition, but more a duplication for emphasis, rather than a repetitive resumption.

The emphasis is on the condition of the poor who have come to Alma₂. Alma₂ has already noted that they are to be blessed for their humility, even though they were required to be humble. In this repetition, Alma₂ comes to the important part of their humility. They desire to know what they can do. They don't desire to know; they don't desire to understand; they desire to *do*. Alma₂ praises them for that desire, and notes that there are those who would have been sufficiently humble to come to that condition before the Lord, even if they had not been compelled to it by their separation for what they thought were their only forms of worship.

This is the reason for emphasizing that faith is not a perfect knowledge. They are willing to act without knowing exactly what to act upon. They have a faith that is motivating them to improve, and to desire to know what to do. They admit that they do not *know*.

Alma₂ Invites the People to Experiment on His Words

Alma 32:27

27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

Comments

If faith allows action where knowledge cannot exist, how does one even begin? How can you have faith in anything for which you have no evidence, no way of seeing whether to use that as a basis of action or not?

Alma₂ suggests that it is simple. One simply exercises “a particle of faith.” One does not begin with a firm faith in everything. At the very beginning, one must at least desire to believe. Perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of this lowest form of belief is the Lamanite overking’s prayer: “O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day” (Alma 22:18).

The Lamanite king doesn’t *know* that there is a God. He knows only that Aaron has said that there is a God. In the prayer, he starts at what must be the barest beginnings of belief: “if there is a God, and if thou art God . . .” What makes this tentative prayer effective is the willingness to act on that beginning faith: “I will give away all my sins to know thee.”

That is how faith begins. It begins with a small beginning and moves to greater and greater faith. While Lamoni’s father’s experience had an exceptionally rapid confirmation, for most of us it is a slower and more gentle process, as Alma₂ explains in the next verses.

Alma 32:28–32

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

29 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

30 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.

31 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.

32 Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.

Comments

Although Alma₂ doesn't mention it, it is certain that these poor, who are not allowed into the synagogues, were farmers. These were people of the land who understood the process of growing things. Therefore, Alma₂ teaches them with an analogy to which they would easily relate: "We will compare the word unto a seed."

The beginning of faith was to give place to God's word. The seed must be planted. A seed kept and stored away may never germinate. Therefore, the beginning action of faith is to plant the seed, to plant God's word, in one's soul.

If the seed is good, and the person is good, then the seed begins to grow. Farmers understand that the fact that the seed begins to grow is not the same as the plant bearing fruit. There is a long way from the first stem and leaves pushing through the soil and the mature grain or fruit available to nourish others. Farmers understand patience and continued effort.

How can one know if the hope expressed in giving place to God's word is true? If it is good, it will grow. If it is not, it will not grow and will be discarded. The proof is in the result. This is the same imagery as in Matthew 7:20: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Alma 32:33–34

33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

Comments

A perfect knowledge understands all things and may be the exclusive domain of the Godhead. However, humanity can know of some things. When our experiment bears fruit, we can know that it has arrived at that point of knowledge. Then faith becomes dormant because we can act on the faith that we have.

As an example, a parent may put training wheels on a child's bicycle. At some point, the parent knows that the child is ready to have them removed, but the child does not know that. They know that they can ride with training wheels. Why are they willing to try? They hope, or have faith, in their parents. They trust them enough to take an action that they do not know they can do. At some point after the removal of the training wheels, the child rides the bicycle. There is no more hope or faith involved, for the child *knows* he or she can ride the bicycle. It is that way as we progress through faith. Our faith is the engine that allows us to progress and become better than we are. Knowledge allows us to operate in the world that we understand, but it doesn't alter that world as faith can.

Alma 32:35–37

35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?

36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.

37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.

Comments

Returning to the agricultural analogy, Alma₂ speaks of the process of growing the plant representing one's faith. One can learn that the experiment on the word, or the planting of the seed, was good. Alma₂ uses the image of light, which farmers will easily understand as an essential part of the growing process. Light is good. Growing is good. It is still not a perfect knowledge. It may be, as he noted in verses 33 and 34, a partial knowledge, but it is not a perfect knowledge.

Thus, one must continue to nourish the plant. In verse 37, the plant is expressly a tree. The imagery is paralleled by the Savior's parable of the sower (see Matt. 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, and Luke 8:4–15), where the seed falls on different soils and therefore has different results. In Alma₂'s case, the imagery isn't to the soil, but to the care of the sapling. That the plant is a tree may invoke the necessity of continuous care for a long period of time. Trees take longer to mature than grain plants.

There are commonalities in the symbolism of Lehi₁'s dream of the Tree of Life and this tree of faith. Both require care, and in both cases, a good beginning can be destroyed when one ceases to care for the tree or partake of its fruit. The fruit of the tree of life is explicitly mentioned in verse 40.

Alma 32:38–40

38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorseth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

39 Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.

40 And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life.

Comments

Verse 40 suggests that Alma₂ did intend for his listeners to recall Lehi's Tree of Life dream. His discussion of faith is the process of walking the narrow path without the imagery of the iron rod. It is assumed that the word of God is available, and that it remains to the individual to grasp it. That is the aspect that Alma₂ is describing. He doesn't dwell on the presence of the rod as the word of God, but rather on the process by which one might grab hold of it and recognize that it will lead to the divine fruit of the Tree of Life.

Alma 32:41–43

41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.

42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.

43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

Comments

The patience and care of the farmer will nourish their Tree of Life. They will know it is good as it grows and swells within them. They will “[look] forward to the fruit thereof.” The result of the long process of nourishing faith, or the tree, will yield “a tree springing up unto everlasting life.”

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Alma₂'s sermon continues in the next chapter.

Alma 33

Alma₂ Quotes Zenos, Zenock, and Moses

Alma 33:1–2

1 Now after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith.

2 And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them.

Comments

In Alma 31: 8–9, Mormon wrote that the Zoramites had previously been taught the Nephite religion, but that they had “fallen into great errors.” That condition meant that Alma₂ could not be sure what these poor of the land of Antionum might have been taught. After Alma₂’s discourse on “growing faith as a seed grows,” they were willing to believe. They were taking that first step and planting the seed. However, Alma₂ needed to know how much to teach them.

They desired to know “whether they should believe in one God.” That is probably not a question of whether they should be polytheists or monotheists, but rather whether they should believe that Yahweh is God. That very question suggests that they had not been taught many of the fundamentals of the Nephite religion.

One thing that they had been taught is that they could not worship God unless they did so in a synagogue. That is the first thing that Alma₂ must contradict, because he wants these people to be able to worship, but he knows that they will not be permitted to enter the Zoramite synagogues. That is the reason that he brings up the subject. Alma₂ rests his ultimate case on the scriptures, noting that, if the Zoramite preachers have used the scriptures to teach that they could only worship in synagogues, those teachers have misunderstood the scriptures.

Alma 33:3–11

3 Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?

4 For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.

5 Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me.

6 And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.

7 And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

8 Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

9 Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.

10 Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

11 And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

Comments

Verses 4–11 quote the prophet Zenos from the brass plates. Alma₂ cites this example of a prayer Zenos gave in order to demonstrate that prayer, and therefore worship, may occur anywhere. The imagery of the language and the repetitive structure of the phrases strongly suggest that this could be reformatted as poetry, and that it was originally either a poem or perhaps had been made into a hymn that was preserved on the brass plates even though we have no other record of it.

The teaching about where one might worship, or pray, moves from a wide area to the heart of one's soul. It starts in the fields, then moves to the house, then to the closet in the house. Then it moves to the person when they are in a congregation and when they have been driven from a congregation and are their own. These poetic movements reinforce the idea that one may pray, or worship, in any location, whether in a group or alone.

Alma 33:12–14

12 And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?

13 Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.

14 Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

Comments

Alma₂'s question about believing in the scriptures has two objectives. The first is to get them to acknowledge that the scriptures hold the instructions that they need to properly worship Yahweh. The second is to teach a very specific lesson from the scriptures. Of course, Alma₂ is rapidly turning to the coming Messiah. Therefore, it is not simply believing in the scriptures, but believing that the scriptures are speaking of that coming Messiah when Zenos said "Thou has turned away thy judgments because of thy Son." That is the essential message of redemption, and the reason for the coming atoning Messiah.

If they believe the scriptures, they must believe "on the Son of God."

Alma 33:15–19

15 For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—
16 For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.

17 And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death.

18 But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

19 Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live.

Comments

It is hardly surprising that Alma₂'s most important and most consistent message is the necessity of believing in the coming Messiah. That is the essential Nephite religious message and it is one of the first things lost in Nephite apostasies. It was certainly lost among the Zoramites (see Alma 31:16–17). Alma₂ began by quoting Zenos on the ability to worship anywhere. Then he used Zenos to focus on the Messiah as the center of such worship.

Now, Alma₂ expands the scriptural references. He quotes Zenock, and then cites the experience where Moses raised the serpent on the staff so that those bitten by a serpent might look upon it and live. He will use that as a type of Christ.

Alma 33:20–23

20 But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish?

22 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

23 And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.

Comments

The sad part of the story of the serpent on the staff during the Exodus was that the way to be healed was so simple. The people had only to look and live. Still, many did not. Perhaps they felt it too easy. Perhaps they didn't believe that Yahweh would truly save them. Alma₂ invokes that experience to bring this people's choice into clear focus. Alma₂ is presenting them with the way to begin to have faith, with the way to worship, and with the true focal point of that worship. All they need to do is to take that first step.

If they can do so, if they can "plant this word in [their] hearts," they will know that it is true. Alma₂ is able to promise that, should they do so, "[their] burdens may be light," because he clearly knew that his father's people had experienced that very blessing. In the land of Helam they had been heavily burdened, but the Lord made their burdens light, or made them stronger to make the burdens appear lighter. Alma₂ can speak to this from his father's experience.

This is one of the cases in Mormon's writing where a testificatory *Amen* does not end a chapter. It is possible that this *Amen* does not trigger a chapter ending because Mormon is copying from Alma₂'s record and Alma₂ didn't end a chapter at this point. Mormon simply kept working from the text and kept it as Alma₂ had written it.

Alma 34

Amulek Explains Christ's Infinite and Eternal Atonement

Alma 34:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had spoken these words unto them he sat down upon the ground, and Amulek arose and began to teach them, saying:

2 My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us.

Comments

In Ammonihah, Alma₂ and Amulek provided the two witnesses that the law required. They do the same here. When Alma₂ finished, Amulek stands to begin to teach. He picks up where Alma₂ has left off. To make certain that his audience understands that he is a second witness to the doctrine of the Messiah, rather than beginning a new sermon, he reiterates some of what Alma₂ said.

In Alma 31:8–9, Mormon noted that the Nephite religion, and therefore the understanding of the coming Messiah, had been taught to the people in Antionum. Amulek reiterates that understanding: “it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us.”

Whether the people in Antionum were known as Zoramites before, or only after, their dissension from the Nephites, they had previously been taught the Nephite religion and had consciously rebelled against it. The people to whom Amulek spoke should have had that teaching. Even if they had, however, they appear to have either not understood it, or lost their understanding under the influence of the Zoramite teachings.

Alma 34:3–7

3 And as ye have desired of my beloved brother that he should make known unto you what ye should do, because of your afflictions; and he hath spoken somewhat unto you to prepare your minds; yea, and he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience—

4 Yea, even that ye would have so much faith as even to plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness.

5 And we have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ.

6 And ye also beheld that my brother has proved unto you, in many instances, that the word is in Christ unto salvation.

7 My brother has called upon the words of Zenos, that redemption cometh through the Son of God, and also upon the words of Zenock; and also he has appealed unto Moses, to prove that these things are true.

Comments

Verses 3–7 are grammatically awkward. For those wanting to make more sense of the verses, simply read verse 3 without the “as,” and it will work better.

The point of the verses is more important than their grammar. Amulek notes that they should have been taught of the coming Messiah. Alma₂ had taught them the principles of developing faith and had introduced the topic of the coming Messiah by turning to the scriptures, specifically the words of Zenos and Zenock, both prophets whose writings were recorded on the brass plates.

That synopsis of what Alma₂ had taught them prepares Amulek for what he wants to teach them in the next verses.

Alma 34:8

8 And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

Comments

Amulek declares: “I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true.” The phrase “of myself” refers to his personal understanding. He is not teaching something only because he has heard it from others, but because he, himself, knows it.

In this, he echoes Alma₂’s teaching in Alma 5:46: “I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit.” Amulek is not teaching because Alma₂ said so, but because Amulek, as did Alma₂, had learned it for himself. Thus, he can be the second witness to the truthfulness of what Alma₂ taught.

Alma 34:9–11

9 For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

10 For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice.

11 Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay.

Comments

There is certainly much that we do not learn here about the Zoramite religion. Most famously we learn of their rameumptom (an elevated place in their synagogue; Alma 31:21), but we also learn that they “bow[ed] down to dumb idols” (Alma 31:1). Although that doesn’t tell us much, it may be the explanation for the specifics of verses 10 and 11. As part of the explanation for what the coming Messiah will do, Amulek teaches that there must be an atonement, which is “a great and last sacrifice.” Then he tells them what the sacrifice cannot be: “not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice.”

Why explain what not to do? It is possible that in the acceptance of the dumb idols, the Zoramites had also accepted forms of sacrifice to those idols. Against a Mesoamerican background, the indigenous gods did receive sacrifices of beasts or fowl, and they did receive human sacrifices. These verses make most sense in the context of what they might actually have been doing, rather than a theoretical prohibition of things they had never even thought of.

Next, we have: “there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another.” That also fits a Mesoamerican context where the stories depicted on carved stones tell of kings and queens performing sacrifices that would shed their own blood.

In a Mesoamerican context, it would appear that the Zoramites had syncretized their beliefs with Mesoamerican religions and had accepted many of their practices. Amulek is declaring that those religions practices, even if thought to be similar to the Messiah’s atoning sacrifices, were not the same and could not provide eternal redemption.

Alma 34:12–14

12 But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.

13 Therefore, it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away.

14 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

Comments

Verse 11 had noted that : “there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another.” Verse 12 expands that understanding. The law required that one who murdered should pay with his own life, but that, in itself, did not absolve any other person. Although the murderer died, he died for his own sin. The impossibility of a human atoning for another human leads to the conclusion that “there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.”

What is an “infinite atonement”? It is, foremost, “a great and last sacrifice.” However, the sacrifice to create an “infinite atonement” also requires an infinite being. Thus, “that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.” Only an infinite being could sacrifice himself to create an infinite atonement.

Alma 34:15–17

15 And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you;

Comments

In Mosiah 15:9, we also see that the atonement would straddle the demands of “justice” and “mercy.” Those are two terms that the Book of Mormon assumes that we understand, as they are not defined. Justice applies the penalties of the law, according to the law. Mercy allows for circumstances that might allow the penalties of the law to be voided. Because both justice and mercy relate to the law, they are difficult to reconcile. It is difficult to have justice and mercy simultaneously.

Amulek teaches that the infinite atonement reconciles the two by providing a vicarious acceptance of the penalty of the law, while allowing humankind access to mercy, which is allowed because of the vicarious satisfaction of that justice. Thus, humankind has access to both the benefits of the law (justice), and the wisdom of mercy. Humankind can repent, and specifically, the people to whom Amulek is preaching can repent; they can “begin to exercise . . . faith unto repentance.”

Amulek notes that, because of the principle of repentance, they are able to call upon their God to apply the atonement. Having noted that they might begin repenting, he will next explain how they might do that.

Alma 34:18–27

18 Yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save.

19 Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him.

20 Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks.

21 Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

22 Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.

23 Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

24 Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.

25 Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

26 But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness.

27 Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Comments

In Alma 33:4–11, Alma₂ quoted Zenos concerning where one might pray. Amulek now explains what they should pray about. Unlike Zenos’s instructions, Amulek’s instructions do not appear to echo a poem or a hymn. There are clearly similarities in the structure of the lines, but these are similarities of repetition, without paying attention to other forms. There are no real meaningful couplets, nor structural functions. They are powerful instructions, but they appear to be Amulek’s words, given as part of the sermon, and not an inserted poem or hymn.

Even though the instructions were given over two thousand years ago, they remain pertinent to all who desire to call upon the mercy of the Lord.

Alma 34:28–30

28 And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted,

and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.

29 Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men.

30 And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance.

Comments

The most important element of faith mentioned was giving place to belief. It is not the thought, but the action that moves from faith to greater faith. Therefore, after teaching about where, and about what, to pray, Amulek moves to the more important teaching: “do not suppose that this is all.” There are elements of true religion that must be practiced. Note that they are told, “If ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need.” These are important aspects of Christian religion. They are important aspects of Nephite religion. They are doubtless things that the Zoramites have practiced against these people. They, of all people, should understand that they should treat others as they themselves would wish to be treated.

When faith is put into action, it can combine with the scriptures to provide sufficient witnesses that one is moved to repentance, and the atonement is applied.

Alma 34:31–32

31 Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

32 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

Comments

Having taught what should be done, Amulek encourages his audience to actually do what he has taught. Although Amulek says that they should “harden not your hearts any longer,” this is a people who had come in humility, desiring a change. Thus, this is not a call to repent of wrongdoing, but perhaps of not doing. They have felt that they couldn’t worship God without a proper place, and they have now been taught that the place is much less important than the state of the heart.

What should modern members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints understand when Amulek says that “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God”? Is there not opportunity in the

next life to repent and grow prior to the time of the final judgment? Yes, there is, but that isn't what Amulek is teaching.

Alma₂ also taught that “this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God” (Alma 12:24). Alma₂ and Amulek are focused on what people should do in this life, not the next. We do not know if they had an understanding of how the gospel might be preached to the dead, and in the world that they knew, it was not really an issue. In the ancient world, there were often fewer choices in what one believed. One believed what everyone else believed. Therefore, because Nephites had the gospel, and the people of Antionum once had that gospel, it was important for them to act in this life.

In particular, the people who were cast out of Zoramite worship had a clear choice. They could continue in their unsatisfactory relationship with the Zoramites, or they could follow God. That was a question they needed to answer in this life. Even when we do take the next life into account, it is still true that what we do on earth matters. It is still a place where we have come to perform our labors. Those labors will factor into our final judgment.

Alma 34:33–36

33 And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

34 Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.

35 For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.

36 And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.

Comments

The scriptures never suggest that one need not obey the gospel because there will be another chance to do so in the next life. That would suggest that there was very little reason to have the gospel in this life. What the scriptures teach is that there is certainly value in living according to the gospel.

Therefore, Amulek teaches that it is important to act upon the knowledge of the gospel that we receive in this life. His audience has asked for the opportunity to have faith, and they have been taught about the Redeemer in whom they should have faith. Thus, they are placed in a position where they must act. They cannot procrastinate by suggesting that maybe it will be more convenient later.

The important teaching is that “that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.” We are who we have learned to become in this life. Perhaps there will be some who will be surprised to find themselves in the next life, but if they will be surprised at where they are, they will not be surprised at who they are.

If we are not the kind of person who can dwell in a kingdom of glory, then we will have become the kind of person that cannot dwell in holy temples, and therefore, we will belong to the spirit of the devil.

Alma 34:37–41

37 And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye should remember these things, and that ye should work out your salvation with fear before God, and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ;
38 That ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you.

39 Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing.

40 And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them;

41 But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.

Comments

These words conclude Amulek’s sermon. There is no chapter break at this point, and the next chapter moves to the events that followed these sermons. These people who have come to Alma₂ were among the few converts that Alma₂ and his brethren make in the land of Antionum.

The conclusion to the sermon is that the people remember the important aspects of Nephite religion, primarily, that they “should no more deny the coming of Christ.” This is a humbled people who do not appear to have had a desire to continue to do as the Zoramites did, so this is an exhortation not to return to old ways and beliefs, but to continue their process of developing faith.

When Amulek shorts them “to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions,” that is simply language parallel to the better-known admonition to “endure to the end.” As Nephi put it: “And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it” (2 Nephi 9:24).

Alma 35

Zoramite Leaders Kick Out the Believers

Alma 35:1–7

1 Now it came to pass that after Amulek had made an end of these words, they withdrew themselves from the multitude and came over into the land of Jershon.

2 Yea, and the rest of the brethren, after they had preached the word unto the Zoramites, also came over into the land of Jershon.

3 And it came to pass that after the more popular part of the Zoramites had consulted together concerning the words which had been preached unto them, they were angry because of the word, for it did destroy their craft; therefore they would not hearken unto the words.

4 And they sent and gathered together throughout all the land all the people, and consulted with them concerning the words which had been spoken.

5 Now their rulers and their priests and their teachers did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people.

6 And it came to pass that after they had found out the minds of all the people, those who were in favor of the words which had been spoken by Alma and his brethren were cast out of the land; and they were many; and they came over also into the land of Jershon.

7 And it came to pass that Alma and his brethren did minister unto them.

Comments

What Alma, and his brethren had taught in Antionum was contrary to, and totally incompatible with, the teachings of the Zoramites. Therefore, when the Zoramites learn of those who had been converted to the Nephite religion, they did not attempt to integrate them into their society, but rather cast them out.

When the converts from the land of Antionum were cast out, they went to the next nearest Nephite land, which was Jershon. Jershon was the land where the Ammonites had settled. The Ammonites were the former Anti-Nephi-Lehies who had covenanted not to bear arms. Thus, this land that did not have its own natural protecting army accepted immigrants who needed to be integrated into their populations

and given land to improve and cultivate. What is even more important is that it is the land Jershon, which is next to the land of Antionum. That fact becomes critical in the next events.

Zoramites Become Lamanite Allies

Alma 35:8–12

8 Now the people of the Zoramites were angry with the people of Ammon who were in Jershon, and the chief ruler of the Zoramites, being a very wicked man, sent over unto the people of Ammon desiring them that they should cast out of their land all those who came over from them into their land.

9 And he breathed out many threatenings against them. And now the people of Ammon did not fear their words; therefore they did not cast them out, but they did receive all the poor of the Zoramites that came over unto them; and they did nourish them, and did clothe them, and did give unto them lands for their inheritance; and they did administer unto them according to their wants.

10 Now this did stir up the Zoramites to anger against the people of Ammon, and they began to mix with the Lamanites and to stir them up also to anger against them.

11 And thus the Zoramites and the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of Ammon, and also against the Nephites.

12 And thus ended the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Alma's fear that "the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites" (Alma 31:4), led to the mission to the Zoramites. While that mission had some success, it was a failure in its larger intent to prevent the Zoramites from entering into agreements with the Lamanites.

Verse 12 concludes the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges. The events of that year began to be discussed in Alma 30:5. At that time, Mormon recorded that "in the commencement of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges, there was continual peace." The declaration of continual peace in the Book of Mormon is a sure signal that the peace will end. It was an eventful year that began with the case of Korihor and ends with the Zoramites stirring the Lamanites to war. The danger of this war is perhaps worse than those which had gone on before it; the loss of Antionum, as a defense on the southeast, opens the way to the next Nephite land, which is Jershon, the least well defended Nephite land because the majority of its inhabitants were unavailable to be called to arms in order to repel an attack.

Alma 35:13

13 And the people of Ammon departed out of the land of Jershon, and came over into the land of Melek, and gave place in the land of Jershon for the armies of the Nephites, that they might contend with the armies of the Lamanites and the armies of the Zoramites; and thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges; and an account shall be given of their wars hereafter.

Comments

The danger of the combination of the Zoramites and the Lamanites to the southeastern part of Nephite lands was so clear that the people of Ammon were moved to the land of Melek. That seems like a simple and effective solution, but it assumes that modern readers understand the more ancient agricultural societies. By leaving the land, the Ammonites left their crops. While they certainly harvested what they could, and would certainly begin farming again as soon as possible, the movement to a new land meant that they had to start over and that there was less land available on which to grow food.

The combination of the move and the need to start farming from scratch would immediately diminish some of the food available to support the army in what would become a protracted war.

Mormon tells his readers that he is going to give more attention to this war when he declares that “an account shall be given of their wars hereafter.” He also knows that he has accounts of Alma₂’s blessings to his sons that he wants to include in his record, and he will place those in the record prior to returning to the war in Alma 43:3.

Alma₂ and Companions Return to Zarahemla

Alma 35:14–16

14 And Alma, and Ammon, and their brethren, and also the two sons of Alma returned to the land of Zarahemla, after having been instruments in the hands of God of bringing many of the Zoramites to repentance; and as many as were brought to repentance were driven out of their land; but they have lands for their inheritance in the land of Jershon, and they have taken up arms to defend themselves, and their wives, and children, and their lands.

15 Now Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them; and having been to declare the word, or sent to declare the word, among all the people in every city; and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

16 Therefore, he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness. And we have an account of his commandments, which he gave unto them according to his own record.

Comments

Verses 14–16 transition from the historical record of the events of the seventeenth year of the reign of the judges to Alma₂'s blessings to his sons. The conclusion of the events of the missionary journey are repeated as a summary. Then, Mormon describes Alma₂ as grieving for the iniquity of his people, which has led to yet another war. The previous war in the fifteenth year was so devastating that both Mormon and Alma₂ commented on how terrible it was, even though Mormon included few details (see Alma 28). Now, in the beginning of the eighteenth year, they will see yet another devastating war.

Nevertheless, the lessons of the mission to the Zoramites are not yet ended. The final lessons will be seen in the teaching of Alma₂ to his son Corianton, but perhaps the danger of the coming war may have led Alma₂ to give what might be considered to be final father's blessings to his sons. Those blessings begin in the next chapter.

Alma 36

Alma 36: Header

The commandments of Alma to his son Helaman.

Comments

Mormon uses a header at the beginning of this chapter to signal that he is returning to Alma₂'s personal record. He has been mixing information from that record with historical information from the large plates in previous chapters. These chapters, which will record the blessings to his sons, will be heavily copied from Alma₂'s personal record. What we cannot know is whether Mormon copied all the available text or made selections. The much shorter blessing to the second son, Shiblon, perhaps suggests that Mormon is being selective.

Alma₂ Recounts His Conversion

Alma 36:1–2

1 My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.

2 I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.

Comments

Alma₂ begins his final blessing to his son, Helaman₁, with two important lessons from history. The first is the Nephite promise of the land. This is the essential New World covenant between Yahweh and the Nephite people. We first saw it in 1 Nephi 4:14, then again in 2 Nephi 1:20; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22 and 2:31. Other verses show the fulfillment of that covenant, both when the Nephites do prosper in the land, and when they do not because of transgression. Thus, the very first

thing Alma₂ declares to his son is the reiteration of the foundational principle of the Nephite nation and their covenant with Yahweh.

The second lesson is more personal. While Alma₂ himself was not in physical captivity, he was in spiritual captivity. His father, Alma₁, was in physical bondage. Whether in spiritual or physical captivity, Alma₂ reminds his son that his family's experiences underscore the deliverance from such captivity. Thus, even in the occasion when the Nephites do not sufficiently keep the commandments in order that they may prosper in the land, even when they fall into captivity because of unrighteousness, all is not lost. Yahweh is still willing to live up to his part of the covenant and deliver them upon the principle of repentance.

While the two verses appear to speak of different things, Alma₂ would have seen them as related. The first verse was the promise of prosperity if they keep the commandments, and the second was the hope of repentance and deliverance should they not.

Alma 36:3–4

3 And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

4 And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but of God.

Comments

Building upon his statement in verse 2, Alma₂ focuses on the fact that Yahweh can deliver one from bondage and trials. There is no promise that there will never be trials, but that Yahweh would support that individual through the trials and afflictions.

This is a lesson that Alma₂ learned the hard way, and as do most parents, he desires that Helaman, learn the important lesson without the pain that was involved when Alma₂ learned that lesson. He therefore emphasizes that this is not just theoretical knowledge, but it is also knowledge gained from personal experience. The phrase “I know of myself” has been used before to indicate personal knowledge, but in this case, it is used to contrast secular knowledge with spiritual knowledge. Alma₂'s understanding of the power of Yahweh's redemption is not academic, it was a personal and very powerful spiritual experience.

Alma 36:5–10

5 Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things; but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself;

6 For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

7 And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us.

8 But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel.

9 And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God.

10 And it came to pass that I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs.

Comments

One cannot imagine that this is the first time he repeats this story for anyone in his family. This must be a well-known story, and Alma₂ gives the story in brief form here to make a point beyond the reiteration of history. The message, in context, is the power of Yahweh to deliver from bondage. Alma₂ declared that Yahweh could do so in verse 2, and now provides the proof that it has happened.

The very fact that verse 6 notes that he and the sons of Mosiah₂ sought to destroy the church of God makes certain that the conditions of not obeying Yahweh's commandments would trigger the bondage of his soul. The process of redemption from that bondage required an angel and required that Alma₂ be so weakened as he battled in spirit that his mortal body lost strength.

The process of repentance is not always simple and is not often painless. The process can be difficult. It is the reward that makes the process worthwhile.

Alma 36:11–13

11 And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

12 But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

13 Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

Comments

Even though the physical manifestation of his spiritual struggle was weakness and perhaps an appearance of death, the internal struggle was intense: “my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.”

In verse 13, Alma₂ notes that he “had rebelled against my God.” This qualified him for the negative part of the promise, which was bondage or destruction if the Nephites did not keep their part of the covenant. Alma₂ is tying those first two verses into his explanation about his transcendental redemption.

Alma 36:14–16

14 Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

15 Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

16 And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

Comments

Alma₂ declares: “I had murdered many of his children.” That is not only harsh, but we have no other evidence for it. Even Alma₂ realized that his metaphor could be confusing, so he qualified it: “or rather led them away unto destruction.” He is not speaking of temporal murder, but of leading people into a possible spiritual death, a spiritual murder in his metaphor.

Alma₂’s sin was not simply personal, but he had actively taught against Yahweh’s word and led people astray. How ironic that it was the repentant Alma₂ who had to deal with Nehor and Korihor, two others who had similarly attempted to lead the Nephites away from Yahweh’s covenants. How painful must it have been for that same Alma₂ to see a repetition of his behavior in his son, Corianton, whose story begins in chapter 39.

Alma 36:17–20

17 And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

18 Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

19 And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

20 And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

Comments

Alma₂ set up his recounting of his experience by restating the foundational Nephite covenant, and by asking Helaman₁ to remember that his fathers had been delivered from bondage. He has used his personal experience to highlight spiritual bondage, and now concludes by reiterating the foundational Nephite religious teaching that redemption comes only through the atoning Messiah.

As Alma₂ was struggling in spirit, it was the Messiah who brought light and healing to his soul. In Alma₂'s use of this story, the understanding of the Messiah as the coming Redeemer becomes just as much a foundational principle as is the covenant of the land.

Alma 36:21–24

21 Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

22 Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

23 But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

24 Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Comments

The result of Alma₂'s deliverance from bondage was that he desired to tell others about it. As part of his redemption, he was also called as a prophet. Alma₂ declares that he had a similar visionary call to Lehi₁'s call. He saw: "God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God." That phrase is used in the report of Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 1:8. The report of that vision was clearly known in Alma₂'s day. Although we have it as part of the small plates, it was probably on the large plates as well.

Alma 36:25–30

25 Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors;

26 For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God.

27 And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.

28 And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time.

29 Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

30 But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his word.

Comments

The conclusion to this section of his blessing to Helaman₁ expresses his joy in the fruit of his labors. It is his testimony to his son that all his experiences really happened, and that they testify of Yahweh's ability to deliver.

With that theme, Alma₂ concludes by returning to the statement about deliverance in verse 2. In verses 28 and 29, Alma₂ specifically recalls the deliverance from Egypt and the Lehiite deliverance from Jerusalem. When he finishes recapitulating verse 2, he ends by returning to verse 1. He reiterates both the positive and the negative aspects of the foundational covenant of the land.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Alma₂ continues immediately to the text that we have as Alma 37.

Alma 37

Alma₂ Gives Helaman₁ the Records

Alma 37:1–5

1 And now, my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me;
2 And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept.

3 And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning—

4 Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.

5 And now behold, if they are kept they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness; yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ.

Comments

The first part of Alma₂'s blessing dealt with Helaman₁'s duty to God. This part is his duty to his people. The first duty is to keep a record, as Alma₂ has done. This refers to the large plates rather than the personal record on which this blessing was found. The large plates are the official record of the people, and those are now officially passed from Alma₂ to Helaman₁. In addition to the charge to write, there is a charge to preserve. As record keeper, there was a dual responsibility to both create a record and to preserve the records that had been passed down.

One of the important records in the collection was the brass plates. They were the same plates that Nephi had taken from Laban in Jerusalem, and which had come across the ocean. They preserved the genealogy of the forefathers, which was the link to the Old World and was probably considered to be one form of validation of the Nephite right to rule. These records were passed down through the kings or the official record keepers.

Verse 5 suggests that “if they are kept, they must retain their brightness.” Whether they are “bright” because of the doctrine they contain, or because they were cared for, or through some other means, the suggestion is that they were not tarnished by time. They were a record that was sacred not only for the text on them, but as a sacred artifact. In the Old World, Israel had the Arc of the Covenant containing important sacred relics. For the Nephites, the brass plates served that function, in addition to preserving the words of the Old World prophets.

Alma 37:6–7

6 Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

7 And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

Comments

Although we see the idea that small things may bring to pass great things in other statements in the Book of Mormon, the issue for this statement is not the meaning but rather *what* the “small and simple” thing was. The reference has to be the brightness of the brass plates mentioned in the previous verse (verse 5). The brass plates are undeniably old. They have been in the New World for nearly five hundred years at this point, and we have no way of knowing how old the oldest of the plates were when Nephi retrieved them from Laban.

Thus, they could be expected to be dimmed by time, yet they were not. It was not a big thing, but something Alma₂ considered “small and simple.” Nevertheless, the brightness served as a sign of their sacred value. Alma₂ uses the brass plates as his object lesson that “the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes.” At times there might be great miracles, but most often God works more subtly. Perhaps in our lives there are times when his hand is so subtle that we don’t even notice his guidance until long after the fact.

Alma 37:8–10

8 And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.

9 Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of

the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

10 And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer?

Comments

When the Spirit justified killing Laban to retrieve the brass plates, he said: “Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief” (1 Nephi 4:13). Alma₂ tells Helaman₁ that the brass plates have more than fulfilled their promise of preserving the teachings necessary to understand and fulfill their covenant with Yahweh, even more than just teaching the Nephites that the teachings of the brass plates had convinced “so many thousands of the Lamanites.”

The small and simple thing of preserving the brass plates led to the preservation of the covenant among the Nephites, the conversion of many thousands of the Lamanites, and the important teaching that they were “to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.” Alma₂ hopes that if those teaching can turn the hearts of many thousands of the Lamanites, they may also do so for those many Nephites who had been hardening their hearts against the Nephite teachings. The most recent and relevant example may have been the Zoramites in Antionum, but Alma₂ had given up the judgment seat to preach in other locations, such as Ammonihah.

Alma 37:11–15

11 Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear.

12 And it may suffice if I only say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God; for he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works, and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

13 O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.

14 And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him, that he may show forth his power unto future generations.

15 And now behold, I tell you by the spirit of prophecy, that if ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan, that he may sift you as chaff before the wind.

Comments

Although Alma₂ has hopes that the preservation of the records might also help turn the hearts of the Nephites who were falling away, he leaves that as his hope. What he knows is that the records are “preserved for a wise purpose.” The preserved records undoubtedly refer to more than the brass plates at this point. Alma₂ had begun by telling Helaman₁, as the record keeper, to continue to keep the large plates, and, at the end of this section, he is certainly returning to those plates, as well as to the more recently mentioned plates of brass.

When Alma₂ began speaking to Helaman₁ in our chapter 36, he began with the statement: “My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:1). The idea of Helaman₁ personally prospering was repeated in Alma 36:30. Now, in verse 13, Alma₂ again declares the foundational Nephite covenant: “If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.”

Verses 14 and 15 elaborate on the two aspects of the promise of the land. The first is that they will prosper upon principles of righteousness. Therefore, Helaman₁ is to keep the sacred records that will teach the people what they should do to remain faithful.

The negative aspect of the promise of the land is that if the people do not keep Yahweh’s commandments, they “shall be cut off from his presence.” Verse 15 declares that one way in which that will happen is that the people will have “these things which are sacred” taken away. Not having the scriptures, they will fall even farther from God and “shall be delivered up unto Satan.” Mormon, who was copying this statement from Alma₂’s record, would know that the Nephite people would eventually fulfill this sad prophecy. They would be destroyed, and the world (for over a thousand years) would not have access to any of their records.

Alma 37:16–20

16 But if ye keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you, (for you must appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them) behold, no power of earth or hell can take them from you, for God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words.

17 For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers.

18 For he promised unto them that he would preserve these things for a wise purpose in him, that he might show forth his power unto future generations.

19 And now behold, one purpose hath he fulfilled, even to the restoration of many thousands of the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; and he hath shown forth his power in them, and he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved.

20 Therefore I command you, my son Helaman, that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words, and that ye be diligent in keeping the commandments of God as they are written.

Comments

Although Mormon knew that the records would eventually be lost, that event was in Helaman₁'s distant future. For Helaman₁, his task in his lifetime was to ensure their preservation, that thereby his people would be able to retain their knowledge of their covenants with God, and to, particularly, retain their understanding of the coming Messiah.

Verse 19 shows that even at this time the Lord had let Alma₂ know that some form of their records would be preserved for the salvation of future populations just as they had served to convert the many thousands of the Lamanites during the mission of the sons of Mosiah₂.

Verse 20 ends the command to preserve the large plates and the brass plates. In the next verse, Alma₂ turns to yet another record.

Alma₂ Tells Helaman₁ about the Jaredite Plates

Alma 37:21–22

21 And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, all their murders, and robbings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters.

22 For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness, yea, work secret murders and abominations; therefore the Lord said, if they did not repent they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth.

Comments

When Alma₂ speaks of murders, robbings, and plunderings among the Jaredites, he uses similar language in ways that are typically applied to the Lamanites. These are definitions of the way that people can be contrary to God. However, the Jaredites, whose story is contained on the twenty-four plates of Ether, are even worse, for they have “their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed.” The Jaredites were a people who had once had a covenant with Yahweh, but who strayed from their covenants. They were destroyed. Thus, their works of darkness, if repeated, would lead to the destruction of the Nephites.

Even though King Mosiah₂ had read the translation of the plates, which had also been read to the people of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 28:11–18), Alma₂ considered the contents of the plates to be dangerous, and therefore will counsel Helaman₁ to keep that information from further public scrutiny.

Alma 37:23–25

23 And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.

24 And now, my son, these interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying:

25 I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.

Comments

King Mosiah₂ had translated the plates “by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow” (Mosiah 28:13). In verse 23, Alma₂ declares that there was a stone, “which shall shine forth in darkness unto light,” that could be used to discover the secret works of the Jaredites. In other words, the stone could be used to translate and interpret the plates.

Lest we become confused with the singular word *stone*, verse 24 clarifies that this named instrument, *Gazelem*, was “these interpreters [which] were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled.” These interpreters accompanied the plates from the time they were hidden, so that they might be understood (see Ether 4:5).

It should be noted that *Gazelem* may also refer to Joseph Smith as the future translator rather than be the name of the stone. There is no simple explanation for the singular word “stone” and the plural “interpreters.” Modern scholarly evidence indicates that Joseph Smith did use a singular stone during the translation, and perhaps this translation foreshadowed the use of the stone (singular) rather than the interpreters.

Alma 37:26–29

26 And now, my son, we see that they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed, and thus far the word of God has been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us.

27 And now, my son, I command you that ye retain all their oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall keep from this people, that they know them not, lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.

28 For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed.

29 Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people, and only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them; and ye shall teach them to abhor such wickedness and abominations and murders; and ye shall also teach them that these people were destroyed on account of their wickedness and abominations and their murders.

Comments

The twenty-four plates containing the book of Ether described the history and the secret abominations of the Jaredite people, secrets which brought about their destruction. Therefore, Alma₂ tells Helaman₁ to keep the information secret. Since the original plates could only be read by means of the interpreters, Helaman₁ is to keep the plates and the interpreters safe. However, Mosiah₂ had already made a translation, and while that translation is not mentioned specifically, it, too, would have had to have been kept from any further dissemination among the Nephites. Even when Mormon told the story from his perspective nearly five hundred years later, he declined to include that information during the story when he described Mosiah₂ reading it to the people (see Mosiah 28:19).

When Alma₂ says that “ye retain all their oaths” (verse 27), the intent of the word *retain* is to hold back, a usage that we see in describing a retaining wall.

Alma 37:30–31

30 For behold, they murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities; and the blood of those whom they murdered did cry unto the Lord their God for vengeance upon those who were their murderers; and thus the judgments of God did come upon these workers of darkness and secret combinations.

31 Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe.

Comments

Alma₂ continues to describe the sins of the Jaredites. One of the factors demonstrating how far they had gone away from God was that they had “murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities.” They not only would not repent, but they also killed those who preached repentance to them.

The only good lesson that Alma₂ takes from the Jaredites is associated with their bad example. When modern readers approach the book of Ether, we note the faith of the brother of Jared. We find inspiration in that early part of the text. Alma₂ did not focus on that part at all. There is no hint that the Jaredites were ever righteous. The message that Alma₂ took from the book of Ether, and the message that Mormon

will use as he shapes his own narrative, is that they were a people who abandoned God and whose secret combinations led to their destruction. They are the example of what such actions would mean for the Nephites, should they follow that path, which Alma₂ makes explicit in verse 31.

Alma 37:32–34

32 And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity.

33 Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.

34 Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls.

Comments

Alma₂ began transitioning from his declaration of the sins of the Jaredites to what Helaman₁ should do for his own people. Of course, the first message was to keep the Jaredite record from them so that they would not be tempted by the secret combinations. The next is to continue to preach repentance to the Nephite people. That shift in message is clear from verses 32 and 33. The lesson turns from the darker theme of the destruction of the Nephites to the more important theme of teaching the Nephites what is important.

Not only should they not learn to do as the Jaredites did, but there are also positive actions that they should learn to do; actions that will move them closer to Yahweh rather than further away. They are to be humble: humility contrasts with pride that exalts one person above another. The message that all should treat each other equally and respectfully is a theme that runs throughout the Book of Mormon.

They are to perform good works. Since this is linked, in verse 34, to being “meek and lowly in heart,” it suggests that the definition of good works is how we treat our fellow man. Verse 33 tied the phrase “meek and lowly in heart” to being humble, which is the opposite of Nephite pride. Nephite pride always took the form of social inequity, of thinking that one person was better than another. Thus, Alma₂ reaffirms the essentials of Nephite social understanding, and tells Helaman₁ to preach the fundamental principle of being humble and of doing good works.

Alma 37:35–37

35 O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.

36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Comments

What is Alma₂'s definition of wisdom? It is to keep the commandments of God. Alma₂ has already emphasized the Nephite promise of the land, which is that they will prosper if they keep the commandments. Alma₂ is telling Helaman₁ that he desires that he should prosper, both personally, and as a representative of his people. If they keep the commandments, they will prosper, therefore it is wise to do so.

On a personal level, how might one do that? Alma₂ suggests that it includes recognizing God's hand in one's life and keeping oneself open to God's influence. Therefore, one should pray ("cry unto God for all thy support") continually ("whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord"). One should listen for the answer to prayer ("counsel with the Lord in all thy doings") and if one's thoughts and actions are always guided by both the commandments and an openness to God's spirit, then one may "be lifted up at the last day."

Alma₂ Gives Helaman₁ the Liahona

Alma 37:38–42

38 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director—or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it.

39 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness.

40 And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

41 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey;

42 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

Comments

Verse 38 is the first time we learn that the “ball, or director” had been called the Liahona. Why does this information come so late in the text? Part of the answer is that it may or may not have been mentioned in the part of the translation of Mormon’s text that was lost (the 116 pages). Perhaps it was known then. Nevertheless, it was apparently known better as the “ball or director,” since that is the term Alma₂ expects Helaman₁ to know. The name *Liahona* was apparently a word with a lost meaning, as Alma₂ declares that it means, “being interpreted, a compass.” Rather than an object name, it may have simply been a description in a language, or at least a word in that language, which had lost its meaning by Alma₂’s day, where the word “ball, or director” had not.

Verses 39 through 42 recount the way that the Liahona worked. Alma₂ tells this part of the story to Helaman₁ because by his day the Liahona was simply a sacred artifact. It appears to have ceased to function in the New World. Thus, Helaman₁ may not have understood what its original function was. Alma₂ needs to make certain that Helaman₁ knows how it worked so that it can become the object lesson he wants to teach.

Alma 37:43–47

43 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.

44 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.

45 And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

46 O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever.

47 And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober. My son, farewell.

Comments

Alma₂ specifically declares that the Liahona is a “shadow.” That word is often linked with “type,” as in “type and shadow.” The meaning is that it is a symbol, or a type, of something else. In this case, the physical

artifact becomes a model for the spiritual relationship one has with the God to whom one is to pray and whose commandments are to be kept (the subject of verses 38–42 above).

The lesson is that the Liahona could guide their fathers to food, or the correct path, but that it required faith to make it work, and it required faith to look to the Liahona to learn what the correct path might be. Thus, “it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss.”

In Lehi₁'s dream, the guide for the path was the iron rod. It led to the joy of the fruit of the tree of life. Alma₂ does not use that imagery, but rather uses the Liahona to serve that same function. Perhaps the Liahona was among the sacred records that had been entrusted to Helaman₁, and therefore it was something that may have been there in the room with them. That is conjecture. Regardless, the message was the same. There has been prepared for humanity both the way to life eternal, and the guide that will help point us while on the way.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 38

Alma 38: Header

The commandments of Alma to his son Shiblon.

Comments

Even though this chapter comes from the same source as the previous original chapter, it is given its own header. Mormon has included three instances of counsel to his three sons (to Helaman₁, chapters 36–37; to Shiblon in this chapter; to Corianton, chapters 39–42) because they suit Mormon’s purposes, which differed from the original reason Alma₂ provided the counsel. It is possible that one of the reasons for the separate headers has to do with the names of the sons. Mormon has used names as a means of reinforcing his message, and it is possible that we are seeing him do that with the three sons.

Helaman₁ is a good Nephite name, and Helaman₁ is a good son. There is nothing negative about Helaman₁ in the counsel given to him.

Shiblon, the subject of this chapter’s instance of counsel, which is by far the shortest, is an interesting case. He is also a good son, but he will be warned against the very actions that will be the subject of Corianton’s counsel.

Unlike the name Helaman₁, Corianton is very much a Jaredite name, and Mormon uses Jaredite names to suggest those who have strayed from the proper path. That defines Corianton. The name Shiblon represents ambivalence. A shiblon is a measure of value (which Mormon made sure to include, see Alma 11:15). However, it is also a Jaredite name. Shiblon, therefore, symbolically represents the middle between Helaman₁ and Corianton. He is good but must be cautioned against temptation.

Mormon intends his readers to be able to see themselves among these three types (or models). What will be most important in these types is that should we see ourselves in Corianton’s shoes, we will be able to take heart when we remember that Corianton repented and was later a faithful missionary, as we shall see.

Alma₂ Counsels Shiblon

Alma 38:1–2

1 My son, give ear to my words, for I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence.

2 And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end.

Comments

Shiblon's counsel is so much shorter than that given to his two brothers that it is difficult to explain. One explanation is that, at least in Shiblon's case, he may have been present when Alma₂ spoke to Helaman₁. That would allow us to see this opening line of "I say unto you, even as I said unto Helaman₁," as a simple application of part of what he told Helaman₁. Thus, the blessing or counsel begins in the same way for both: "inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land."

Giving both the positive and negative aspects of the promise of the land is particularly important for Shiblon, considering that he will represent both being righteous and being cautious on that path, rather than being led away.

The beginning of this counsel is all positive: "I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God." Even with that positive beginning, there is still the caution: "I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments." Shiblon may be used for the modern reader as the example of those who are righteous, but we must continue to work at our righteousness. We are tempted, but we must avoid those temptations.

Alma 38:3–5

3 I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.

4 For I know that thou wast in bonds; yea, and I also know that thou wast stoned for the word's sake; and thou didst bear all these things with patience because the Lord was with thee; and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.

5 And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Comments

Alma₂ had taken Shiblon with him to Antionum, but Mormon did not give us any details about Shiblon's experiences there. Clearly, Shiblon was separated from his father, perhaps preaching in a different location, and Shiblon's experience differed from the one Mormon selected for Alma₂ and Amulek's teachings on faith and the conversion of those who later went to Jershon. Shiblon's experience had stones thrown at him.

We should not read this as the same as stoning in the New Testament, as that was a form of execution, and Shiblon was clearly still alive. Therefore, we are seeing the word used in translation and therefore, with the meaning of having stones thrown as a sign of rejection rather than as a method of capital punishment.

Alma₂ will use this experience as an object lesson. When Alma₂ taught Helaman₁, Alma₂ invoked the bondage of the fathers as background to his own spiritual bondage. Here, Alma₂ uses Shiblon's personal physical bondage as the backdrop to the same story of Alma₂'s deliverance from spiritual bondage.

Alma 38:6–9

6 Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me; for if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things.

7 But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people; yea, and I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me, and his voice was as thunder, and it shook the whole earth.

8 And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.

9 And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn of me that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.

Comments

Nearly the whole of our chapter 36 of Alma₂ is devoted to Alma₂'s description of his conversion story to Helaman₁. John W. Welch has formatted that chapter as a long chiasmus, or a poetic form that begins and moves to a central text and then takes each point and essentially repeats it in reverse until the last line parallels the first. That is a complex and beautiful passage. Shiblon gets the same story in only four verses.

We should not suppose that Alma₂ cares less for Shiblon. Alma₂'s conversion story was certainly known to his sons, and it appears in their blessings and father's counsel as part of the moral lessons. Perhaps it was unnecessary to give the longer version to Shiblon, if Shiblon were actually present for the first recitation.

If he was not, perhaps Alma₂ simply wrote the incident more simply as he recorded it and Shiblon did receive the very same recitation. Clearly, Alma₂ intended that the opening admonition to both Helaman₁ and Shiblon be about the same topics. Perhaps they were, in their oral form, closer than what Alma₂ eventually wrote down.

Alma 38:10–15

10 And now, as ye have begun to teach the word even so I would that ye should continue to teach; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things.

11 See that ye are not lifted up unto pride; yea, see that ye do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength.

12 Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love; see that ye refrain from idleness.

13 Do not pray as the Zoramites do, for ye have seen that they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom.

14 Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.

15 And may the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people. Be sober. My son, farewell.

Comments

Alma₂'s blessing and counsel to Helaman₁ spoke to Helaman₁ as a person, but also as a record keeper with a responsibility to the people. Shiblon does not share those responsibilities, but he is still given a personal blessing. It is interesting that although Alma₂ has already praised him and indicated that he knows that he will have joy in Shiblon (see verse 2), these admonitions are for what he should not do, rather than a list of things that he should do, as was given to Helaman₁.

Perhaps Alma₂ saw this as a complementary blessing to Helaman₁. Where that blessing gives a “do this” list, Shiblon’s blessing gives a “don’t do this” list. Both are applicable to all modern readers. There are things we should do, and things we should not.

As noted in the discussion of the header for this chapter, it is also possible that Mormon is using these blessings as types for his readers, and that he had edited this blessing to have Shiblon as the representative of so many of us who are basically faithful, but who might be tempted by the things of the world.

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 39

Alma₂ Counsels Corianton (Chapters 39–42)

Alma 39: Header

The commandments of Alma to his son Corianton.

Comments

As with the last two headers at the beginning of the 1830 chapters, this one marks the blessing of a son of Alma₂. In the 1830 edition, each of the sons had a single chapter marked by a header indicating to which son the blessings and counsel were extended. The most extensive comments are given to Corianton, which will include not only an admonition for his sins but will also include significant doctrinal explanation. Orson Pratt split this information into several chapters. The original included our chapters 39 through 42. When chapter 42 ends, Mormon will return to using the large plates as the primary source for his text.

As with the counsel to his brothers, Alma₂'s counsel to Corianton was taken from Alma₂'s personal record rather than from the large plates.

Alma 39:1–2

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?

2 For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites. Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.

Comments

The introduction to Alma₂'s counsel to Corianton suggests that perhaps all the brothers were present at the same time for these blessings and counsels. Shiblon received a shorter version of Alma₂'s conversion story, and Alma₂ skips the introduction he had used for both Helaman₁ and Shiblon. Both of those sons

were basically faithful, but Corianton is more problematic. Therefore, there is more to be said, perhaps because Corianton needs more counsel.

When Alma₂ asks if Corianton has observed the steadiness and faithfulness of his brother, it appears that he is speaking of Shiblon. That will be appropriate because Corianton's issues began when preaching to the Zoramites. Helaman₁ did not go to the Zoramites, but Shiblon did, and Alma₂ praised his efforts there in spite of having been driven out when people threw stones at him (see Alma 38:4). Shiblon's example among the Zoramites will contrast with Corianton's experience among the same people.

Note that Corianton “[did] go about boasting in [his] strength and [his] wisdom.” Alma₂ had made a point of telling Shiblon that he should not “boast in [his] own wisdom, nor of [his] much strength.” Thus, Alma₂ sets up Shiblon as one who was tempted with the same temptations as was Corianton, but he did not succumb to them.

Corianton and His Sin

Alma 39:3–6

3 And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

4 Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted.

5 Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

6 For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness.

Comments

Verse 5 is often read in the context of verses 3 and 4, and the suggestion is that immorality is a sin “above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost.” That cannot be the complete reading. Although immorality is certainly classified as sin, it is certainly one of which complete repentance is possible. The text should be read in a different light.

The common reading hinges on the word “harlot,” but we do not know what that meant for this event, or what Corianton did. The only thing that the text says is that he forsook his ministry to follow her. If we remove the versification, we have: “Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted. Know ye not,

my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord?” The immediate reference for that which is an abomination is his not tending to the ministry, which does not specifically have anything to do with Isabel.

Why was his sin so bad? In verse 11 we will learn that “when [the Zoramites] saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.” Corianton not only abandoned his ministry, but he caused others to harden their hearts and miss an opportunity to repent. To understand why this sin might have been next to murder, we remember Alma₂ suggesting that during his own time of rebellion, he “had murdered many of [God’s] children, or rather led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14). Corianton had committed a similar crime. Alma₂ personally understood the gravity of that sin, and the cost of repenting from it. As he says in verse 6, “it is not easy for him, who commits such a crime, to obtain a forgiveness.”

Alma 39:7–9

7 And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good.

8 But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

9 Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

Comments

Alma₂ knows that Corianton had committed a serious sin: “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime.” Alma₂ gained that knowledge from personal experience, for in his rebellious time he had committed the same sin of leading the children of God astray. Alma₂ also understood that repentance is possible from even that sin; he turns to working with Corianton in order to make repentance possible for Corianton.

The idea that one would “cross yourself in all these things,” is an awkward phrase of imprecise connotation. However, the clear meaning, in the context of verse 9, is to stop doing something that is not right. If it held the meaning that Catholics use to ascribe making the sign of the cross, it would have been to symbolically accept Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

It is unlikely that it meant making the sign of the cross, because the cross never became a religious symbol for the Nephites. Nephi saw that Christ would be crucified, but the transformation of the cross from instrument of death to symbol of resurrection is a New Testament process, and not one we see in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon peoples never experienced the death of their God, only his impressive and glorious descent and appearance around the temple in the land of Bountiful (1 Nephi 11:1). The use of this “cross yourself” is most likely due to the more modern translation.

Alma 39:10–11

10 And I command you to take it upon you to counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel.

11 Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.

Comments

Alma₂ ends his plea for Corianton to repent by sending him to his elder brothers for counsel. At the end of both the counsel to Helaman₁ and Shiblon, Alma₂ had said “farewell.” There must have been some foreknowledge that Alma₂ would not be around for much longer. For that reason, he sends Corianton to his faithful brothers.

The counsel has been to repent, and now the admonition is to cease to “be led away by any vain or foolish thing,” including whatever it meant to go after “those wicked harlots.” That was certainly a part of his sin, even if the greater sin was leading to the hardening of hearts. It was his bad example that was the problem. Modern readers also understand how difficult it is to follow leaders who fail to live up to their stated ideals. When that occurs within the Church, it is particularly difficult and may lead to many hardening their hearts. Those who do so are in great sin.

Alma 39:12–14

12 And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities;

13 That ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly; but rather return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done.

14 Seek not after riches nor the vain things of this world; for behold, you cannot carry them with you.

Comments

Alma₂ reiterates the most grievous of Corianton’s sins. Alma₂ tells Corianton that he should “lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly.” Following after harlots was bad enough. The real sin was causing others to do wickedly. Alma₂ commands Corianton to begin the repentance process by returning to those he had wronged and to acknowledge what he had done. Why would Alma₂ give this counsel? Because Alma₂ himself had lived it. Alma₂ had done the very thing Corianton had done in leading people to do wickedly

(even though nothing was ever said about Alma₂ and harlots). Alma₂'s repentance led him to a desire to preach in order to recover those he had led away. The sons of Mosiah₂ were led to teach the Lamanites, perhaps because some of what they taught had been an emulation of Lamanite ideas.

Alma₂ knows that Corianton can be redeemed. Alma₂ was. The sons of Mosiah₂ were. They had similarly led people astray. Alma₂ knows the way back through his own personal, painful experience.

Alma₂ Explains Why Christ's Coming Was Revealed in Advance

Alma 39:15–16

15 And now, my son, I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people.

16 And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people, to prepare their minds; or rather that salvation might come unto them, that they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming.

Comments

There is no way that Alma₂ had forgotten to teach his sons about the coming of the Messiah. It was Corianton who had forgotten, or perhaps not fully understood, what he had been taught. One of the most obvious signs of Nephite apostasy was the rejection of the doctrine that teaches the need for the coming Messiah. It appears that Corianton had either become convinced of that idea, or, at least, was on the path to believing that a Messiah was not needed. Therefore, Alma₂ teaches about the coming Messiah.

Alma₂ reminds Corianton that his ministry was to declare that very message to the people. That was the ministry, and perhaps the belief, that he had abandoned.

Alma 39:17–19

17 And now I will ease your mind somewhat on this subject. Behold, you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand. Behold, I say unto you, is not a soul at this time as precious unto God as a soul will be at the time of his coming?

18 Is it not as necessary that the plan of redemption should be made known unto this people as well as unto their children?

19 Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?

Comments

When Alma₂ begins by saying that “you marvel why these things should be known so long beforehand,” he lets us know that Corianton has fallen into the common apostate arguments that anti-Messiah preachers have been using since Sherem by saying that one cannot know that Christ will come; it is too far in the future. Alma₂ will work to show Corianton that this isn’t the strong argument that he had thought it to be.

At the root of this question will be the nature of prophecy and communication with Yahweh. Alma₂ begins by setting the stage by suggesting that since the atonement is so important, should God not make it known? Doesn’t God have a responsibility to let his children know that the power of redemption will be manifest? Because it is in the future, God can do this only by sending “his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children.”

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. There is a shift to a slightly different topic. Alma₂ begins by explaining that it is right that God should announce the atoning mission of the Messiah. He will now move to explain the importance of that atoning mission. Because that created a shift in the topic, Orson Pratt separated it into a different chapter.

Alma 40

Alma₂ Teaches about Life after Death

Alma 40:1–3

1 Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead.

2 Behold, I say unto you, that there is no resurrection—or, I would say, in other words, that this mortal does not put on immortality, this corruption does not put on incorruption—until after the coming of Christ.

3 Behold, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. But behold, my son, the resurrection is not yet. Now, I unfold unto you a mystery; nevertheless, there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth them save God himself. But I show unto you one thing which I have inquired diligently of God that I might know—that is concerning the resurrection.

Comments

Perhaps one of the arguments that had been used to say that there was no reason to believe in a future atoning Messiah is that it would mean that there was no current ability to repent. It might have been argued that it was not fair of God to wait so long to allow people to repent. Of course, that is not the case, but it might have been the argument. To counter that argument, Alma₂ suggests that it might be based on a confusion between the atonement for spiritual death and the atonement for temporal death, which is the resurrection.

Therefore, Alma₂ says that there is no resurrection. At least, there is no resurrection yet. The Messiah will initiate a resurrection for all humankind, but it will not begin until that future mission. Perhaps Alma₂ had had the same kind of question, for he had “inquired diligently of God that [he] might know . . . concerning the resurrection.

The Spirit World

Alma 40:4–10

4 Behold, there is a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed.

5 Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

6 Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection.

7 And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?

8 Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.

9 Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know.

10 And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man.

Comments

This part of the discussion is both simple, and made more complex, because either Alma₂ or the translator lost temporary track of the development of the argument. In the simple form, it begins in verses 2 and 3. Those verses indicated that the resurrection would not begin until the Messiah fulfilled the atoning mission in the future. This means that for all, up until that time (at least), there is a time between mortal death and the bodily resurrection. The question that needs to be asked is “what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?”

The problem is that Alma₂ is also answering a tangential question, and that tangential question takes the logic off track somewhat. In verses 5 and 8 he discusses whether or not there is a single time of resurrection or multiple resurrections. His answer is that he doesn't know and that it doesn't really matter. For whatever reason, that intrusion in verse 5 gets repeated in verse 8, and verse 9 tries to pick up the question beginning in verse 8. The last part of verse 9 echoes Alma₂'s statement in verse 3—that this is something about which he has made a personal study.

Verse 10 concludes the question concerning how many times there will be a resurrection. We will know” when the time cometh.”

Alma 40:11–12

11 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this

mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life.

12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

Comments

Alma₂ finally moves to answer the question about what happens to the soul between mortal death and the resurrection. The first important understanding is that all souls continue to live. While modern revelation makes greater distinctions than did Alma₂, he simply declares that “the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life?”

There is a preliminary judgment that separates the good from the evil, and each is given a place. The good are in a “state of happiness, which is called paradise.” The evil will be discussed in the next verses.

Alma 40:13–14

13 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.

14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

Comments

Alma₂'s understanding of the time between death and the resurrection is more of a duality than is our modern understanding of it. We might recognize his paradise, but his description of the fate of the wicked, or the evil, is described as the opposite of paradise. That is appropriate for his understanding that there is only good and evil. That this idea doesn't correspond to modern revelation is not surprising. It is sufficient for that earlier time, and is enriched by our modern revelation, not completely contradicted by it. Alma₂ understood that the good are in a paradise, and that the wicked are on a location that is opposite to that.

For both those who were good as well as those who were evil, this situation will remain until the time of their resurrection, which cannot begin until after the Messiah's atoning mission.

There Will Be a First Resurrection

Alma 40:15–18

15 Now, there are some that have understood that this state of happiness and this state of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection. Yea, I admit it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul and their consignation to happiness or misery, according to the words which have been spoken.

16 And behold, again it hath been spoken, that there is a first resurrection, a resurrection of all those who have been, or who are, or who shall be, down to the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

17 Now, we do not suppose that this first resurrection, which is spoken of in this manner, can be the resurrection of the souls and their consignation to happiness or misery. Ye cannot suppose that this is what it meaneth.

18 Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body, of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ.

Comments

Alma₂ now picks up on the question that had sidetracked him somewhat in verses 5 and 8. There are some who have taught that the rising of the soul is a resurrection. Apparently, they mistook the continuation of the soul as a form of resurrection. Alma₂ “admit[s] it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul,” but declares that this is not the real definition of the resurrection. Rather, “it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body.”

Alma 40:19–21

19 Now, whether the souls and the bodies of those of whom has been spoken shall all be reunited at once, the wicked as well as the righteous, I do not say; let it suffice, that I say that they all come forth; or in other words, their resurrection cometh to pass before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of Christ.

20 Now, my son, I do not say that their resurrection cometh at the resurrection of Christ; but behold, I give it as my opinion, that the souls and the bodies are reunited, of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven.

21 But whether it be at his resurrection or after, I do not say; but this much I say, that there is a space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

Comments

The reunion of body and soul begins with the resurrection of the Messiah, but Alma₂ still doesn't understand whether all who have died by the time of the Messiah's resurrection will be resurrected at that same time, or if there will be some whose length of time between death and resurrection would be extended, while others had already begun to be resurrected. Alma₂ says that he believes that those who are righteous will be resurrected at that time, but "whether it be at his resurrection or after, [he does] not say."

Regardless of the timing, however, there is a space between temporal death and the resurrection, and there will be a time after the resurrection when the reunited soul and body are brought to stand before God to be judged and assigned to a final state.

Alma₂ Introduces His Concept of Restoration

Alma 40:22–26

22 Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets.

23 The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

24 And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets—
25 And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God.

26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup.

Comments

Alma₂ begins to teach a doctrine that he calls restoration. It is a concept that we understand, but that we do not discuss in the same way. The real elaboration of that doctrine comes in the next chapter, which was not originally a separate chapter. This introduction to the doctrine of restoration and its elaboration in the next chapter really do belong together.

The beginning of the concept of restoration is modeled after the physical resurrection. Thus "every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame." Modern readers will see this as part of the definition of resurrection, but Alma₂ sees it as a type for the spiritual aspect of resurrection. After all, it is not only

the body that is restored to the soul, but the soul to the body. Both the body and soul undergo a restoration, where that which happened on earth will be restored both physically and spiritually.

The good are restored to the good which they have done. The evil are restored to the evil which they have done. In other words, the kind of person we become during our time on earth will dictate the kind of person we are when we continue after death. “That same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world” (Alma 34:34).

Alma 41

Alma₂ Elaborates His Doctrine of Restoration

Alma 41:1–2

1 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the restoration of which has been spoken; for behold, some have wrested the scriptures, and have gone far astray because of this thing. And I perceive that thy mind has been worried also concerning this thing. But behold, I will explain it unto thee.

2 I say unto thee, my son, that the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself.

Comments

The doctrine of restoration was introduced in Alma 40:22–23. In verse 1 of this chapter, Alma₂ indicates that he is presenting this information because “some have wrested the scriptures, and have gone far astray because of this thing.” It was also a topic that concerned Corianton, and by implication it was one of the ideas that had caused him to go astray. It should be reiterated that we must remember that this is a different use of the term restoration than what we typically hear. This is not the restoration of the gospel, but rather the restoration of the immortalized body and the deeds of mortality to the eternal soul.

In verse 2, Alma₂ sets the stage for the discussion. Restoration is “requisite with the justice of God.” It is requisite, or required, by justice. In the first part of the argument, Alma₂ begins with the restoration of the body to the spirit. This is the physical resurrection, where the spirit again becomes flesh, with all of aspects of the mortal body restored to the soul after the resurrection. They are restored, hence the doctrine of restoration.

Alma 41:3–5

3 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

4 And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame—mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on one hand, the other on the other—

5 The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

Comments

The first aspect of the doctrine of restoration was that the body would be restored to the eternal soul. The idea of restoration is that something that was important in this earth life will also be important in the next life, and therefore they are *restored* to the soul after death. The body is one of those things, but the deeds we have done in this life are also important, and they also affect our next life. Therefore, deeds are also restored.

In Alma₂'s language, good works are restored to good works, and evil works are restored as evil. That language simply means that what we do in this life determines the type of person we are, what our character is like. The habits and inclinations to do good will rise with us. The habits and inclinations to do evil will rise with us. This earth is important in that it develops our characters, and what we learn is restored to us in the next life.

As with other aspects of the gospel, Alma₂'s discussion deals in two opposite absolutes; good and evil. We should not see this restoration as counting deeds, but rather as representing what we have become. Thus, in verse 5, "The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil." What we have done in this life determines our desires, and we will have those same desires in the next life. That is the sense in which they are a restoration.

Alma 41:6–8

6 And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.

7 These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil.

8 Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved.

Comments

There is an important aspect of the restoration, and that is also part of the justice of God. It is just when the penalty is removed through the Atonement. Thus, repentance also places one in the position where they can have good restored to them. In verse 6, Alma₂ notes that those who have repented and desired righteousness will, therefore, have righteousness restored to them.

Alma₂ emphasizes his point about the repentant by listing them with the those who have desired good. While we understand that all must repent and none save Christ himself are sinless in this life—for his teaching purposes, Alma₂ uses two categories. For his purposes, it is important to note that those who are repentant and learn to desire righteousness have the very same reward as those who have no need of repentance. To the Lord, there is no difference. To us, that makes all the difference, because we may understand that even through our mistakes we may progress and learn and still have the same reward as those whom we might see as more righteous than ourselves.

The end of verse 8 is significant, but easier to understand if a single comma is added: “the way is prepared that whosoever will[,] may walk therein and be saved.” All who learn to desire the good may learn of the path to God, and walk it successfully.

Alma 41:9–10

9 And now behold, my son, do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine, which ye have hitherto risked to commit sin.

10 Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

Comments

Corianton had gone astray. That does not mean that he was past salvation. Alma₂ clearly believed that he could still repent. We will learn that he will indeed repent and become a faithful servant. Nevertheless, there is a conceptual problem with the true principle of repentance. While repentance can absolutely lead to the same blessings as those who had no need of repentance, there is a danger that one might justify oneself in continuing to commit sin with the expectation that we might simply repent in the future.

That very caution is manifested impactfully in verse 10: we cannot be restored from sin to happiness. The kind of happiness described is the kind of joy that was the result of eating the fruit of the Tree of Life in Lehi₁'s dream. It is that kind of joy, or happiness, that is the goal. Sin simply cannot get us there. Some sins might temporarily be more enjoyable than righteousness, but their resulting happiness is temporary and artificial.

Alma₂ cautions Corianton to take care to sin no more, else his process of repentance will be more difficult. If we put off our repentance too long, then our characters will be formed in such a way that divine happiness has not become our goal, and repentance will be that much more difficult; not impossible, but more difficult.

Alma 41:11–13

11 And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

12 And now behold, is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in an unnatural state, or to place it in a state opposite to its nature?

13 O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful.

Comments

Alma₂ describes mortality as “a state of nature,” “a carnal state,” and “without God in the world.” In his description of opposites, our mortality is opposite to immortality. Therefore, mortality is “naturally” given to being without God, where immortality is “naturally” the location and time being with God. Alma₂ creates that particular duality to emphasize the problem of procrastinating our repentance.

In verse 12, he notes that what is not restored is the “natural state.” Thus, the state of being without God cannot exist when we are in the state of being where God is. It is simply impossible, and therefore, a person who does not desire God cannot be restored to a person who does desire God.

Verse 13 reiterates the meaning of restoration. It takes a state that we have learned to be in, in this life, and it is restored to us on the other side of death. What we become in this world is critical for what we will be in the next.

Alma 41:14–15

14 Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

15 For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.

Comments

The conclusion of this lesson is that our ultimate goal should dictate our current actions. We need to know what we want to become, and to learn in this life to develop those characteristics that will lead us there. Therefore, Alma₂ tells Corianton that he should do those things that represent the good: “see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually.”

It is important to note that Alma₂ doesn't tell Corianton what he should *believe*, but rather what he should *do*. What we do is the best expression of what we truly believe.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. The next chapter continues Alma₂'s counsel to Corianton, simply moving to a new, but related, subject.

Alma 42

Alma₂ Teaches about Justice and Mercy

Alma 42:1

1 And now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.

Comments

Corianton's confusion about the nature of the gospel apparently had much to do with an understanding of the eternal purposes of God. He had denied the need for a Christ and Alma₂ responded to that issue in our chapter 40, which discussed the issue of the time gap between when a person would die and the future time when Christ would perform the atonement. Alma₂ introduced that chapter by saying that he knew that the issue was on Corianton's mind.

Chapter 41 begins with Alma₂ saying that he knew that Corianton was concerned with another issue of the next life, and so he explained the doctrine of restoration. Now, in chapter 42, Alma₂ again says that "I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind." This discussion will cover the justice of God in separating some people from the possible happiness that was previously discussed (see specifically Alma 41:5).

Alma 42:2–4

2 Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee. For behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground, from whence they were taken—yea, he drew out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life—

3 Now, we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit—

4 And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.

Comments

To understand the justice of God's punishment, Alma₂ finds that he must return to the way that opposition was set in motion for all of humankind. He returns to the Garden of Eden, a story that Corianton surely knows, and therefore Alma₂ gives only a brief outline. The part he chooses to tell is that after partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve had to be prevented from partaking of the fruit of the tree of life. This is the tree of life in the Garden, which has a slightly different imagery from the one in Lehi₁'s dream.

The elaboration of the meaning will come in verses 5 and 6, but Alma₂ sets up that meaning by suggesting that by forestalling eternal life, a time was created in which humankind could learn and, through repentance, still achieve that eternal life.

Alma 42:5–7

5 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.

6 But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man.

7 And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

Comments

The problem in Eden was that with agency and the imposition of opposition in all things, there was not only the possibility, but the probability, of sin. Had Adam and Eve eaten of the tree of life they would have lived forever. Without death, there was no boundary between mortality and immortality, and therefore no separation between the two in order that there would be a restoration. No restoration could be done, because nothing was lost that could be restored. Without dying, there is no resurrection — that is to say, with no death of the sinful life, there is no resurrection to new possibilities.

The blessing of prohibiting the partaking of the fruit of the tree of life was to allow for repentance. When Alma₂ says that “there was a time granted unto man to repent,” he refers to our mortal lives. In that time, we can learn the important lessons of mortality. Even when we sin, we can learn repentance. Then, because death ends that state, the doctrine of restoration allows what we have learned to rise with us and therefore, to lead us to an eternal life that is eternal in quality and not simply lengthy in time.

The conclusion of this discussion of the benefits of mortal death is that agency has time to work: “thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.”

Alma 42:8–10

8 Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

9 Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

10 Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

Comments

It seems contradictory to indicate that humanity should not be reclaimed from death when we know that humanity has been saved through the Atonement. Alma₂ knows that as well and has already taught about the timing of the resurrection and the doctrine of restoration. What Alma₂ is doing here is speaking of the necessity of a time between the fall and the eternal consequences of sin. When he says that it was “not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death,” he is saying that it was not expedient that man should be immediately reclaimed.

Verse 9 verifies this understanding. The soul could not die, and the fall brought physical and spiritual death. Alma₂ had already noted that had Adam and Eve immediately been given eternal life, they would have had no dividing line to separate their mortality from life with God. The merciful plan, however, provides that this life can be a place of agency, where we can learn to prepare for the next life. This life is “carnal, sensual, and devilish” only if we do not learn and do not repent while in it.

Alma 42:11–14

11 And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.

12 And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience;

13 Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.

14 And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence.

Comments

The question that Alma₂ is answering is how is it just that God punish the wicked if he saves the good. The simple answer to that is the plan of redemption, but Alma₂ cannot explain the justice of that plan without discussing what would happen in its absence. That is the reason that he “lay[s] aside” the plan of redemption. It is laid aside for the argument precisely because it is the answer to the argument. However, the reason that it is the answer is best seen when examining a world without the plan of redemption.

Thus, we have in verse 12 the condition where there was “no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience.” Agency virtually assured that we would disobey and therefore merit our fallen state. Without the plan of redemption, and with already having eternal life, we would be condemned forever, as there was no way to separate us from our sins (again, without the plan of redemption).

Without the barrier of death, there was no way to separate humankind from their life in the mortal state. Even repentance would be ineffective as there was no way to implement repentance because there was no barrier of death and subsequent resurrection that would allow for good changes in our behavior to be effective and for repented sins to be forsaken.

Alma₂ concludes that in that state, where humankind was subject to sin, but not to death, they “were in the grasp of justice.” Our actions would inevitably lead us away from God with no way of reconciliation. In those conditions, justice prevailed, and mercy had no ability to act.

Alma 42:15

15 And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

Comments

Alma₂ had “laid aside” the plan of redemption for the purposes of his discussion (see verse 11), but that left a rather bleak picture. Alma₂ inserts verse 15 to make sure that Corianton understands that there is a plan of redemption, and that the coming Messiah is central to that plan. It is the atonement that reconciles the problem of spiritual and temporal death and which “bring[s] about the plan of mercy, [and appeases] the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.”

Having made this insertion to verify that the bleak picture is not our reality, Alma₂ will continue with his discussion of how mercy and justice are both satisfied through the plan of redemption.

Alma 42:16–20

16 Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.

17 Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?

18 Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man.

19 Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder?

20 And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin.

Comments

Alma₂ has returned to his “what if” scenario. The thesis is that we cannot repent unless there is a punishment. How does that work? As a very mundane example, say there are two pencils on a table, and you pick up one and move it to a different table. Of what could you repent? Have you done anything wrong? There is no law, and certainly no punishment attached to the law, so your action is simply an action. There is nothing of which to repent.

That is the meaning of “how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” Each of those questions emphasizes the relationship not between sin and the law, but between repentance and the law. We do not think of that particular relationship, but that is the critical issue here.

Repentance is the engine that moves mortal humans from one state to another, such as from evil to good (complete opposites) or even from good to better. There is no way to make reasoned and purposeful judgments unless there is a law against which we may measure ourselves. Having the law teaches us what we should do and be. Repentance overcomes the penalties attached to disobeying that law.

Verses 18–20 reinforce that idea. Without a law to know what is good, and without a punishment to enforce it, how would we ever be able to use the law to progress?

Alma 42:21–23

21 And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?

22 But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law

inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

23 But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

Comments

Verse 21 sums up the hypothetical condition of a world without law and punishment. There would be nothing against which justice, or even mercy, could act. Justice and mercy would be meaningless.

However, “there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted.” This is where Alma₂ leaves the hypothetical argument and moves to explain how the plan of redemption has been implemented. The first important aspect of the plan is that there is a law, and a punishment. Those two things allow for repentance, as Alma₂ had explained in his hypothetical case in previous verses.

This plan of life and redemption is so important that it is part of the essential nature of God. As a just God, if justice were removed from his character, he would cease to be God. This is the crux of Corianton’s issue. He apparently felt that mercy should triumph over justice. Alma₂ declares that it was impossible for mercy to remove justice, for that would be the same as declaring that God was not just.

The plan reconciles justice and mercy and replaces neither. The Atonement provides the way so that the problem of sin and death may be overcome. The resurrection defeats the barrier of death, while still allowing time for repentance. An atonement for sin provides repentance, which allows us to use the time of our probation to learn and develop characteristics more similar to God’s.

The two come together in a final judgment, where mortal deeds are restored to us, and we can be judged according to our works. Mercy allows us to improve; justice judges what we have become, not what we were.

Alma 42:24–26

24 For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

25 What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God.

26 And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery.

Comments

Alma₂ concludes his explanation of justice and mercy by focusing on mercy, which appears to have been Corianton's emphasis. Certainly, all humankind hopes for mercy, but that mercy must come within the context of a plan that uses our agency to transform us. At the final judgment, all of what we have learned and become will stand before God, and in that moment both justice and mercy will be served. Mercy will allow us all the opportunity to be worthy to stand before God. Justice will associate the reward of our next life to the degree that we have learned attributes of Godhood in this life.

These are "His great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world."

Alma 42:27–28

27 Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds.

28 If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God.

Comments

This great plan of salvation opens the opportunity for this life to be a time of learning and not one of condemnation. Where justice might require punishment, mercy gives us repentance and time to learn and grow, thereby perhaps to no longer merit that punishment. Both are still satisfied. There is simply time and opportunity to improve.

In the end, it is still a restoration of the desire to do good or evil. The difference is that the plan of redemption gives us the chance to learn how to do good.

Alma 42:29–31

29 And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance.

30 O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility.

31 And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen.

Comments

Alma₂ ends his counsel to his son. The plan of redemption works for Corianton as it does for us all. There is the opportunity to repent and learn to be better. That is the ultimate counsel. Alma₂ tells Corianton: “I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more.” This was one of the heresies that he had adopted, and therefore it is what Alma₂ spent a lot of time on and what he desired that Corianton reject. The request was to no longer teach the ideas that he had proposed: that God would be merciful and that one did not need to worry about justice.

At the end, Alma₂ calls Corianton “to preach the word unto this people.” This was the response that Alma₂ himself, had when he was converted from his apostate ways. He repented by preaching that what he had learned was the truth, thereby attempting to undo the wrongs he had done to those whom he had taught. Corianton is to do the same. In humility, he is to preach to those to whom he had previously preached, but this time to teach truth, just as Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ had done.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. It also ends the material that Mormon selected from Alma₂'s personal record. The following chapters return to the large plates as their primary source.

Alma 43

War Breaks Out between Lamanites and Nephites

Alma 43:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that the sons of Alma did go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them. And Alma, also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth.

2 Now we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called.

Comments

The end of our chapter 42 was a testificatory *Amen*. In Nephite tradition, that required the end of a chapter. However, it wasn't the end of the story, so the first two verses of our chapter 43 end the story of Alma₂'s sons. In Alma 42:31, Alma commissioned Corianton to preach the gospel. Verse 1 in this chapter tells us that Corianton and his brothers, as well as his father, did go forth to preach.

Mormon wanted to include the counsel to the sons, but he didn't want to add anything about that particular preaching journey. He tells his audience "now we shall say no more concerning their preaching." The only thing he says is that they preached through the spirit of prophecy and revelation. Unlike the discussion of Alma₂'s missionary journey within the land of Zarahemla and the stories of the sons of Mosiah₂, Mormon gives his readers no details whatsoever of these journeys.

Alma 43:3–4

3 And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges.

4 For behold, it came to pass that the Zoramites became Lamanites; therefore, in the commencement of the eighteenth year the people of the Nephites saw that the Lamanites were coming upon them; therefore they made preparations for war; yea, they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon.

Comments

Verse 3 is the narrative shift that moves away from the chapters on Alma₂'s counsel to his sons. Mormon returns to the history from the large plates. As with so much of what he recorded from the large plates, it is a return "to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites."

Mormon introduced these wars in the eighteenth year in Alma 35:13: "And the people of Ammon departed out of the land of Jershon, and came over into the land of Melek, and gave place in the land of Jershon for the armies of the Nephites, that they might contend with the armies of the Lamanites and the armies of the Zoramites; and thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges; and an account shall be given of their wars hereafter." These wars were precipitated by the failure to bring the Zoramites back into the Nephite fold.

Returning to those very wars confirms that the inclusion of the counsel to Alma₂'s sons was a text that was somewhat out of place. Alma 35:13 serves as a conceptual exit point, and Alma 43:3 as the re-entry point, or a repetitive resumption. That technique brackets together inserted text. In this case, text was inserted from Alma₂'s personal record into a section otherwise taken from the large plates.

Mormon realized that the departure point was far from this reentry, and so he provides not only a reentry statement, but also the essential context that is needed to understand this particular war. Thus, verse 4 reiterates that it was the loss of the Zoramites to the Lamanites that precipitated this war. The land of Antionum had been the buffer between the land of Jershon and the Lamanites. With the Zoramites not siding with the Lamanites, Jershon was exposed. Therefore, "they gathered together their armies in the land of Jershon."

Alma 43:5–8

5 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came with their thousands; and they came into the land of Antionum, which is the land of the Zoramites; and a man by the name of Zerahemnah was their leader.

6 And now, as the Amalekites were of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were, in and of themselves, therefore, Zerahemnah appointed chief captains over the Lamanites, and they were all Amalekites and Zoramites.

7 Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs.

8 For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

Comments

With the southeast corner of the land now without a strong defense, the combined armies of the Zoramites and the Lamanites take advantage of this. This was not the typical entry point for Lamanite invasions, which

normally came through what must have been a pass near the city of Manti. However, the defection of the Zoramites opened a new possibility, and this war will end up being fought on two fronts.

Mormon certainly speaks of the Lamanites as the enemy of the Nephites, but he also takes pains to show his readers that even more dangerous than hereditary Lamanites were those who were apostate Nephites who had become Lamanites. That is the case here. At least one people designated as Amalekites had combined with the Lamanites and the former priests of Noah to create a city named Jerusalem in Lamanite territory (Alma 21:2). That they were of the order of Nehor (Alma 21:4) suggests that they were once Nephites. They were among those who most strongly resisted the preaching of the sons of Mosiah₂. Mormon makes certain that his readers understand that Zerahemnah, the leader of these armies, was both an Amalekite and one with a particular “hatred towards the Nephites.”

From a historical standpoint, it is interesting that Mormon tells us that Zerahemnah desired that “he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.” The Book of Mormon uses the term *bondage* to indicate a tribute relationship to a more distant overlord. Thus, this isn’t a conquest for new territory, but is an attempt to create a client state that would essentially pay taxes to the overlord. In this case, the overlord would be the Amalekites. Presumably, the Zoramites would also receive some of those taxes in recompense for their part in the war.

Alma 43:9–12

9 And now the design of the Nephites was to support their lands, and their houses, and their wives, and their children, that they might preserve them from the hands of their enemies; and also that they might preserve their rights and their privileges, yea, and also their liberty, that they might worship God according to their desires.

10 For they knew that if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites, that whosoever should worship God in spirit and in truth, the true and the living God, the Lamanites would destroy.

11 Yea, and they also knew the extreme hatred of the Lamanites towards their brethren, who were the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, who were called the people of Ammon—and they would not take up arms, yea, they had entered into a covenant and they would not break it—therefore, if they should fall into the hands of the Lamanites they would be destroyed.

12 And the Nephites would not suffer that they should be destroyed; therefore they gave them lands for their inheritance.

Comments

Verses 5–8 gave the “designs” of Zerahemnah (see especially verse 8). Verse 9 contrasts those designs with the “design of the Nephites.” Where Zerahemnah wanted to subjugate the Nephites, the Nephites wanted only to preserve their lands and people. Mormon still remembers that the essential context for this war was

chapters in the past, and so he gives yet another repetition of that context. In this case, the people who had been called Anti-Nephi-Lehies, and were now the people of Ammon, were a people who had covenanted not to take up arms. That meant that their relocation to Jershon put a large population into that land, a people who could not be called upon to defend the land. Verses 11 and 12 are part of the refreshing of the context by repeating information from Mormon's text prior to his insertion of Alma₂'s counsel to his sons.

Alma 43:13–15

13 And the people of Ammon did give unto the Nephites a large portion of their substance to support their armies; and thus the Nephites were compelled, alone, to withstand against the Lamanites, who were a compound of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and all those who had dissented from the Nephites, who were Amalekites and Zoramites, and the descendants of the priests of Noah.

14 Now those descendants were as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites; and thus the Nephites were obliged to contend with their brethren, even unto bloodshed.

15 And it came to pass as the armies of the Lamanites had gathered together in the land of Antionum, behold, the armies of the Nephites were prepared to meet them in the land of Jershon.

Comments

These verses conclude the recapitulation of the historical situation behind this new crisis. In verse 15, Mormon is finished with the background and returns to the current topic he started in verse 5. Interestingly, verse 5 began the story of the armies being gathered together in the land of Antionum, and then led to the discussion of the Lamanite leader. Here, this same beginning is used, and the next text introduces the Nephite leader (see the verses that follow).

Alma 43:16–17

16 Now, the leader of the Nephites, or the man who had been appointed to be the chief captain over the Nephites—now the chief captain took the command of all the armies of the Nephites—and his name was Moroni;

17 And Moroni took all the command, and the government of their wars. And he was only twenty and five years old when he was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites.

Comments

Verses 5 and 6 introduced Zerahemnah, the leader of the combined Amalekite and Zoramite armies. Verses 16 and 17 introduce his counterpart, Moroni. Moroni was appointed chief captain over the armies of the Nephites, which meant that he “took the command of all the armies of the Nephites.” That language

suggests what was an accurate representation of Mesoamerican armies. There were no standing armies, but rather the people of the land were called up from their various cities to defend those cities. As chief captain, the implication was that there were other captains, almost certainly with a captain at the head of the armies that were gathered from each separate city. Moroni coordinated all the separate armies.

Alma 43:18–21

18 And it came to pass that he met the Lamanites in the borders of Jershon, and his people were armed with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war.

19 And when the armies of the Lamanites saw that the people of Nephi, or that Moroni, had prepared his people with breastplates and with arm-shields, yea, and also shields to defend their heads, and also they were dressed with thick clothing—

20 Now the army of Zerahemnah was not prepared with any such thing; they had only their swords and their cimeters, their bows and their arrows, their stones and their slings; and they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were naked, save it were the Zoramites and the Amalekites;

21 But they were not armed with breastplates, nor shields—therefore, they were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites because of their armor, notwithstanding their number being so much greater than the Nephites.

Comments

Chief Captain Moroni defends his armies with the help of protective equipment. His list of protective gear can be seen to have counterparts in the known military gear used in Mesoamerica, even though what we might conjure up, upon hearing a term like “breastplates,” would be different from Mesoamerican protective equipment. Rather than the European fitted metal version, Mesoamerican breastplates were more often wooden and flat, covering only the breast. Arm shields would be smaller shields, perhaps called bucklers in European military terminology. “Shields to defend their heads” indicates some type of head protection without indicating anything about their materials or form. The most interesting term, in verse 19, is “thick clothing.” Even up to the time of the European conquest, quilted “thick clothing” was the primary protective armor. The Spaniards felt that it was actually superior to their metal armor. It appears to have stopped arrows better and was cooler and more comfortable than metal armor. Many Spanish Conquistadors wore it instead of metal body armor.

Mormon appears to credit Chief Captain Moroni with the invention of this type of protective gear, but it is more likely that Captain Moroni was attempting to distribute this gear to all the army rather than to just the few who might have been well enough off to have provided their own.

Nephite preparation with protective armor is contrasted with the lack of protective armor for Zerahemnah’s armies.

Zerahemnah Attacks Manti

Alma 43:22–25

22 Behold, now it came to pass that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Antionum into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone.

23 But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness Moroni sent spies into the wilderness to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

24 And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the weaker part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

25 Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means a part of the Lamanites should come into that land and take possession of the city, took the remaining part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti.

Comments

Seeing the defending army wearing protective gear changed the Amalekite army's plans. They left the field and went south and west to enter Nephite lands through the more traditional entry point near Manti, an entry point that led directly to the heart of the land of Zarahemla.

Militarily, we see Moroni consulting with Alma₂ to know where the Lamanites would go. Moroni likely knew that Zoram had done the very same thing, and Alma₂ had been able to tell him where to go to find the army fleeing after the destruction of Ammonihah (see Alma 16:5–6). Moroni gets an answer and is able to bring part of his army to bear at the entry point before the Amalekites could press their attack.

The geographic implication of this action is interesting. The Amalekites have the advantage of beginning their march first. Moroni has to wait to know where they were going. When he finds out, he has to get his army in place quickly. How does he get there faster? It appears that the circuit from the southeastern corner of the land of Nephi was longer and or more difficult than a journey through the Sidon River valley. Moroni's path would have been shorter, and probably more easily traveled than the route taken by Zerahemnah.

Alma 43:26–28

26 And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land should gather themselves together to battle against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites.

27 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his army should be secreted in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon, which was on the west of the river Sidon in the wilderness.

28 And Moroni placed spies round about, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

Comments

One of the important aspects of what Chief Captain Moroni did was to cause “that all the people in that quarter of the land should gather themselves together to battle.” Moroni did not bring his entire army, but in addition to those he did bring, he rallied those who lived in that quarter to come to the defense of the land. Therefore, he mustered more men than just those who came with him.

One of the differences we see in these war chapters from what we have seen before, or will see again, is a more detailed look at armor, armaments, and tactics. As a military man, it is certain that Mormon is interested in such things, but it is also probable that we get the information in these chapters because of his admiration for Chief Captain Moroni, rather than simply because of his interest in military things. Mormon admired him enough to name a son after him. We probably get the details of these wars, not for the wars per se, but as examples of the valor and importance of the men who are prominent in the stories of these wars. These wars are where we learn of Chief Captain Moroni, Lehi₂, and Teancum. The wars continue into the book of Helaman, and there we will hear of Helaman₁, and his stripling warriors. Mormon is interested in the people involved in these wars, and therefore we get the details that help us understand those heroes.

Alma 43:29–30

29 And now, as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves over all the land;

30 And he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore, he found by his spies which course the Lamanites were to take.

Comments

It is unlikely that this justification for Chief Captain Moroni’s actions were on the large plates. It is an interesting view into the mind of a military man that Mormon needs to justify Moroni’s action of defending

the Nephites by a stratagem. Mormon implies that such tactics might not be completely honorable. Nevertheless, because the intent behind them was honorable, Mormon sees the stratagem as justified.

The only reason for the inclusion of these two verses in an otherwise straightforward telling of the military situation is that Mormon had some level of discomfort with the idea of defeating an enemy by essentially using trickery rather than what he must have felt was a more honorable face-to-face conflict.

Alma 43:31–34

31 Therefore, he divided his army and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah;

32 And the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti.

33 And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them.

34 And it came to pass that the Lamanites came up on the north of the hill, where a part of the army of Moroni was concealed.

Comments

It is again worth noting how much time Moroni had to prepare his defense before the Lamanites arrived. He called up more men, and then organized them into two groups and placed them in their desired locations. What Moroni does is split the army, concealing one part on the east, where they could be hidden by the hill Riplah from an army coming down from the north.

The other army is hiding in the west valley. The intent is to bring the Lamanite army between the two halves of Moroni's forces, one on each side of the River Sidon. Crucial to this story is that there must have been a known ford where even the Lamanites understood they could cross the river on foot.

Alma 43:35–36

35 And as the Lamanites had passed the hill Riplah, and came into the valley, and began to cross the river Sidon, the army which was concealed on the south of the hill, which was led by a man whose name was Lehi, and he led his army forth and encircled the Lamanites about on the east in their rear.

36 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about and began to contend with the army of Lehi.

Comments

Part of the military plan used the river itself as part of the defense. Once the Lamanite army was in the river, they were less mobile by the very nature of crossing through water. Thus, Lehi, the Nephite army's

leader, waits until the Lamanites have begun crossing, and then institutes a surprise attack on their rear. This attack from the rear not only would cause the Lamanites to have to rapidly reorient themselves, but it also would delay some of the Lamanite army from coming against the Nephites precisely because they were already in the river.

Alma 43:37–40

37 And the work of death commenced on both sides, but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites, for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke.

38 While on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords and the loss of blood, they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breastplates, and their armshields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.

39 And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon.

40 And they were pursued by Lehi and his men; and they were driven by Lehi into the waters of Sidon, and they crossed the waters of Sidon. And Lehi retained his armies upon the bank of the river Sidon that they should not cross.

Comments

The surprise attack was successful. Although there are casualties on both sides, they appear to be greater among the Lamanites. Thus, the Lamanites saw a difficult task in attempting to fight Lehi₂'s army; they also saw that they might cross the river and perhaps escape, so they fled into the river to presumed safety on the other side.

Lehi₂ knew that Moroni's second army was on that side of the river, so he halted his army to prevent the Lamanites from coming back that way in order to escape their new battlefield.

Alma 43:41–42

41 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army met the Lamanites in the valley, on the other side of the river Sidon, and began to fall upon them and to slay them.

42 And the Lamanites did flee again before them, towards the land of Manti; and they were met again by the armies of Moroni.

Comments

The Lamanites now have an army at their rear, though across a river and not an immediate threat. They also had an army in front of them, and they were not winning the battle. Once again, they flee. This time they proceed down the river valley in the land of Manti, heading toward Zarahemla.

The original description of Moroni's action divided the army in two. Where did this third army come from? The best answer is that the army that Moroni brought with him was the one divided, and the one that was in the land on the south was the army raised from the men of that land. These were men who were directly defending their homes, and therefore they were highly motivated, if not particularly trained.

Alma 43:43–44

43 Now in this case the Lamanites did fight exceedingly; yea, never had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceedingly great strength and courage, no, not even from the beginning.

44 And they were inspired by the Zoramites and the Amalekites, who were their chief captains and leaders, and by Zerahemnah, who was their chief captain, or their chief leader and commander; yea, they did fight like dragons, and many of the Nephites were slain by their hands, yea, for they did smite in two many of their head-plates, and they did pierce many of their breastplates, and they did smite off many of their arms; and thus the Lamanites did smite in their fierce anger.

Comments

The Lamanites are trapped with no way to flee. They have an army in front of them, and one at their heels. They were fighting for their lives, and it is no surprise that they fought fiercely. The image used is that “they did fight like dragons.” Of course, there were no dragons in the Asian or European sense. In the New World, it might have been the image of a crocodile as the monster that inspired an image of dragons.

We learn a little more of the nature of Nephite protective armor when Mormon tells us that the Lamanites “did smite in two many of their head-plates.” Something other than a European helmet is being described, and it is likely that it was made of wood, and therefore being split in two.

Alma 43:45–47

45 Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

46 And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, 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.

47 And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.

Comments

Mormon continues to be concerned with the morality of warfare. Where earlier he had to defend Moroni's use of a stratagem (verse 30), here he defends war itself. "[T]he Nephites were inspired by a better cause." "They were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God." To those justifications, he adds God's commands concerning warfare. The Nephites are justified in defending themselves, if they are not initiating the war ("not guilty of the first offense"). When diplomacy failed, "ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies." Although not intended as a contrast to the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, that command from God indicates the very unusual and special nature of the covenant that they had made with God.

Alma 43:48–50

48 And it came to pass that when the men of Moroni saw the fierceness and the anger of the Lamanites, they were about to shrink and flee from them. And Moroni, perceiving their intent, sent forth and inspired their hearts with these thoughts—yea, the thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage.
49 And it came to pass that they turned upon the Lamanites, and they cried with one voice unto the Lord their God, for their liberty and their freedom from bondage.
50 And they began to stand against the Lamanites with power; and in that selfsame hour that they cried unto the Lord for their freedom, the Lamanites began to flee before them; and they fled even to the waters of Sidon.

Comments

Even with the tactical advantages of position and protective armor, the Nephites find that they are in danger of losing the battle. That is when Moroni rallies them. He encourages them to remember what they are fighting for. They do remember, and the tide of the battle turns again. The Lamanites attempt to flee one last time, attempting again to cross the Sidon to the east side, where they may not have known that Lehi₂'s army had remained.

Alma 43:51–54

51 Now, the Lamanites were more numerous, yea, by more than double the number of the Nephites; nevertheless, they were driven insomuch that they were gathered together in one body in the valley, upon the bank by the river Sidon.

52 Therefore the armies of Moroni encircled them about, yea, even on both sides of the river, for behold, on the east were the men of Lehi.

53 Therefore when Zerahemnah saw the men of Lehi on the east of the river Sidon, and the armies of Moroni on the west of the river Sidon, that they were encircled about by the Nephites, they were struck with terror.

54 Now Moroni, when he saw their terror, commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood.

Comments

The river again comes into play in the military situation. Rather than being able to flee as a unit, the Lamanites have had to form some smaller line to cross the river. Hence there are some on the west bank, some on the river, and when those who emerged from the east side of the river found land, they also found Lehi₂ and his army. They are in an indefensible position.

Moroni does not pursue a war of destruction, but, upon seeing the inevitable defeat of his enemy, he stops the battle. There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition, and indeed, the story continues with the immediate aftermath of halting the fighting.

Alma 44

Moroni's Ultimatum to Zerahemnah

Alma 44:1–4

1 And it came to pass that they did stop and withdrew a pace from them. And Moroni said unto Zerahemnah: Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you.

2 Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage. But this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion.

3 But now, ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith.

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 our religion; and never will the Lord suffer that we shall be destroyed except we should fall into transgression and deny our faith.

Comments

Verse 1 originally followed verse 54 of chapter 43 without a break. That verse described the end of the conflict, when Moroni commanded that his armies stop killing the Lamanites. It is at that time that “they did stop and withdrew a pace from them.” This allowed Moroni to approach Zerahemnah to give this speech.

We do not know how Moroni knew which Lamanite combatant was the leader, but it would not have been unusual in ancient warfare for that person to have some kind of visual marker that would identify him as a leader. Even modern military uniforms have visual indicators of rank. Thus, Moroni could approach the leader, who would be able to make a decision for the whole of his army.

The obvious evidence, to any ancient warrior, that God was on their side was that they were victorious. Thus, Moroni declares that “the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands.” Moroni even uses their victory to declare that “ye see that this is the true faith of God.”

Alma 44:5–7

5 And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, and by the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children, by that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country; yea, and also by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness; and by all that is most dear unto us—

6 Yea, and this is not all; I command you by all the desires which ye have for life, that ye deliver up your weapons of war unto us, and we will seek not your blood, but we will spare your lives, if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us.

7 And now, if ye do not this, behold, ye are in our hands, and I will command my men that they shall fall upon you, and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies, that ye may become extinct; and then we will see who shall have power over this people; yea, we will see who shall be brought into bondage.

Comments

Having declared that the Nephite God is the true God, and the reason for the Nephite victory, Moroni commands Zerahemnah, in God's name, to make a decision. The decision to be made is contained in verse 6. Zerahemnah can choose to cease the war, or to continue and die. Each of the decisions has consequences. If he chooses to stop fighting, he and his army may leave, but must covenant not to make war upon the Nephites again. The alternative consequence is that they will be killed.

Moroni desires, and expects, the more forgiving alternative. Thus, he issues the command “by all the desires which ye have for life.” Humankind has a strong will to live, and Moroni assumes that those desires will cause Zerahemnah to accept the generous offer.

The final statement of verse 7 is Moroni turning the dagger just a little in the wound. Zerahemnah had declared that he wanted to bring the Nephites into subjugation. Moroni, with the obvious upper hand, notes that should they continue to fight, “we will see who shall be brought into bondage.” Ironically, he had no intention of bringing them to physical bondage. They were to be killed, perhaps consigning them to spiritual bondage.

Alma 44:8–9

8 And now it came to pass that when Zerahemnah had heard these sayings he came forth and delivered up his sword and his cimeter, and his bow into the hands of Moroni, and said unto him: Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children; but take our weapons of war, and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness; otherwise we will retain our swords, and we will perish or conquer.

9 Behold, we are not of your faith; we do not believe that it is God that has delivered us into your hands; but we believe that it is your cunning that has preserved you from our swords. Behold, it is your breastplates and your shields that have preserved you.

Comments

Zerahemnah responds almost as expected. He does personally deliver up his weapons to Moroni, symbolically enacting the same for all of his troops. He accepts the opportunity to stop the war and leave. However, there is a caveat. “We will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break.” As Zerahemnah also points out in verse 9, they do not adhere to the Nephite faith, and do not believe that it was God who won the battle, but rather the Nephites. Zerahemnah blames his defeat on the Nephite protective armor (verse 9).

The important point is that there was no similar religious belief between them that governed the taking of the oath, yet the very act of taking an oath was considered inviolable to both peoples. We encountered the ancient power of the oath when Zoram agreed to travel with Lehi’s family (in 1 Nephi 4) and was accepted upon an oath. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies took an oath and suffered death rather than violate it. Zerahemnah is at least hinting that he is willing to do the same. The oath was more important to them than suffering death.

Alma 44:10–11

10 And now when Zerahemnah had made an end of speaking these words, Moroni returned the sword and the weapons of war, which he had received, unto Zerahemnah, saying: Behold, we will end the conflict.

11 Now I cannot recall the words which I have spoken, therefore as the Lord liveth, ye shall not depart except ye depart with an oath that ye will not return again against us to war. Now as ye are in our hands we will spill your blood upon the ground, or ye shall submit to the conditions which I have proposed.

Comments

The modern world has changed considerably from the ancient world depicted here. Not only is Zerahemnah unwilling to take an oath that he knows he will not keep, but when Moroni hears that Zerahemnah will not agree to Moroni’s terms, he gives him back his weapons of war. Moroni had rearmed his enemy.

In verse 11, Moroni says: “I cannot recall the words which I have spoken.” In modern usage, we tend to read this as “I cannot remember the words which I have spoken.” That is clearly not the meaning in this case. Here, the word *recall* is used in the sense of bringing them back or undoing them. It is the sense we use when a recall is made for a product. It is to be brought back. Moroni’s words were just as much an oath as he could expect from Zerahemnah. Just because Zerahemnah would not take an oath (Moroni knew

that Zerahemnah wouldn't abide by it), Moroni would not change the offered oath simply because it was not accepted. Therefore, Moroni reiterates that if they do not accept the oath, they will be slaughtered.

Alma 44:12–15

12 And now when Moroni had said these words, Zerahemnah retained his sword, and he was angry with Moroni, and he rushed forward that he might slay Moroni; but as he raised his sword, behold, one of Moroni's soldiers smote it even to the earth, and it broke by the hilt; and he also smote Zerahemnah that he took off his scalp and it fell to the earth. And Zerahemnah withdrew from before them into the midst of his soldiers.

13 And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by, who smote off the scalp of Zerahemnah, took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice:

14 Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace.

15 Now there were many, when they heard these words and saw the scalp which was upon the sword, that were struck with fear; and many came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and entered into a covenant of peace. And as many as entered into a covenant they suffered to depart into the wilderness.

Comments

When Mormon writes "Zerahemnah retained his sword," we have another word used in a different sense than expected. "Retain" means to keep or hold on to. In this verse, it is used with a non-standard meaning of "recover," or perhaps "retain again." It is not a meaning used for "retain" in Webster's 1828 Dictionary.

The importance of the verse is that even though everything has been honorable to this point in the discussion, Zerahemnah does what one might expect a sworn enemy to do. He attacks Moroni. One of Moroni's soldiers takes a swing at Zerahemnah, removing his scalp. Although this action certainly bears resemblance to the North American Native American practice of scalping (which comes much later in history), it is more likely that it was simply the result and not the intention. That is, it was not a scalping in order to make a point, but it was rather simply the result of the blow.

Rather than be symbolic in itself, the symbolism comes from what the soldier does with it. He declares what is called a simile curse, that is, a curse that likens one thing to another. Thus, "Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is the scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace." The statement is simply repeating Moroni's part of the oath and it is now adding a visual representation to emphasize the cursing to come should they not accept the oath.

The result was that many did comprehend the futility of their situation and accepted the oath. After entering into a covenant of peace, they were allowed to depart, according to Moroni's part of the covenant.

Alma 44:16–20

16 Now it came to pass that Zerahemnah was exceedingly wroth, and he did stir up the remainder of his soldiers to anger, to contend more powerfully against the Nephites.

17 And now Moroni was angry, because of the stubbornness of the Lamanites; therefore he commanded his people that they should fall upon them and slay them. And it came to pass that they began to slay them; yea, and the Lamanites did contend with their swords and their might.

18 But behold, their naked skins and their bare heads were exposed to the sharp swords of the Nephites; yea, behold they were pierced and smitten, yea, and did fall exceedingly fast before the swords of the Nephites; and they began to be swept down, even as the soldier of Moroni had prophesied.

19 Now Zerahemnah, when he saw that they were all about to be destroyed, cried mightily unto Moroni, promising that he would covenant and also his people with them, if they would spare the remainder of their lives, that they never would come to war again against them.

20 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that the work of death should cease again among the people. And he took the weapons of war from the Lamanites; and after they had entered into a covenant with him of peace they were suffered to depart into the wilderness.

Comments

Zerahemnah had not wanted to take the oath, and he provoked others to stand and fight with him. They did. They had known that they were hopelessly outnumbered, but in individual warfare, only so many men can engage at one time. Although not stated, it is probable that the Lamanites stood back-to-back so that they provided a fighting front to all around them. Still, even the best of fighters must tire. Even though the Nephites could not bring all of their army to bear simultaneously, they could keep providing fresh troops where the Lamanites simply continued to exhaust their strength, even if they were individually fighting well.

There came a point when the battle was clearly over, and Zerahemnah makes it known that they are finally willing to enter into a covenant of peace. Moroni had not put a time limit on the offer of the covenant. Therefore, Moroni once again ceases the fighting. This time, the remainder of the Lamanites accept the covenant and leave.

Alma 44:21–24

21 Now the number of their dead was not numbered because of the greatness of the number; yea, the number of their dead was exceedingly great, both on the Nephites and on the Lamanites.

22 And it came to pass that they did cast their dead into the waters of Sidon, and they have gone forth and are buried in the depths of the sea.

23 And the armies of the Nephites, or of Moroni, returned and came to their houses and their lands.

24 And thus ended the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended the record of Alma, which was written upon the plates of Nephi.

Comments

In the aftermath of the battle, the bodies of the Lamanites were cast into the Sidon. This was a sign of disrespect for an enemy. Although it does not say so here, the Nephite dead were surely buried.

When the war is over, the Nephite armies “returned and came to their houses and their lands.” This was not a standing army, but one recruited from the men of the land. We see neither standing armies nor dedicated police forces in the Book of Mormon.

With the ending of the record of the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, Alma₂ stops recording. The story of what happens to Alma₂ will be told in the next chapter, one written by Helaman₁ rather than Alma₂.

Alma 45

Alma 45: Header

The account of the people of Nephi, and their wars and dissensions, in the days of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman, which he kept in his days.

Comments

This is the only time there is a change in official record keeper that is declared in a header. The book of Mosiah had three official record keepers: Mosiah, Benjamin, and Mosiah. The loss of the beginning of the book of Mosiah means we can't say if there might have been a header noting the change from Mosiah to his son, Benjamin, but we do know that there was no header marking the change from Benjamin to his son, Mosiah.

The evidence for why books are named for specific individuals suggests that it is due to the creation of a new dynastic record. There may be multiple kings' histories included in a single book, but only when those kings are part of the dynasty of the king for whom the book was named. In this book, the book of Alma, Alma₂'s eldest son Helaman₁ becomes the new recordkeeper (he is not a king). We will eventually see a name change when moving from the book of Alma to the book of Helaman₂, but Helaman₂ is the grandson of Alma₂.

This header indicates the shift in the original recordkeeper, rather than a change in dynasty. The next verses will explain why Alma₂ is no longer the recordkeeper. Even though the header appears at this point, some of the events of the next verses precede the change of recordkeeper, which required this header. This header may have been on the large plates, unlike other chapter headers which are more clearly Mormon's additions.

Alma 45:1

¹ Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy.

Comments

Following the header that introduced Helaman₁ as the new record keeper, we have a verse that is certainly from Mormon. Mormon is pulling information from the large plates and creating a much smaller text. That means that there are times when he must create linking text to move from one story to the next, perhaps skipping a number of stories that were on the large plates, but which Mormon declined to add to his own book.

Verse 1 is just such a transitional narrative. Mormon told the story of the eighteenth year, and now moves to a new story. However, he finishes that previous story at the beginning of this chapter. Of course, the Nephites celebrated winning the war. Mormon describes the celebrations as having much fasting, praying, and worship. Doubtless there were more boisterous celebrations as well, but Mormon's point is that God won the victory, and therefore the Nephites gave glory to God.

Alma₂'s Final Counsel

Alma 45:2–8

2 And it came to pass in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma came unto his son Helaman and said unto him: Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept?

3 And Helaman said unto him: Yea, I believe.

4 And Alma said again: Believest thou in Jesus Christ, who shall come?

5 And he said: Yea, I believe all the words which thou hast spoken.

6 And Alma said unto him again: Will ye keep my commandments?

7 And he said: Yea, I will keep thy commandments with all my heart.

8 Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land.

Comments

The chapters had been separated at the division of the years, and these events took place in the nineteenth year. Alma₂ comes to his son and prepares to commission Helaman₁ to take the records. Therefore, the first question is whether Helaman₁ believed what he had been told about the records when Alma₂ gave him his specific counsel and blessing (see Alma 37).

Helaman₁ does believe what he was told. The next question is equally important for a Nephite record-keeper: "Believest thou in Jesus Christ, who shall come?" This is one of the pillars of Nephite belief. In part, the records are kept in order to continually testify of that coming Messiah.

Next, the question is whether Helaman₁ will keep Alma₂'s commandments. These commandments were the instructions for keeping and caring for the records. Helaman₁ will. As a result of Helaman₁'s faithfulness, "the Lord shall prosper [him] in this land." That was one of the subjects of the blessing recorded in Alma 36.

Alma 45:9–10

9 But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known; yea, what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say.

10 And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief.

Comments

As the official recordkeeper, Alma₂ gives Helaman₁ a new command. He is to write a prophecy but to keep that prophecy from the people until it is fulfilled. One of the reasons is that the prophecy is quite time specific. Four hundred years from the time that the Messiah will show himself to the Nephites, the Nephite nation will dwindle in unbelief. Although Alma₂ will be explicit that this will lead to their destruction, Helaman₁ might have already surmised that much, because the promise of the land depended upon continued righteousness. Dwindling in unbelief surely would lead to some kind of destruction.

We cannot know how this prophecy was kept from general knowledge, but if it was to wait to be known until its fulfillment, then Mormon would be the first to publish it widely. It would not have been earlier, since it was Mormon who lived in the time of its fulfillment.

If the Book of Mormon is set in a Mesoamerican location, the very fact that this destruction comes four hundred years after the manifestation of Christ is significant. Rather than simply be a prophecy of a particular time, it was a very significant time. The Mesoamericans used counting system based on 20 rather than 10. For them, a four-hundred-year period carried much the same kind of cognitive significance as a thousand years in our decimal system. The Maya named that period a *baktun*, just as we name our significant period a *millennium*.

Alma 45:11–14

11 Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct—

12 Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

13 And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi.

14 But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled.

Comments

Dwindling in unbelief will remove the protection of the covenant of the land. That will lead directly to “wars and pestilences . . . even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct.” Verses 12 and 13 repeat the basic information. This is a repetition of emphasis. This will really happen. The Nephites will be destroyed.

Also important in this prophecy is the recognition that it is the political destiny of a Nephite that is destroyed, not every person who had been called a Nephite. Verse 14 points out that those Nephites who remain after the destruction will be numbered among the Lamanites, “and shall become like unto them.” The exception is the three disciples who are granted permission to remain on this earth. Their story is told in 3 Nephi 28:4–10.

Alma 45:15–17

15 And now it came to pass that after Alma had said these things to Helaman, he blessed him, and also his other sons; and he also blessed the earth for the righteous’ sake.

16 And he said: Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.

17 And now, when Alma had said these words he blessed the church, yea, all those who should stand fast in the faith from that time henceforth.

Comments

Even though Alma₂ had already given counsel to his sons, he gives them a final blessing, as well as giving the earth a general blessing. The “blessing,” recorded in verse 16, is more of a curse. It is the declaration of the negative aspect of the covenant of the land. The land will be cursed for those who do wickedly. Perhaps some of that sentiment was based on the destruction of the war of the eighteenth year. Perhaps, even more, it was based upon his prophetic vision of the ultimate destruction of the Nephite people.

Mormon doesn’t record Alma₂’s blessing on the church, but it surely was not as gloomy as verse 16. Nevertheless, for Mormon’s purposes, it was the penalty of verse 16 that he was living through, and therefore that cursing would have been most poignant for him as he wrote.

Alma 45:18–19

18 And when Alma had done this he departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of.
19 Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause we know nothing concerning his death and burial.

Comments

Alma₂ departs and is never seen again: “as to his death or burial we know not of.” Verse 19 suggests that Alma₂ was “taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses.” This statement appears to refer to Deuteronomy 34:5–6: “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”

Since no one knew what happened to him, they surmised that because Alma₂ was a righteous man that his death would have been similar to another righteous man: Moses.

Amalickiah Leads a Rebellion

Alma 45:20–24

20 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Helaman went forth among the people to declare the word unto them.
21 For behold, because of their wars with the Lamanites and the many little dissensions and disturbances which had been among the people, it became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them, yea, and that a regulation should be made throughout the church.
22 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth to establish the church again in all the land, yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches.
23 And now it came to pass that after Helaman and his brethren had appointed priests and teachers over the churches that there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman and his brethren;
24 But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words, to walk uprightly before God.

Comments

There is no chapter ending at this point in the 1830 edition. After telling the story of Alma₂'s disappearance, Mormon moves to his next story, which will yet again be one of internal dissention and conflict.

The new story begins with a missionary journey that was required to “regulate” the church (verse 21). The second meaning of “regulate” from Webster’s 1828 Dictionary is: “To put in good order; as, to *regulate* the disordered state of a nation or its finances.” Helaman₁ and his brothers attempt to put the Nephite people, particularly those in the church, in “good order.”

The response to the devastation of the war was to increase the efforts to spread the church through the land, and to appoint priests and teachers to help maintain that “good order.” Nevertheless, we are told that “they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts.” That kind of pride was always one of thinking one person better than another, and most often expressed by costly apparel or other demonstrations of wealth.

Alma 46

Alma 46:1–4

1 And it came to pass that as many as would not hearken to the words of Helaman and his brethren were gathered together against their brethren.

2 And now behold, they were exceedingly wroth, insomuch that they were determined to slay them.

3 Now the leader of those who were wroth against their brethren was a large and a strong man; and his name was Amalickiah.

4 And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power.

Comments

The end of the previous chapter spoke of Helaman₁ and his brethren going on a missionary tour of the land of Zarahemla. Now we learn why that was so urgent. During Alma₂'s time as Chief Judge, he saw political unrest and abdicated the political position to go on a preaching tour to attempt to bring back the hearts of the people. When the Zoramites threatened to break away from the Nephites, no one sent an army, but rather missionaries.

This is the same situation in this case. There is political unrest that was not described before mentioning the missionary journey, but certainly it was fomenting before that time and led to Helaman₁ and his brethren going out to preach. They had some success, but not sufficient to prevent the coming conflict.

We learn of Amalickiah, who “was desirous to be a king.” Mormon appears to emphasize names having an MLK root as not only apostate, but specifically those who desired to return to having a king. The MLK root in Hebrew means “king.”

When Mosiah₂ dissolved the monarchy, he created a new system of government. That didn't mean that everyone agreed with him. He had created the new system because he feared the social disruption that would follow when there was no clear heir to the kingship. It is most likely that Amalickiah and similar thinkers were those who might have had a claim on the kingship. Now, even though there was a new system in place, they supported the return of a king, and surely a place for themselves in the political hierarchy. Mormon expressly notes, in verse 4, that “they were seeking for power.”

Alma 46:5–8

5 And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people.

6 Thus they were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions, notwithstanding the preaching of Helaman and his brethren, yea, notwithstanding their exceedingly great care over the church, for they were high priests over the church.

7 And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous, notwithstanding their great victory which they had had over the Lamanites, and their great rejoicings which they had had because of their deliverance by the hand of the Lord.

8 Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one.

Comments

One reading of these verses would be that having a king leads people away from God. Even though that is a simple reading of the text, the social and cultural background provides the complexity to understand better what was happening. Foremost, it cannot be a condemnation of kingship specifically, because the Nephites had a king for much longer than they have not at this point. Thus, the answer is not in kingship, but in some other problem associated with kingship. When the Nephite nation was first created, the people wanted Nephi to be a king, but Nephi himself was reluctant. Where had that desire for a king come from?

The Nephites lived in a larger cultural area, subject to the influence of the people around them. Early on, it was a time when the establishment of kings was becoming the most common political system, and therefore the Nephite people desired to be more like their neighbors. That outside influence often affected them, typically with the temptation toward social hierarchies, at the top of which was a king.

Thus, what is happening in the land of Zarahemla is that the old influences of the people who had been in Zarahemla prior to the arrival of the Nephites were returning to their old beliefs and reflecting, perhaps as they once had, the cultures around them. It was those ideas that were detrimental to the church, because they espoused different religious ideals. In particular, they denied the coming Messiah, which was a foundational element of Nephite religion. More than just desiring a king, these men who desired power also desired the destruction of the uniquely Nephite religion and culture. It was the potential destruction of their religion that caused the need for the missionary journey of Helaman¹ and his brethren.

Alma 46:9–10

9 Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men.

10 Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.

Comments

Mormon confirms how dangerous Amalickiah is. Although Mormon is taking the story from the large plates, these two verses see Mormon explaining why he selected this story to tell. There is a moral at play here, and Mormon wants his readers to clearly see that moral. Thus, Mormon warns his future readers specifically about Amalickiah, but also against all who might be, as Amalickiah was: “a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words.”

When Mormon tells us that Amalickiah sought “to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted them,” it was a warning that Amalickiah was leading the people away from God. By leading them away from God, he was leading them away from the protective covenant of the land.

Moroni and the Title of Liberty

Alma 46:11–12

11 And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

12 And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.

Comments

Moroni had recently fought a battle against apostate Nephites, a battle that had cost many lives. The threat from Amalickiah is yet another form of apostasy, but this one is an internal threat rather than an external one. It is unsurprising that Moroni would be angry with someone who was attempting to do internally (to destroy the foundation of liberty) what Moroni had just done externally (in defending liberty).

The banner that Moroni made was an impromptu creation. It was intended to be seen, and easily raised above the heads of the people so that they could see it even when they were in a group. The fact that he wrote on it requires that we think of what it might have meant to have writing on the banner. First, it would be expected that someone could read it, else there was no reason to write on it in the first place. Nevertheless, the writing itself would not be seen by all. If one saw it from a distance, or the banner were fluttering in the wind, the words would be difficult to read. On top of those issues is the probability that literacy was limited.

Therefore, the writing became part of the symbol. It would be read to others, and the meaning of the words passed around, but the function of the writing would be that it be seen, and not necessarily be read.

Alma 46:13–16

13 And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land—

14 For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.

15 And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.

16 And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored.

Comments

Moroni gave his banner a name: “Title of Liberty.” By giving it a name, it could be referenced even if not present, and the name would convey the message of the words even when the words could not be read. Right after introducing the name, Mormon notes that it was associated with Christians, with those who had taken upon themselves the name of Christ.

The first important point is that this is the language of translation, and uses the English words as we have received them. The actual names used would have been more appropriate to the language of the Nephites, yet they would still identify the Nephites as a people who believed in the coming Messiah, whatever those words were.

The next important point is that liberty is not associated with political freedoms, but with a specific religion. For the Nephites, their religion was at the heart of who they were, and at the heart of their politics. The ancient world did not make the divisions between politics and religion that modern peoples take for granted. Thus, the threat to liberty, while beginning in the realm of politics, was most directly a threat to religious liberty. In verse 10, Mormon has written: “[Amalickiah sought] to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty.”

The Nephites had some unique beliefs, and the most important was their acceptance of the coming Messiah. The most common apostate notion was to reject that belief. Therefore, it was understood that the rise of Amalickiah and the desire to return to a king brought with it a change to the religious climate, and probably to the prohibition of the belief of those who called themselves after the name of the coming Messiah.

Alma 46:17–18

17 And it came to pass that when he had poured out his soul to God, he named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, yea, and in fine, all the land, both on the north and on the south—A chosen land, and the land of liberty.

18 And he said: Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions.

Comments

When Mormon declares that Moroni “named all the land which was south of the land Desolation . . . a chosen land, and the land of liberty,” he was describing the land of Zarahemla. Moroni would have had no intention of suggesting that the lands of the Lamanites to the south of the land of Zarahemla were a “land of liberty.” As noted in the comments on verses 17–18, Moroni used the concept of “liberty” to mean liberty to believe in the Nephite religion. It was not a declaration of a political system except as that political system was founded in the Nephite religious ideas of egalitarianism.

Moroni is using different language to reinforce the covenant of the land. He was declaring that the covenant applied to the land of Zarahemla and to those who believed in the Nephite religion (specifically those who had taken upon themselves the name of Christ) and that God would support them as they combated this threat.

Alma 46:19–20

19 And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:

20 Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them.

Comments

Amalickiah had his supporters, and his supporters were among the lower judges (see verse 4). That meant that they had recognized positions of authority that were leading the people astray. Moroni needed to rally the people to the cause of the Nephite religion, or the cause of liberty. Therefore, he uses the banner to make himself more visible in crowds. In addition to those who could read the writing on the banner, he vocally proclaimed the message. It was a call to arms from the people of the land. There was no standing army and Moroni had to compete with Amalickiah for army recruits.

Alma 46:21–22

21 And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.

22 Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression.

Comments

The people understood that Moroni was calling them to arms. They came “with their armor girded about their loins.” The next description is another physical representation of a covenant. In the comments on Alma 44:14, the idea of a simile curse was discussed. The curse was that should the Lamanites not accept the covenant of peace, they would fall to earth just as Zerahemnah’s scalp had fallen.

This is not a curse, but a simile covenant. The covenant was made, and the simile invoked the nature of the penalty should they break their covenant. They made it clear that they intended to keep the covenant to fight for their religious liberty.

Alma 46:23–27

23 Moroni said unto them: Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain.

24 Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph; yea, let us remember the words of Jacob, before his death, for behold, he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed. And he said—Even as this remnant of garment of my son 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 of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment.

25 Now behold, this giveth my soul sorrow; nevertheless, my soul hath joy in my son, because of that part of his seed which shall be taken unto God.

26 Now behold, this was the language of Jacob.

27 And now who knoweth but what the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us? Yea, and even it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ.

Comments

Moroni picks up on the rent garments that the people have cast down as part of their simile covenant and links those torn garments to Joseph's rent garment that was presented to his father, Jacob. Moroni links the current people to their respected ancestors from the Old World. First to Joseph, and then to Jacob as the father of Israel. The quotation from Jacob in verse 25 is not found in our scriptures but must have been on the brass plates. Moroni is suggesting that while this conflict will cause sorrow through the loss of life, yet the God of Jacob will "have joy" in his children, the faithful Nephites.

Amalickiah Flees toward Lamanite Lands

Alma 46:28–29

28 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words he went forth, and also sent forth in all the parts of the land where there were dissensions, and gathered together all the people who were desirous to maintain their liberty, to stand against Amalickiah and those who had dissented, who were called Amalickiahites.

29 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah saw that the people of Moroni were more numerous than the Amalickiahites—and he also saw that his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken—therefore, fearing that he should not gain the point, he took those of his people who would and departed into the land of Nephi.

Comments

Moroni's actions in gathering the faithful to the cause of their liberty acted similarly to a vote of the people. The numbers of the people who desired the cause of liberty, meaning the liberty of their religion, were greater than those who supported Amalickiah. When those supporting Amalickiah, who had become known as Amalickiahites, discovered that they were in the minority, they realized that they would not be able to win the day through legal means, and, perhaps, not through military means. Therefore, they left.

Alma 46:30–33

30 Now Moroni thought it was not expedient that the Lamanites should have any more strength; therefore he thought to cut off the people of Amalickiah, or to take them and bring them back, and put Amalickiah to death; yea, for he knew that he would stir up the Lamanites to anger against them, and cause them to come to battle against them; and this he knew that Amalickiah would do that he might obtain his purposes.

31 Therefore Moroni thought it was expedient that he should take his armies, who had gathered themselves together, and armed themselves, and entered into a covenant to keep the peace—and it came to pass that he took his army and marched out with his tents into the wilderness, to cut off the course of Amalickiah in the wilderness.

32 And it came to pass that he did according to his desires, and marched forth into the wilderness, and headed the armies of Amalickiah.

33 And it came to pass that Amalickiah fled with a small number of his men, and the remainder were delivered up into the hands of Moroni and were taken back into the land of Zarahemla.

Comments

The Amalickiahite threat was not one of simple belief, but one of treason against the foundation of the Nephite religion and politics. Moroni determined that having a number of apostate and traitorous Nephites joining with the Lamanites would not be wise. He had recently fought a war that began with the Zoramites in Antionum apostatizing and joining with the Lamanites. Moroni clearly had no desire to repeat the number of deaths that resulted from that battle.

Moroni cuts off the people fleeing with Amalickiah, although Amalickiah himself and a few others escape and will indeed unite with the Lamanites. At this point, however, the majority of the Amalickiahites were captured.

Alma 46:34–37

34 Now, Moroni being a man who was appointed by the chief judges and the voice of the people, therefore he had power according to his will with the armies of the Nephites, to establish and to exercise authority over them.

35 And it came to pass that whomsoever of the Amalickiahites that would not enter into a covenant to support the cause of freedom, that they might maintain a free government, he caused to be put to death; and there were but few who denied the covenant of freedom.

36 And it came to pass also, that he caused the title of liberty to be hoisted upon every tower which was in all the land, which was possessed by the Nephites; and thus Moroni planted the standard of liberty among the Nephites.

37 And they began to have peace again in the land; and thus they did maintain peace in the land until nearly the end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Mormon makes certain that his reader understands that Moroni had been given authority to make the decisions that he does in this case. Similar to the ending of the battle with Zerahemnah's army (told in

chapter 43), Moroni gives the captured Amalickiahites the choice to covenant to “support the cause of freedom” or to be put to death. The power of the oath was sufficient that there “were but few who denied the covenant of freedom.” That there were few is not surprising. That there were any who chose death over the oath is even more surprising.

This part of the story ends with the title of liberty being raised over all the land, with the land again having peace. The story began in the beginning of the nineteenth year. They obtained “peace in the land until nearly the end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges.” In other words, it lasted only a few months.

Alma 46:38–41

38 And Helaman and the high priests did also maintain order in the church; yea, even for the space of four years did they have much peace and rejoicing in the church.

39 And it came to pass that there were many who died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing.

40 And there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent in the land—but not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases, to which men were subject by the nature of the climate—

41 But there were many who died with old age; and those who died in the faith of Christ are happy in him, as we must needs suppose.

Comments

Mormon gave the political aftermath of the Amalickiahite conflict in verses 34–37. These verses give the religious aftermath. The cause of religious liberty had been supported, and therefore “they [did] have much peace and rejoicing in the church.” As with other times of peace, Mormon gives very few details about that period. Verse 40 notes that there were some who died of fevers; therefore, the time of a lack of conflict was not a time of an absence of sorrow.

The impact of verses 40 and 41 is simply to note that life went on, and that while some died, they died of reasons not related to war. Verse 38 requires some clarification. It says that they maintained order in the church for four years. That is not the same as peace in the land. The church itself was strengthened and not threatened for four years. Nevertheless, there was war in the land with the Lamanites.

This is not the end of the chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 47

Amalickiah Galvanizes the Lamanites to War

Alma 47:1–3

1 Now we will return in our record to Amalickiah and those who had fled with him into the wilderness; for, behold, he had taken those who went with him, and went up in the land of Nephi among the Lamanites, and did stir up the Lamanites to anger against the people of Nephi, insomuch that the king of the Lamanites sent a proclamation throughout all his land, among all his people, that they should gather themselves together again to go to battle against the Nephites.

2 And it came to pass that when the proclamation had gone forth among them they were exceedingly afraid; yea, they feared to displease the king, and they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives. And it came to pass that they would not, or the more part of them would not, obey the commandments of the king.

3 And now it came to pass that the king was wroth because of their disobedience; therefore he gave Amalickiah the command of that part of his army which was obedient unto his commands, and commanded him that he should go forth and compel them to arms.

Comments

Mormon had left the story of Amalickiah with his flight to the Lamanites. After that mention, Mormon turned to the aftermath of the story. At this point, he returns to Amalickiah, but to the story of Amalickiah among the Lamanites. Amalickiah manages to do just as Moroni had feared. He stirred up the Lamanites to make war on the Nephites.

There is no indication of how Mormon got the information about these actions, specifically that the Lamanites “feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives.” From a purely historical standpoint, that seems somewhat unlikely and is certainly something that the Nephites would have said about the Lamanites, but much less likely to have been a Lamanite reason.

Regardless of the reasoning or methods, Amalickiah manages to become a commander of part of the Lamanite overking’s army.

Alma 47:4–6

4 Now behold, this was the desire of Amalickiah; for he being a very subtle man to do evil therefore he laid the plan in his heart to dethrone the king of the Lamanites.

5 And now he had got the command of those parts of the Lamanites who were in favor of the king; and he sought to gain favor of those who were not obedient; therefore he went forward to the place which was called Onidah, for thither had all the Lamanites fled; for they discovered the army coming, and, supposing that they were coming to destroy them, therefore they fled to Onidah, to the place of arms.

6 And they had appointed a man to be a king and a leader over them, being fixed in their minds with a determined resolution that they would not be subjected to go against the Nephites.

Comments

As with the verses from the beginning of this chapter, it is unknown how a Nephite record obtained all these details. Certainly, some were learned after the fact, perhaps by spies or deserters. What becomes interesting is that, even if we cannot be sure of motivations, it is clear that the Lamanites were not immune to defections of their own. Just as some Nephites left the political designation of Nephite, so too did some of the Lamanites leave their cities and allegiances and create new ones. In this case, there is a new king.

This new king had his own army, and they placed themselves on a hill which was clearly defensible. The idea of making a stand on a hill was clearly known to Book of Mormon peoples, as both the Jaredites and Nephites also did that.

Amalickiah Gains Control over Lamanite Armies

Alma 47:7–9

7 And it came to pass that they had gathered themselves together upon the top of the mount which was called Antipas, in preparation to battle.

8 Now it was not Amalickiah's intention to give them battle according to the commandments of the king; but behold, it was his intention to gain favor with the armies of the Lamanites, that he might place himself at their head and dethrone the king and take possession of the kingdom.

9 And behold, it came to pass that he caused his army to pitch their tents in the valley which was near the mount Antipas.

Comments

It is certain that it is possible to assault and take a heavily defended hill. However, especially in the days of hand-to-hand combat, it was a deadly affair. Amalickiah decided not to do that. What he does, however, has the first appearance of a typical response which is to lay siege to the defended position.

Alma 47:10–13

10 And it came to pass that when it was night he sent a secret embassy into the mount Antipas, desiring that the leader of those who were upon the mount, whose name was Lehonti, that he should come down to the foot of the mount, for he desired to speak with him.

11 And it came to pass that when Lehonti received the message he durst not go down to the foot of the mount. And it came to pass that Amalickiah sent again the second time, desiring him to come down. And it came to pass that Lehonti would not; and he sent again the third time.

12 And it came to pass that when Amalickiah found that he could not get Lehonti to come down off from the mount, he went up into the mount, nearly to Lehonti's camp; and he sent again the fourth time his message unto Lehonti, desiring that he would come down, and that he would bring his guards with him.

13 And it came to pass that when Lehonti had come down with his guards to Amalickiah, that Amalickiah desired him to come down with his army in the night-time, and surround those men in their camps over whom the king had given him command, and that he would deliver them up into Lehonti's hands, if he would make him (Amalickiah) a second leader over the whole army.

Comments

If Mormon was perhaps bothered that Chief Captain Moroni had used a stratagem in battle (see Alma 43:30), he was certainly appalled at Amalickiah's duplicity. The amazing thing is that Lehonti accepted Amalickiah's offer. Somehow, Amalickiah made himself appear to be sincere and honest. Although, how one might consider a general who turns on his own army to be honest, is unknown.

Mormon includes this story both to show how Amalickiah gained the influence he ultimately did, and also to demonstrate the untrustworthy and evil nature of the man.

Alma 47:14–16

14 And it came to pass that Lehonti came down with his men and surrounded the men of Amalickiah, so that before they awoke at the dawn of day they were surrounded by the armies of Lehonti.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that they were surrounded, they pled with Amalickiah that he would suffer them to fall in with their brethren, that they might not be destroyed. Now this was the very thing which Amalickiah desired.

16 And it came to pass that he delivered his men, contrary to the commands of the king. Now this was the thing that Amalickiah desired, that he might accomplish his designs in dethroning the king.

Comments

Amalickiah has designs much greater than simply leading an army. He has desires of dethroning the Lamanite king and is preparing to do so by amassing an even larger army than he had before. In addition

to the army that he previously led, he now has control over one that was already in conflict with, and opposed to, the Lamanite king.

Amalickiah Becomes King of the Land through Deception

Alma 47:17–20

17 Now it was the custom among the Lamanites, if their chief leader was killed, to appoint the second leader to be their chief leader.

18 And it came to pass that Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer poison by degrees to Lehonti, that he died.

19 Now, when Lehonti was dead, the Lamanites appointed Amalickiah to be their leader and their chief commander.

20 And it came to pass that Amalickiah marched with his armies (for he had gained his desires) to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi, which was the chief city.

Comments

Mormon supplies the bit of information that his readers will need to understand Amalickiah's next move. By custom, when the leader died, the second in command rose to full command. Therefore, Amalickiah murders Lehonti. Of course, if he had done so blatantly, he might have been executed, so Amalickiah elected to use poison gradually over time. Lehonti died and Amalickiah was not suspected.

Having acquired the leadership of the enlarged army, Amalickiah makes his next move and marches to the chief city, the city of Nephi.

Alma 47:21–24

21 And the king came out to meet him with his guards, for he supposed that Amalickiah had fulfilled his commands, and that Amalickiah had gathered together so great an army to go against the Nephites to battle.

22 But behold, as the king came out to meet him Amalickiah caused that his servants should go forth to meet the king. And they went and bowed themselves before the king, as if to reverence him because of his greatness.

23 And it came to pass that the king put forth his hand to raise them, as was the custom with the Lamanites, as a token of peace, which custom they had taken from the Nephites.

24 And it came to pass that when he had raised the first from the ground, behold he stabbed the king to the heart; and he fell to the earth.

Comments

Amalickiah continues to gain power through deceit and murder. When he brings his army to the king, the king suspects nothing. The king would not go out without guards, so they accompanied him, but they were doubtless not on high alert. The murder occurs when Amalickiah's servants have bowed down. That put them in a vulnerable position, which demonstrated their lack of harmful intent, at least according to custom.

When the king puts forth his hand to raise them, the first of Amalickiah's servants kills the king by taking advantage of both surprise and the fact that the king's arm was probably in a position where he could not easily defend himself against a strike.

Alma 47:25–28

25 Now the servants of the king fled; and the servants of Amalickiah raised a cry, saying:

26 Behold, the servants of the king have stabbed him to the heart, and he has fallen and they have fled; behold, come and see.

27 And it came to pass that Amalickiah commanded that his armies should march forth and see what had happened to the king; and when they had come to the spot, and found the king lying in his gore, Amalickiah pretended to be wroth, and said: Whosoever loved the king, let him go forth, and pursue his servants that they may be slain.

28 And it came to pass that all they who loved the king, when they heard these words, came forth and pursued after the servants of the king.

Comments

The only people who would have seen what happened to the king were either the king's guards or Amalickiah's people. The guards knew that Amalickiah's people had killed the king, and also knew that they were standing not far from a very large army. Being only an honor guard, they were outnumbered and fled.

Whether or not they had fled, Amalickiah's army would have been ready to either blame them or kill them, whichever served them best. In this case, the guards fled, and Amalickiah takes advantage of that flight to use it to declare their guilt in killing the king. Therefore, Amalickiah arranged for the king's murder, but also managed to be seen as a hero in the aftermath.

Alma 47:29–31

29 Now when the servants of the king saw an army pursuing after them, they were frightened again, and fled into the wilderness, and came over into the land of Zarahemla and joined the people of Ammon.

30 And the army which pursued after them returned, having pursued after them in vain; and thus Amalickiah, by his fraud, gained the hearts of the people.

31 And it came to pass on the morrow he entered the city Nephi with his armies, and took possession of the city.

Comments

The guards escaped the Nephites. There must have been a story of how they arrived, the tale they told, and the asylum they requested. That isn't the story Mormon was interested in. Mormon indicates only that they are sent to the people of Ammon, who themselves were refugees from the Lamanite lands. It is possible that some of the story of Amalickiah would have been transmitted by the guards, but the very fact that they went unafraid to meet Amalickiah suggests that the only story they knew of him was his last act of treachery, and not his previous ones.

The result of Amalickiah's machinations was that he entered the city of Nephi and became the de facto leader. He was supported by a large army against the citizens of the city who had no reason to doubt his version of the story of the death of their king.

Alma 47:32–36

32 And now it came to pass that the queen, when she had heard that the king was slain—for Amalickiah had sent an embassy to the queen informing her that the king had been slain by his servants, that he had pursued them with his army, but it was in vain, and they had made their escape—

33 Therefore, when the queen had received this message she sent unto Amalickiah, desiring him that he would spare the people of the city; and she also desired him that he should come in unto her; and she also desired him that he should bring witnesses with him to testify concerning the death of the king.

34 And it came to pass that Amalickiah took the same servant that slew the king, and all them who were with him, and went in unto the queen, unto the place where she sat; and they all testified unto her that the king was slain by his own servants; and they said also: They have fled; does not this testify against them? And thus they satisfied the queen concerning the death of the king.

35 And it came to pass that Amalickiah sought the favor of the queen, and took her unto him to wife; and thus by his fraud, and by the assistance of his cunning servants, he obtained the kingdom; yea, he was acknowledged king throughout all the land, among all the people of the Lamanites, who were composed of the Lamanites and the Lemuelites and the Ishmaelites, and all the dissenters of the Nephites, from the reign of Nephi down to the present time.

36 Now these dissenters, having the same instruction and the same information of the Nephites, yea, having been instructed in the same knowledge of the Lord, nevertheless, it is strange to relate, not long

after their dissensions they became more hardened and impenitent, and more wild, wicked and ferocious than the Lamanites—drinking in with the traditions of the Lamanites; giving way to indolence, and all manner of lasciviousness; yea, entirely forgetting the Lord their God.

Comments

The final consolidation of Amalickiah's power came when he took the previous queen as his wife. Thus, even as a former Nephite, Amalickiah was now married into Lamanite royalty, and could rule by force of his armies and also by the traditions of the royal line.

Mormon's conclusion to this section of the story is that all of those who had been dissenters from the Nephites became even more firm in their hatred of the Nephites than before. This story is a prime example of Mormon's contention that the most dangerous enemies are apostate Nephites, at least until the Gadiantons enter the picture.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 48

Amalickiah Leads the Lamanites to War

Alma 48:1–4

1 And now it came to pass that, as soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites.

2 And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites, insomuch that in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges, he having accomplished his designs thus far, yea, having been made king over the Lamanites, he sought also to reign over all the land, yea, and all the people who were in the land, the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.

3 Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered together a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites.

4 For he was determined, because of the greatness of the number of his people, to overpower the Nephites and to bring them into bondage.

Comments

The story of Amalickiah began when he desired to be a king among the Nephites (see Alma 46:3–4). At this point, he has become the king of the Lamanites, but he has not forgotten his previous desire, and perhaps his previous anger at having been cast out of the land of Zarahemla. Therefore, he stirs up the Lamanites to go into the land of Zarahemla to attempt to bring the land of Zarahemla under his control as well.

As with other conquests, the point of the conquest wasn't to gain territory and impose their government on the land, but rather to bring the Nephites into bondage. In Mesoamerica, this was a tribute relationship, where the conquering nation would allow the conquered city to retain its government and way of life, but also required tribute on an annual basis.

Alma 48:5–6

5 And thus he did appoint chief captains of the Zoramites, they being the most acquainted with the strength of the Nephites, and their places of resort, and the weakest parts of their cities; therefore he appointed them to be chief captains over his armies.

6 And it came to pass that they took their camp, and moved forth toward the land of Zarahemla in the wilderness.

Comments

Amalickiah places Zoramites in important positions. They were a people most recently part of the Nephite lands, and therefore would have had the best and most recent information about Nephite strengths and weaknesses. Of course, one of the weaknesses would be in the southeastern section where the Zoramites had once been central to the defense of Nephite lands from that entry point.

Having done so, the army moves. At this point, Mormon halts his story of the Lamanite actions and returns to a focus on Chief Captain Moroni. To do so, Mormon moves back slightly in time to show what Moroni had been doing during the time that Amalickiah had been consolidating power among the Lamanites.

Moroni Strengthens Nephite Defenses

Alma 48:7–10

7 Now it came to pass that while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God.

8 Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land.

9 And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

10 And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians.

Comments

Chief Captain Moroni understood that when Amalickiah escaped capture, he would both go to the Lamanites, and he would likely stir them up to invade. Moroni could not have anticipated how dramatically Amalickiah would rise in power and ability to direct the Lamanite armies, but Moroni still thought it prudent to

defend the land with more than just men. In addition to strengthening the armies, Moroni erected “small forts, or places of resort.”

The idea of the small fort was that it was a defensible position that served only a military purpose. These were not walled cities, but military outposts. When the text says that he “[threw] up banks of earth round about,” this was a typical means of simple fortification. A pit was dug around the area to be protected, and the dirt removed from the pit was built up on the interior side of the trench.

It is interesting that Mormon also mentions stone walls. While some locations would have had them, some might have had the more typical wooden walls erected on the top of the mounded dirt. Both types of fortifications are known archaeologically in Mesoamerica, though most of them are attested in later times.

Alma 48:11–13

11 And Moroni was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery;

12 Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

13 Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood.

Comments

In the comments on Alma 43:26–28, it was suggested that Mormon was more interested in the people involved in the wars than in the wars themselves. In these three verses we see the nature of Mormon’s interest in, and admiration for, Chief Captain Moroni. These three verses are not part of the story, they are simply Mormon’s expression of admiration for Moroni’s character. Doubtless, when Mormon named his own son after Chief Captain Moroni, he was hoping that these qualities would also manifest in his son, Moroni.

Alma 48:14–16

14 Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives.

15 And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger;

16 And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity.

Comments

In Alma 43:46–47, Mormon gave the Lord’s commandment on military matters for the Nephites: “And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, 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 again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion.”

These verses place that commandment in the context of their defensive preparations. Since they were not to “give an offense,” they needed to be prepared for a strong defense against any who might come against them. As the label for “enemy,” the Lamanites were typically the enemy they had to defend against. That will continue through the end of the Book of Mormon, but we will see the Gadiantons arise as a different enemy, and one that foretold the eventual Nephite destruction.

Verse 16 ties the defensive warfare into the covenant of the land, where the Nephites would be protected upon their righteousness. Thus, verse 16 notes that the Nephites should keep the commandments of God. It is important for modern readers to understand that while the covenant of protection was certain, it was not one that meant that the Nephites did not have to act on their own behalf. They needed to act as though they were on their own, but trusting that, with Yahweh’s assistance, their efforts would be sufficient.

Alma 48:17–18

17 Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.

18 Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God.

Comments

Mormon had extolled Chief Captain Moroni’s virtues in verses 12–13, then continued with the story of the defenses. However, that story included the Yahweh’s covenant, and that led Mormon to return to his admiration of Moroni as a man of firm faith. There are perhaps few better goals than to have it said of any

of us that: “if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men.” That is praise that Mormon reserved for Captain Moroni. Even with the importance of Alma₁ and Alma₂ to Nephite society, even with all of their faith, Mormon never said anything of the like about either of them.

He does use Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ as similar models of righteous men. He knows that Chief Captain Moroni was not the only righteous Nephite, but Mormon’s personal admiration for Moroni is obvious. Perhaps some of that admiration was due to his empathy of a man of God being caught up in the ungodlike business of war.

Alma 48:19–21

19 Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni; for they did preach the word of God, and they did baptize unto repentance all men whosoever would hearken unto their words.

20 And thus they went forth, and the people did humble themselves because of their words, insomuch that they were highly favored of the Lord, and thus they were free from wars and contentions among themselves, yea, even for the space of four years.

21 But, as I have said, in the latter end of the nineteenth year, yea, notwithstanding their peace amongst themselves, they were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.

Comments

Having mentioned the faithfulness of Chief Captain Moroni, and then Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂, Mormon picks up on the theme of the spread of the Nephite religion. He had spoken of Helaman₁’s efforts in Alma 46:38. At that time, Mormon had indicated that they had arranged the affairs of the church and that their work would last for four years. At this time, it is less than a year after that statement. Thus, the four years mentioned in verse 20 are the very same four years Mormon indicated in Alma 46:38. Just as Alma 46:37 noted that they only had peace until “nearly the end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges,” so in verse 21 does Mormon repeat that by the end of the nineteenth year they “were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites.”

The very specific repetition suggests that we are seeing a case of repetitive resumption (see comments accompanying 1 Nephi 6:1–6 for details of the technique). In between these two repeated phrases is mostly the story of Amalickiah among the Lamanites, which would be appropriately seen as an insertion in Mormon’s intended text. The ending of that insertion focuses on the defensive fortifications, but also includes Mormon’s insertion of his admiration for Chief Captain Moroni as well as the explanation of the justification of defensive warfare.

It would appear that Mormon has gotten back on track of his intended story, which is the war with the Lamanites that begins in the ending of the nineteenth year, and which begins officially in the beginning of our chapter 49, although there is no intervening chapter break in the 1830 edition.

Alma 48:22–25

22 Yea, and in fine, their wars never did cease for the space of many years with the Lamanites, notwithstanding their much reluctance.

23 Now, they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; yea, and this was not all—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.

24 Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites.

25 Yea, they could not bear that their brethren should rejoice over the blood of the Nephites, so long as there were any who should keep the commandments of God, for the promise of the Lord was, if they should keep his commandments they should prosper in the land.

Comments

Even though Mormon has repeated text that suggests that he is ready to reenter his planned text, he does not move to do so immediately. As a writer, he is still thinking about the last information that he inserted into the story, that of the relationship of the Nephites towards the Lamanites. These verses finish his ideas, noting that even though there was often warfare, “they were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood.”

Perhaps one of the reasons that Mormon notes this of the people under Chief Captain Moroni’s charge was the stark contrast to the people Mormon had to lead, a people who had become as blood-thirsty as the Lamanites. In these verses, at least, Mormon can show what the Nephites should have been like, even though those he knew no longer had those qualities.

Alma 49

Nephite Fortifications Thwart Lamanites

Alma 49:1–4

1 And now it came to pass in the eleventh month of the nineteenth year, on the tenth day of the month, the armies of the Lamanites were seen approaching towards the land of Ammonihah.

2 And behold, the city had been rebuilt, and Moroni had stationed an army by the borders of the city, and they had cast up dirt round about to shield them from the arrows and the stones of the Lamanites; for behold, they fought with stones and with arrows.

3 Behold, I said that the city of Ammonihah had been rebuilt. I say unto you, yea, that it was in part rebuilt; and because the Lamanites had destroyed it once because of the iniquity of the people, they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them.

4 But behold, how great was their disappointment; for behold, the Nephites had dug up a ridge of earth round about them, which was so high that the Lamanites could not cast their stones and their arrows at them that they might take effect, neither could they come upon them save it was by their place of entrance.

Comments

The earlier lightning attack on Ammonihah succeeded, at least in part, because the people of Ammonihah did not know that the Lamanites were coming. Ammonihah is on the western part of the land of Zarahemla, and northwest of Zarahemla. This suggests that there was a mountain range that shielded the approach of the Lamanite army, as well as a pass that led from one side of the mountains to Ammonihah. Even though Mormon could not have known what was in the Lamanite mind when he suggested that they attacked again at Ammonihah because “they supposed that it would again become an easy prey for them,” it was not an unreasonable guess.

The last thing that the Lamanites, and perhaps the Zoramites, had known of Ammonihah was that it had been destroyed, and was, as Mormon called it, the “Desolation of Nehors.” Mormon indicated at that time that Ammonihah was abandoned “for many years” (see Alma 16:11). That was in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges.

Now in the nineteenth year, it had been rebuilt. The Zoramite-informed Lamanites did not know it had been rebuilt. This new defensive position consisted at least of the dirt embankment on the inside of the trench from which the dirt was taken, making a more formidable barrier. No mention is made of a wooden wall, but that would have been a typical part of the defensive structure.

Alma 49:5–9

5 Now at this time the chief captains of the Lamanites were astonished exceedingly, because of the wisdom of the Nephites in preparing their places of security.

6 Now the leaders of the Lamanites had supposed, because of the greatness of their numbers, yea, they supposed that they should be privileged to come upon them as they had hitherto done; yea, and they had also prepared themselves with shields, and with breastplates; and they had also prepared themselves with garments of skins, yea, very thick garments to cover their nakedness.

7 And being thus prepared they supposed that they should easily overpower and subject their brethren to the yoke of bondage, or slay and massacre them according to their pleasure.

8 But behold, to their uttermost astonishment, they were prepared for them, in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi. Now they were prepared for the Lamanites, to battle after the manner of the instructions of Moroni.

9 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites, were exceedingly astonished at their manner of preparation for war.

Comments

These verses allow Mormon to express his own admiration for Chief Captain Moroni's defensive wisdom and ingenuity by putting his words in Lamanite mouths. From a purely historical perspective, it would have been extremely difficult for any Nephite to know what was on the Lamanites minds, and these verses are most easily recognized as taking literary license rather than reflecting historical verisimilitude.

The part that the Nephites clearly could see was that the Lamanites had learned from Chief Captain Moroni's use of defensive armor. The Lamanites copied that armor, with shields, breastplates, and "very thick garments." See the comments on Alma 43:19 for the Mesoamerican context of this type of defensive armor.

Alma 49:10–12

10 Now, if king Amalickiah had come down out of the land of Nephi, at the head of his army, perhaps he would have caused the Lamanites to have attacked the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah; for behold, he did care not for the blood of his people.

11 But behold, Amalickiah did not come down himself to battle. And behold, his chief captains durst not attack the Nephites at the city of Ammonihah, for Moroni had altered the management of affairs among the Nephites, insomuch that the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them.

12 Therefore they retreated into the wilderness, and took their camp and marched towards the land of Noah, supposing that to be the next best place for them to come against the Nephites.

Comments

Verse 10 sets up the later story of the Lamanite attack on the city of Noah. At this point, however, the Lamanite generals decide not to force the issue at Ammonihah but attempt to find a weaker entry point. Therefore, the retreat “into the wilderness.” The Book of Mormon is not clear on what it means when it describes a wilderness. Certainly, it indicated a land where there was no population, but it doesn’t indicate why it was unoccupied. The probability is that it indicated a mountainous area, the plausible mountain range that had provided the Lamanite army cover as they came up from the south and then turned east to attack Ammonihah.

Alma 49:13–15

13 For they knew not that Moroni had fortified, or had built forts of security, for every city in all the land round about; therefore, they marched forward to the land of Noah with a firm determination; yea, their chief captains came forward and took an oath that they would destroy the people of that city.

14 But behold, to their astonishment, the city of Noah, which had hitherto been a weak place, had now, by the means of Moroni, become strong, yea, even to exceed the strength of the city Ammonihah.

15 And now, behold, this was wisdom in Moroni; for he had supposed that they would be frightened at the city Ammonihah; and as the city of Noah had hitherto been the weakest part of the land therefore they would march thither to battle; and thus it was according to his desires.

Comments

Just as the Lamanites did not know that Moroni had rebuilt Ammonihah (at least as a “fort of security,” if not a thriving city), they did not know that Moroni had significantly reinforced the defenses of the city of Noah, which had previously been a weakly defended location.

The Lamanites had hoped to find an easy way into the heart of the land of Zarahemla, but Chief Captain Moroni had reinforced many cities to prevent just such an easy invasion. Therefore, the Lamanites were faced with yet another fortified city, and probably understood that this is what they would continue to find.

Alma 49:16–20

16 And behold, Moroni had appointed Lehi to be chief captain over the men of that city; and it was that same Lehi who fought with the Lamanites in the valley on the east of the river Sidon.

17 And now behold it came to pass, that when the Lamanites had found that Lehi commanded the city they were again disappointed, for they feared Lehi exceedingly; nevertheless their chief captains had sworn with an oath to attack the city; therefore, they brought up their armies.

18 Now behold, the Lamanites could not get into their forts of security by any other way save by the entrance, because of the highness of the bank which had been thrown up, and the depth of the ditch which had been dug round about, save it were by the entrance.

19 And thus were the Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way, by casting over stones and arrows at them.

20 Thus they were prepared, yea, a body of their strongest men, with their swords and their slings, to smite down all who should attempt to come into their place of security by the place of entrance; and thus were they prepared to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

Comments

Mormon's comments about Amalickiah not caring for shedding the blood of his own people becomes relevant here as "their chief captains had sworn an oath to attack the city." The city of Noah was not only perhaps better defended than Ammonihah had been, but it was also defended by a general, Lehi², who had been part of the army that had soundly defeated the army of Zerahemnah. Nevertheless, the Lamanite chief captains attacked.

We learn a little more of the nature of the Nephite defenses. In many ways, they were similar to defensive fortifications all over the world. Many principles are the same. Since the walls surrounded a city, the people needed a way in and out. In this case, it does not appear that there were gates. The entryway appears to have been open. However, the entrance would have to be somehow curved, or turned a corner, so that there was no way to have a direct assault on the opening.

The elongated entryway also allowed armed men to take up position on the tops of the walls on either side. Thus, in verse 20, there are strong men standing at the entrance. There were defenders along the walls (verse 19), and certainly men on the top of the walls of the path leading to the entrance, making that entrance a killing zone should any army attempt to attack at that location.

Lamanites Repulsed at the City of Noah

Alma 49:21–24

21 And it came to pass that the captains of the Lamanites brought up their armies before the place of entrance, and began to contend with the Nephites, to get into their place of security;

but behold, they were driven back from time to time, insomuch that they were slain with an immense slaughter.

22 Now when they found that they could not obtain power over the Nephites by the pass, they began to dig down their banks of earth that they might obtain a pass to their armies, that they might have an equal chance to fight; but behold, in these attempts they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were thrown at them; and instead of filling up their ditches by pulling down the banks of earth, they were filled up in a measure with their dead and wounded bodies.

23 Thus the Nephites had all power over their enemies; and thus the Lamanites did attempt to destroy the Nephites until their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain; while, on the other hand, there was not a single soul of the Nephites which was slain.

24 There were about fifty who were wounded, who had been exposed to the arrows of the Lamanites through the pass, but they were shielded by their shields, and their breastplates, and their head-plates, insomuch that their wounds were upon their legs, many of which were very severe.

Comments

The nature of ancient armaments assured that the advantage in direct combat would be to the defender. They had the high ground and were able to sling down stones and arrows on the attackers. Other than at the point of entrance, the attackers had to cross the ditch, and then find a way to scale the wall, all under severe attack from stones and arrows, hence the destruction noted in verse 22.

One of the standard options for attacking such a walled city was to attempt to breach the wall itself. Thus, as also indicated in verse 22, the Lamanites attempted to dig to undermine the wall. They were still unprotected, and the attempt was unsuccessful. The result was the devastation of the attacking army, with not a single fatality among the defenders, and only fifty who were wounded. For the Lamanites, it was a disastrous attack.

One important note is verse 24's notice that "their wounds were upon their legs." Nephite armor, and indeed Mesoamerican armor, defended the upper body, but there was no defensive armor on the legs. Hence, the legs were unprotected. This led directly to the large numbers of wounds on the legs.

Alma 49:25–27

25 And it came to pass, that when the Lamanites saw that their chief captains were all slain they fled into the wilderness. And it came to pass that they returned to the land of Nephi, to inform their king, Amalickiah, who was a Nephite by birth, concerning their great loss.

26 And it came to pass that he was exceedingly angry with his people, because he had not obtained his desire over the Nephites; he had not subjected them to the yoke of bondage.

27 Yea, he was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood; and this because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people.

Comments

This battle ended, and the Lamanite army returned to the land of Nephi in defeat. Amalickiah was still desirous to bring the Nephites into bondage, so this will not be the last of the war. It will start up again.

These three verses give the Lamanite reaction, which was an increase in anger and a renewal of the desire to bring the Nephites into bondage. The next three verses describe the Nephite reaction.

Alma 49:28–30

28 And it came to pass, that on the other hand, the people of Nephi did thank the Lord their God, because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies.

29 And thus ended the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

30 Yea, and there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent forth to preach among the people.

Comments

Mormon attributes their victory to Yahweh, in accordance with the covenant of the land. The Nephites were sufficiently righteous to warrant Yahweh's protection, and they had received it. Mormon underlines that it was not only a fulfillment of the protection part of the covenant, but also that there was "exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God."

This ends the nineteenth year, and with the end of the nineteenth year, Mormon ended his chapter, which our modern editions have split into chapters 45–49. Even though a battle and a year have ended, the war has not ended, and will continue in the next chapter. In such situations, where there is no other reason for Mormon to create a chapter ending, he often breaks between years, allowing for a set of five years. Depending upon how he wants to tell his stories, sometimes the fifth year starts the next chapter, or sometimes it ends the current chapter. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable emphasis on five-year blocks of time. See the comments on Alma 1:1 for more information.

Alma 50

Moroni Adds to the Nephite Defenses

Alma 50:1–3

1 And now it came to pass that Moroni did not stop making preparations for war, or to defend his people against the Lamanites; for he caused that his armies should commence in the commencement of the twentieth year of the reign of the judges, that they should commence in digging up heaps of earth round about all the cities, throughout all the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

2 And upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers, yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man, round about the cities.

3 And he caused that upon those works of timbers there should be a frame of pickets built upon the timbers round about; and they were strong and high.

Comments

The preparations already done for defense proved effective in the city of Noah. Moroni clearly understood that such defenses might be required in all locations, so he continued to prepare all Nephite cities. At this time, Mormon gives us more detail of how the defenses were created. Ridges, or heaps of earth, taken from ditches dug around their cities, are the same as the earlier description (see Alma 48:8), but here he specifically mentions that there would be a wooden wall built atop the ridges. Although it is possible that this is a new addition, it is also possible that Mormon only mentions it here, and that it was a feature of other fortifications.

One of the Mesoamerican sites that exhibits just this type of defensive wall is found in the site of Becán in the Yucatan peninsula. The site dates to Book of Mormon times but might have been considered a Lamanite site rather than part of the Nephite hegemony. Nevertheless, this type of fortification appears in the correct time period and among cultures that could have been involved in the Book of Mormon story.

Alma 50:4–6

4 And he caused towers to be erected that overlooked those works of pickets, and he caused places of security to be built upon those towers, that the stones and the arrows of the Lamanites could not hurt them.

5 And they were prepared that they could cast stones from the top thereof, according to their pleasure and their strength, and slay him who should attempt to approach near the walls of the city.

6 Thus Moroni did prepare strongholds against the coming of their enemies, round about every city in all the land.

Comments

Archaeological remains of Becán reveal wooden wall postholes (the wood itself has not survived the ravages of time). The principle lies in the idea of extending the height of the earthen wall itself, so it would not be a surprising addition to that type of defensive structure.

Alma 50:7–11

7 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his armies should go forth into the east wilderness; yea, and they went forth and drove all the Lamanites who were in the east wilderness into their own lands, which were south of the land of Zarahemla.

8 And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.

9 And it came to pass that when Moroni had driven all the Lamanites out of the east wilderness, which was north of the lands of their own possessions, he caused that the inhabitants who were in the land of Zarahemla and in the land round about should go forth into the east wilderness, even to the borders by the seashore, and possess the land.

10 And he also placed armies on the south, in the borders of their possessions, and caused them to erect fortifications that they might secure their armies and their people from the hands of their enemies.

11 And thus he cut off all the strongholds of the Lamanites in the east wilderness, yea, and also on the west, fortifying the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, from the west sea, running by the head of the river Sidon—the Nephites possessing all the land northward, yea, even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful, according to their pleasure.

Comments

One of the difficulties in establishing a Book of Mormon geography in the real world is that researchers often treat the question from the latest Nephite perspective rather than one that is time appropriate. One of the important distinctions in timing is given in these verses. The eastern border of the Nephite lands was described in Alma 22:29, but the description is often ignored in mapping the Nephite lands in favor of what those lands looked like after Chief Captain Moroni's military expansion into those eastern lands.

Alma 22:29 said: “And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them. And thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites.” Being nearly surrounded was not a good idea, and Moroni pushed the Lamanites out of the lands, gaining control of the coast.

Mormon gives us no information about his campaign, and it is given so quickly that it suggests that while there were Lamanites located along the eastern border of the Nephite lands, they were not located in populous cities. Thus, they were not Nephites, but may not have been the same Lamanites as those who were obviously a state-like organization in which the sons of Mosiah₂ preached, and over which Amalickiah had recently become king.

The nature of the term Lamanite should be remembered to be similar to the Hebrew use of the word “gentile,” which did not designate any particular city or nation, but only “not us.” That is the Nephite usage first documented in Jacob 1:14, where Jacob wrote: “I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites.”

Alma 50:12–16

12 Thus Moroni, with his armies, which did increase daily because of the assurance of protection which his works did bring forth unto them, did seek to cut off the strength and the power of the Lamanites from off the lands of their possessions, that they should have no power upon the lands of their possession.

13 And it came to pass that the Nephites began the foundation of a city, and they called the name of the city Moroni; and it was by the east sea; and it was on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites.

14 And they also began a foundation for a city between the city of Moroni and the city of Aaron, joining the borders of Aaron and Moroni; and they called the name of the city, or the land, Nephihah.

15 And they also began in that same year to build many cities on the north, one in a particular manner which they called Lehi, which was in the north by the borders of the seashore.

16 And thus ended the twentieth year.

Comments

Moroni had a year to continue his campaign of strengthening the Nephite defenses. Having taken possession of the eastern seaboard, he fortified the coast to protect the Nephite lands from any army that might attempt to come up the coast to enter deeper into Nephite lands.

Although we typically hear of threats from the Lamanites on the south, there must have been at least some possibility of a threat from the north, because Moroni fortifies the north as well. That fact continues to emphasize that there were more people in the land than those directly mentioned in the Book of Mormon. These people in the north will become more important in the book of Helaman.

In verse 15, we have a reminder that the punctuation of the sentences in the Book of Mormon was not part of the inspired translation. The words were, but the compositor at Grandin Press created the punctuation. In this case, it makes it appear that there was a type of city that they called Lehi. It is more likely that there was a certain type of city built, and that city was named Lehi. Thus, it would be better to add a comma: “one in a particular manner, which they called Lehi.”

Alma 50:17–20

17 And in these prosperous circumstances were the people of Nephi in the commencement of the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

18 And they did prosper exceedingly, and they became exceedingly rich; yea, and they did multiply and wax strong in the land.

19 And thus we see how merciful and just are all the dealings of the Lord, to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men; yea, we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi, saying:

20 Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

Comments

Mormon takes a short break from developing his historical story and inserts the moral of the lesson he is attempting to show in this break between wars. Not only do they have a time of peace, but it is also one of prosperity. This is exactly what the covenant of the land promises, and Mormon makes that explicit by repeating it in verse 20.

It is not surprising that Mormon would have entered this promise to Lehi, even though he appears to have been unaware of the small plates record, upon which modern readers find that promise. That was so foundational to Nephite society that it was certainly passed on in numerous ways and repeated often.

Alma 50:21–23

21 And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrellings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

22 And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites.

23 But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni, yea, even at this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Mormon makes explicit that he is describing the effects of living according to the covenant of the land that he quoted in verse 20. The basic information repeats what he had said in verses 17–19, but even though

there is the same conceptual content before and after the promise in verse 20, this is not a chiasmic arrangement. It is simply a repetition for emphasis. However, verse 23 reconfirms Mormon's personal admiration for Chief Captain Moroni, apparently crediting Moroni with the ability of the Nephite people to live in both peace and prosperity in accordance with the covenant of the land.

Morianton Causes Contention in the Northeast

Alma 50:24–27

24 And it came to pass that the twenty and second year of the reign of the judges also ended in peace; yea, and also the twenty and third year.

25 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges, there would also have been peace among the people of Nephi had it not been for a contention which took place among them concerning the land of Lehi, and the land of Morianton, which joined upon the borders of Lehi; both of which were on the borders by the seashore.

26 For behold, the people who possessed the land of Morianton did claim a part of the land of Lehi; therefore there began to be a warm contention between them, insomuch that the people of Morianton took up arms against their brethren, and they were determined by the sword to slay them.

27 But behold, the people who possessed the land of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni, and appealed unto him for assistance; for behold they were not in the wrong.

Comments

This period of peace lasts for years rather than the few months that we saw in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges. Nevertheless, there arose contention. This case teaches us more about the nature of what it meant to be a Nephite during Chief Captain Moroni's time. Even though the people who possessed the land of Morianton were considered Nephites, as were the people in the land of Lehi, there was a dispute about the borders of the land.

This dispute suggests that these were new communities established after Moroni's campaign to drive the Lamanites out of the eastern portion of Nephite lands. Thus, with new communities, long tradition had not codified the boundary lines between the territories that were beholding to the central city. Those lands were available to be tilled, and therefore had an effect on the prosperity of the central city.

Even though both cities were ostensibly Nephite, there was no specific mode of appeal, and conflict could develop internally. The people of Morianton rose up against the city of Lehi, not against the whole of the Nephite hegemony. This continues to paint a picture of cities aligned with other cities, with a principal city that might attempt to act for all. It was not a state government as we see arise in other areas of the world. Archaeologists and ethnohistorians debate whether Mesoamerica ever had true states, but the

more state-like political entities tended to come later than Book of Mormon times, and nothing in the Book of Mormon suggests that the Nephites had a state-type organization.

Alma 50:28–31

28 And it came to pass that when the people of Morianton, who were led by a man whose name was Morianton, found that the people of Lehi had fled to the camp of Moroni, they were exceedingly fearful lest the army of Moroni should come upon them and destroy them.

29 Therefore, Morianton put it into their hearts that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water, and take possession of the land which was northward.

30 And behold, they would have carried this plan into effect, (which would have been a cause to have been lamented) but behold, Morianton being a man of much passion, therefore he was angry with one of his maid servants, and he fell upon her and beat her much.

31 And it came to pass that she fled, and came over to the camp of Moroni, and told Moroni all things concerning the matter, and also concerning their intentions to flee into the land northward.

Comments

Communications were much more difficult in the ancient world, and it is not surprising that Chief Captain Moroni only learns of the problems in the land of Morianton by those who left that land and presented their case. There are a few instructive historical lessons in this event.

The first is that this is a fairly new community. It was named for their founder (see verse 28), who lived among them. This confirms that the newness of the settlement was one of the reasons for the dispute with the city of Lehi mentioned in the previous verses.

Second, when Morianton decides to flee because he fears that Moroni's army will come against them, he does not go south to the Lamanites, but he attempts to go north. At this point in the Book of Mormon, we have seen little of the land northward, and know only that it is a land of desolation. What we learn here is that it is also somehow dangerous and heading in that direction "would have been a cause to have been lamented" (verse 30). There must have been people there at that time, and Mormon implies that those in the lands northward could be dangerous. That is a theme that Mormon will continue to develop.

Alma 50:32

32 Now behold, the people who were in the land Bountiful, or rather Moroni, feared that they would hearken to the words of Morianton and unite with his people, and thus he would obtain possession of those parts of the land, which would lay a foundation for serious consequences among the people of Nephi, yea, which consequences would lead to the overthrow of their liberty.

Comments

Verse 32 contains what has been termed a “corrective or,” that is, using the conjunction “or” to clarify something that had been incorrectly stated in the first clause. In this case, the information that the people of Morianton wanted to flee north invoked a mental map of the Nephite lands. The land Bountiful was on the southern side of the narrow neck of land and was the division between the land southward and the land northward, which Mormon called Desolation. Thus, the mental map probably triggered the statement about the people in the land Bountiful. However, that was not what should have been said. Either Mormon in writing, or Joseph Smith in translating, made an error. The “or” provided the correct, intended, meaning. It was Moroni who feared that Morianton would unite with the people in the land northward, and therefore moved to prevent that from happening.

Alma 50:33–36

33 Therefore Moroni sent an army, with their camp, to head the people of Morianton, to stop their flight into the land northward.

34 And it came to pass that they did not head them until they had come to the borders of the land Desolation; and there they did head them, by the narrow pass which led by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.

35 And it came to pass that the army which was sent by Moroni, which was led by a man whose name was Teancum, did meet the people of Morianton; and so stubborn were the people of Morianton, (being inspired by his wickedness and his flattering words) that a battle commenced between them, in the which Teancum did slay Morianton and defeat his army, and took them prisoners, and returned to the camp of Moroni. And thus ended the twenty and fourth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

36 And thus were the people of Morianton brought back. And upon their covenanting to keep the peace they were restored to the land of Morianton, and a union took place between them and the people of Lehi; and they were also restored to their lands.

Comments

The story of the rebellion of the people of Morianton concludes in these verses. An army is sent that cuts off the people before they could reach the narrow pass. The presence of the narrow pass likely determined where they had to go, and therefore allowed the army to know where to meet them.

The interesting question is why Mormon included this story. It is not sufficient to say that he included it because it happened. There were many things that happened, so many that it was impossible to record all of them. Why this one?

This story allows Mormon to introduce Teancum, who will play a role later in the coming conflict, but it also allows Mormon to begin to add the threat of some unknown people in the north to the known threat

of the Lamanites from the south. Mormon's emphasis on the people in the north will increase from now to the end of his own eponymous book.

Alma 50:37–40

37 And it came to pass that in the same year that the people of Nephi had peace restored unto them, that Nephiah, the second chief judge, died, having filled the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God.

38 Nevertheless, he had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman.

39 Behold, it came to pass that the son of Nephiah was appointed to fill the judgment-seat, in the stead of his father; yea, he was appointed chief judge and governor over the people, with an oath and sacred ordinance to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime.

40 Now behold, his name was Pahoran. And Pahoran did fill the seat of his father, and did commence his reign in the end of the twenty and fourth year, over the people of Nephi.

Comments

With that story finished, Mormon prepares to move to the next story which will concern Pahoran, the Chief Judge. At this point, Mormon appears to notice that he had not introduced Pahoran, so he must take a few sentences to inform his readers about this man. This information is now almost sixteen years in the past, dating to the ninth year of the reign of the judges when Alma₂ gave up the position of Chief Judge to a man who, at that time, was unnamed (see Alma 4:11, 16). Now we find out that his name was Nephiah.

Even though the Nephites were operating under the reign of the judges, the voice of the people worked perhaps more as confirmation than election. Pahoran fills the judgment seat, not by election, but by right, as son of the sitting Chief Judge.

This is the end of a chapter in the 1830 edition. Mormon has just introduced Pahoran, who will be the focus as the next chapter begins. It appears that Mormon elected to end this chapter because there was another break representing a five-year set. This is the end of the twenty-fourth year, and the next chapter begins in the twenty-fifth.

Alma 51

King-Men Seek to Overthrow the Government

Alma 51:1–2

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, they having established peace between the people of Lehi and the people of Morianton concerning their lands, and having commenced the twenty and fifth year in peace;

2 Nevertheless, they did not long maintain an entire peace in the land, for there began to be a contention among the people concerning the chief judge Pahoran; for behold, there were a part of the people who desired that a few particular points of the law should be altered.

Comments

Some of this information repeats what Mormon included at the end of the previous chapter. In this case, the chapter ended because Mormon wanted to break the text into a unit along the five-year boundary. The story of Pahoran belongs in the twenty-fifth year, but Mormon had to introduce Pahoran at the end of the previous chapter because he had neglected to introduce Nephihah. Based on what must have been Mormon's planned text, it was actually the previous information that was "duplicated," since he wanted to tell Pahoran's story in the record beginning with the twenty-fifth year.

The story of Pahoran begins early in the twenty-fifth year, after the story of the people of Morianton had closed the record of the twenty-fourth year.

Alma 51:3–6

3 But behold, Pahoran would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered; therefore, he did not hearken to those who had sent in their voices with their petitions concerning the altering of the law.

4 Therefore, those who were desirous that the law should be altered were angry with him, and desired that he should no longer be chief judge over the land; therefore there arose a warm dispute concerning the matter, but not unto bloodshed.

5 And it came to pass that those who were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat were called king-men, for they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land.

6 And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the freemen had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.

Comments

There have been previous attempts to change the Nephite government from judges back to a monarchy. To understand those conflicts, and particularly this one, it is important to remember that there was very little distinction between politics and religion in the ancient world, and within the Nephite world view. The creation of churches had allowed some conceptual division, and that may have contributed to the extent of the people who desired different ways, but religion and the right of rule were still connected.

Thus, the kingmen were not only those who wanted a king, but who espoused specific religious ideals, one of which was usually the rejection of the belief in the coming Messiah. Therefore, having a king was not a return to Benjamin and Mosiah², but a return to Zarahemla and a time before there was a Nephite religion in the land.

This is the reason that the opposition to kingmen was freemen. When Chief Captain Moroni raised the title of liberty, it was a declaration of religious liberty, not specifically political freedoms. Thus, it is that the freedom desired by the freemen was not particular political rights, but the ability to continue to worship as they desired. The conflict is identified by the difference between the rule of a king or the judges, but the deeper conflict was the religious understanding of the people. The type of kingship that the kingmen espoused would lead to the destruction of the Nephite understanding of Mosaic religion combined with the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah.

Amalickiah Returns

Alma 51:7–10

7 And it came to pass that this matter of their contention was settled by the voice of the people. And it came to pass that the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen, and Pahoran retained the judgment-seat, which caused much rejoicing among the brethren of Pahoran and also many of the people of liberty, who also put the king-men to silence, that they durst not oppose but were obliged to maintain the cause of freedom.

8 Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people.

9 But behold, this was a critical time for such contentions to be among the people of Nephi; for behold, Amalickiah had again stirred up the hearts of the people of the Lamanites against the people of the Nephites, and he was gathering together soldiers from all parts of his land, and arming them, and preparing for war with all diligence; for he had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni.

10 But behold, we shall see that his promise which he made was rash; nevertheless, he did prepare himself and his armies to come to battle against the Nephites.

Comments

When verse 7 indicates that “this matter of their contention was settled by the voice of the people,” it is not exactly correct. The question was certainly put to the people, and the voice of the people was in favor of retaining the judges, but that did not mean that the division in their society was over.

Further information about the nature of this division comes in verse 8, where we find that “those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth.” That “high birth” suggests that they may have had ties with the families who had been in line to become kings prior to the arrival of the Nephites. They were people who had power in wealth and position and felt that they deserved more of both. The fact that it was important families behind this division likely influenced many to support them.

At the same time that there was internal political and religious division, one of those who had desired to be a Nephite king, now king among the Lamanites, again stirred his people to war against the Nephites. Amalickiah’s armies had been defeated at the city of Noah by Chief Captain Moroni’s defensive efforts, and Amalickiah developed a personal hatred for Moroni. He “had sworn to drink the blood of Moroni.”

Mormon could not help but add that this “promise which he made was rash.” Mormon let’s his audience know that Amalickiah will not be successful, even before Mormon began to describe what Amalickiah did to try to fulfill the promise.

King-Men Refuse to Fight Lamanites

Alma 51:11–13

11 Now his armies were not so great as they had hitherto been, because of the many thousands who had been slain by the hand of the Nephites; but notwithstanding their great loss, Amalickiah had gathered together a wonderfully great army, insomuch that he feared not to come down to the land of Zarahemla.

12 Yea, even Amalickiah did himself come down, at the head of the Lamanites. And it was in the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges; and it was at the same time that they had begun to settle the affairs of their contentions concerning the chief judge, Pahoran.

13 And it came to pass that when the men who were called king-men had heard that the Lamanites were coming down to battle against them, they were glad in their hearts; and they refused to take up arms, for they were so wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty, that they would not take up arms to defend their country.

Comments

While a few years have passed since the defeat of Amalickiah's army at the city of Noah, those who grew into the age to join the army were not quite sufficient to replace those who had been lost. However, in this conflict, Amalickiah would have an advantage that he did not have before. The internal conflict between the kingmen and freemen weakened the defensive forces of the land of Zarahemla. The kingmen "refused to take up arms." That the kingmen willingly accepted a probable domination by Lamanites, rather than a continuation of the reign of the judges, further underscores the nature of the conflict. The kingmen were much closer to Lamanites in belief than they were to the freemen. Since the Lamanites had long believed differently from the Nephites, it is understandable that the freemen saw the kingmen threat as one that could destroy their way of life.

Alma 51:14–16

14 And it came to pass that when Moroni saw this, and also saw that the Lamanites were coming into the borders of the land, he was exceedingly wroth because of the stubbornness of those people whom he had labored with so much diligence to preserve; yea, he was exceedingly wroth; his soul was filled with anger against them.

15 And it came to pass that he sent a petition, with the voice of the people, unto the governor of the land, desiring that he should read it, and give him (Moroni) power to compel those dissenters to defend their country or to put them to death.

16 For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction. And it came to pass that it was granted according to the voice of the people.

Comments

Moroni "was exceedingly wroth because of the stubbornness of those people whom he had labored with so much diligence to preserve." That was the very point of his title of liberty, and the point of all the work he had done to fortify the defenses of the cities that were part of the land of Zarahemla.

His response was dramatic, but accompanied by the voice of the people, he received permission to force those who would not take up arms to join the army. Those who were to be compelled were those who had refused to fight for this invasion, and did not include the Ammonites, who declined to fight because of a previous oath.

Alma 51:17–21

17 And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against those king-men, to pull down their pride and their nobility and level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty.

18 And it came to pass that the armies did march forth against them; and they did pull down their pride and their nobility, insomuch that as they did lift their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni they were hewn down and leveled to the earth.

19 And it came to pass that there were four thousand of those dissenters who were hewn down by the sword; and those of their leaders who were not slain in battle were taken and cast into prison, for there was no time for their trials at this period.

20 And the remainder of those dissenters, rather than be smitten down to the earth by the sword, yielded to the standard of liberty, and were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defence of their country.

21 And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men, that there were not any known by the appellation of king-men; and thus he put an end to the stubbornness and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren, and to fight valiantly for their freedom from bondage.

Comments

With the power to force the dissenters to either join with the rest of the Nephites, or be killed, Mormon fought what was essentially a civil war, but one in which appears to have had significantly fewer numbers. His civil war ended much more quickly than the Civil War that the United States had to endure.

Mormon writes these passages as though the defeat of the armies was the total defeat of the kingmen, but that will not be the case. This is a temporary victory as we will see later in Alma 60.

Amalickiah Captures Several Nephite Cities

Alma 51:22–23

22 Behold, it came to pass that while Moroni was thus breaking down the wars and contentions among his own people, and subjecting them to peace and civilization, and making regulations to prepare for war against the Lamanites, behold, the Lamanites had come into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

23 And it came to pass that the Nephites were not sufficiently strong in the city of Moroni; therefore Amalickiah did drive them, slaying many. And it came to pass that Amalickiah took possession of the city, yea, possession of all their fortifications.

Comments

The last time Amalickiah sent forces to war against the Nephites, they attacked from the west, and deeper north in the land than the typical invasion through the pass near Manti. That was rebuffed, and Amalickiah did not repeat that invasion. Rather, he attempted to attack again on the east, moving up the seaboard.

The eastern approach was stronger than it once had been by the defection of the Zoramites. The Lamanites had attempted that route in the invasion prior to Amalickiah's attempt on the west, but they saw Moroni's army and went back to the entry point near Manti. This time, the Nephite defensive armor was not a surprise, and the Lamanites had copied it. Therefore, Amalickiah attempts an invasion again.

Moroni had attempted to strengthen that region as well, but the city of Moroni was new, and perhaps not yet very large. For whatever reason, the Lamanites were able to take and occupy the city. That gave them a foothold from which they could proceed to other cities.

Because Moroni was in the center of the land fighting the kingmen, he was apparently unable to send sufficient reinforcements in time. Therefore, the Lamanites were successful.

Alma 51:24–28

24 And those who fled out of the city of Moroni came to the city of Nephihah; and also the people of the city of Lehi gathered themselves together, and made preparations and were ready to receive the Lamanites to battle.

25 But it came to pass that Amalickiah would not suffer the Lamanites to go against the city of Nephihah to battle, but kept them down by the seashore, leaving men in every city to maintain and defend it.

26 And thus he went on, taking possession of many cities, the city of Nephihah, and the city of Lehi, and the city of Morianton, and the city of Omner, and the city of Gid, and the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore.

27 And thus had the Lamanites obtained, by the cunning of Amalickiah, so many cities, by their numberless hosts, all of which were strongly fortified after the manner of the fortifications of Moroni; all of which afforded strongholds for the Lamanites.

28 And it came to pass that they marched to the borders of the land Bountiful, driving the Nephites before them and slaying many.

Comments

The foothold at the city of Moroni allowed the Lamanites to continue their invasion northward along the eastern coast. While the defensive fortifications no doubt slowed their progress, they could not stop the army. The army was large enough that the Lamanites could continue to have an army sufficient to attack while leaving troops to defend cities where Moroni's defenses had not been able to keep them out; they now provided protection sufficiently that they could hold those cities with less than the entire army.

The land Bountiful is the northernmost edge of the land of Zarahemla, and thus the Lamanites controlled virtually all of the land on the east of the land of Zarahemla, from south to north.

Verse 26 says that the city of Nephihah was taken, which appears to contradict verse 24 which says that Amalickiah did not come against the city of Nephihah. Although both the original and the printer's manuscript have the city of Nephihah for both verses, it is possible that the mention of Nephihah in verse 26 is an error, and perhaps should have been the city of Moroni.

Alma 51:29–31

29 But it came to pass that they were met by Teancum, who had slain Morianton and had headed his people in his flight.

30 And it came to pass that he headed Amalickiah also, as he was marching forth with his numerous army that he might take possession of the land Bountiful, and also the land northward.

31 But behold he met with a disappointment by being repulsed by Teancum and his men, for they were great warriors; for every man of Teancum did exceed the Lamanites in their strength and in their skill of war, insomuch that they did gain advantage over the Lamanites.

Comments

As the Lamanites move north, they desire to take possession of at least the narrow pass and therefore control the ability of people to move through that point. We previously saw that Teancum and his army had been positioned in that land in order to protect against the people of Morianton fleeing into the land northward. He was clearly still there, and Amalickiah's army finally meets a larger Nephite army.

Teancum and his army prevented the capture of the pass and the northernmost part of the land.

Teancum Kills Amalickiah

Alma 51:32–34

32 And it came to pass that they did harass them, insomuch that they did slay them even until it was dark. And it came to pass that Teancum and his men did pitch their tents in the borders of the land Bountiful; and Amalickiah did pitch his tents in the borders on the beach by the seashore, and after this manner were they driven.

33 And it came to pass that when the night had come, Teancum and his servant stole forth and went out by night, and went into the camp of Amalickiah; and behold, sleep had overpowered them because of their much fatigue, which was caused by the labors and heat of the day.

34 And it came to pass that Teancum stole privily into the tent of the king, and put a javelin to his heart; and he did cause the death of the king immediately that he did not awake his servants.

Comments

Teancum's army forced the Lamanites back from the narrow neck and toward the east coast. They fled in that direction because that was where they had captured the fortified cities. However, before they could return to one of those cities, Teancum secretly entered the Lamanite camp and executed Amalickiah. He was able to do it without raising any alarm.

Alma 51:35–37

35 And he returned again privily to his own camp, and behold, his men were asleep, and he awoke them and told them all the things that he had done.

36 And he caused that his armies should stand in readiness, lest the Lamanites had awakened and should come upon them.

37 And thus endeth the twenty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus endeth the days of Amalickiah.

Comments

Knowing that one of the possible reactions to Amalickiah's death would be a retaliation, Teancum prepares his army. Mormon stops the story short of the conclusion of the story, perhaps to emphasize the importance of the timing of what happened. Verse 37 ends a chapter in the 1830 edition, which ends auspiciously in the twenty-fifth year. Not only the ending of the twenty-fifth year, but on the very last day of that year. The next chapter not only begins in the twenty-sixth year, but on the first day of the year.

Alma 52

Lamanites Retreat, Ammoron Becomes Their King

Alma 52:1–2

1 And now, it came to pass in the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, behold, when the Lamanites awoke on the first morning of the first month, behold, they found Amalickiah was dead in his own tent; and they also saw that Teancum was ready to give them battle on that day.

2 And now, when the Lamanites saw this they were affrighted; and they abandoned their design in marching into the land northward, and retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek, and sought protection in their fortifications.

Comments

It is probable that Mormon wanted to make certain that the timing of finding Amalickiah dead was given appropriate attention. In many cultures, the first day of a new year is auspicious, and finding the king dead on that very day would be a bad omen. When that was compounded with finding that the Nephites were ready to give battle, though not attacking, the prudent response was to retreat to one of the fortified cities and assess what should be done.

Mormon suggests that the Lamanites were thwarted in their designs to continue northward. Mormon would not have known what those designs were, but from this time forward he will increase his attention on the lands to the north. In this story, he is only laying those foundations.

Teancum Prepares Nephite Defenses

Alma 52:3–7

3 And it came to pass that the brother of Amalickiah was appointed king over the people; and his name was Ammoron; thus king Ammoron, the brother of king Amalickiah, was appointed to reign in his stead.

4 And it came to pass that he did command that his people should maintain those cities, which they had taken by the shedding of blood; for they had not taken any cities save they had lost much blood.

5 And now, Teancum saw that the Lamanites were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken, and those parts of the land which they had obtained possession of; and also seeing the enormity of their number, Teancum thought it was not expedient that he should attempt to attack them in their forts.
6 But he kept his men round about, as if making preparations for war; yea, and truly he was preparing to defend himself against them, by casting up walls round about and preparing places of resort.
7 And it came to pass that he kept thus preparing for war until Moroni had sent a large number of men to strengthen his army.

Comments

Attacking a fortified position that was defended with a large army meant that Teancum's army was probably insufficient to take the cities. Therefore, the decision was made to attempt to keep the Lamanites within the places they had won, but not be able to increase their holdings. This would have been less than a siege, and more of a containment.

Teancum's desire was that he would hold his positions and keep the Lamanites from expansion but would not attempt to drive the Lamanites out of the land until Mormon could send reinforcements.

Alma 52:8–11

8 And Moroni also sent orders unto him that he should retain all the prisoners who fell into his hands; for as the Lamanites had taken many prisoners, that he should retain all the prisoners of the Lamanites as a ransom for those whom the Lamanites had taken.

9 And he also sent orders unto him that he should fortify the land Bountiful, and secure the narrow pass which led into the land northward, lest the Lamanites should obtain that point and should have power to harass them on every side.

10 And Moroni also sent unto him, desiring him that he would be faithful in maintaining that quarter of the land, and that he would seek every opportunity to scourge the Lamanites in that quarter, as much as was in his power, that perhaps he might take again by stratagem or some other way those cities which had been taken out of their hands; and that he also would fortify and strengthen the cities round about, which had not fallen into the hands of the Lamanites.

11 And he also said unto him, I would come unto you, but behold, the Lamanites are upon us in the borders of the land by the west sea; and behold, I go against them, therefore I cannot come unto you.

Comments

When Moroni responds to Teancum's request for reinforcements, he is told to simply hold his position and try to keep that part of the land in a stalemate. The Lamanites had sufficient armies that they had also attacked on the borders by the west sea. Moroni's forces were heading there to attempt to prevent on

the west coast the deep incursion the Lamanites had achieved on the east coast. If the Lamanites could hold both coasts, it would put significant pressure on the Nephite lands.

Ammoron Brings a Second Army to the West Sea

Alma 52:12–14

12 Now, the king (Ammoron) had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and had made known unto the queen concerning the death of his brother, and had gathered together a large number of men, and had marched forth against the Nephites on the borders by the west sea.

13 And thus he was endeavoring to harass the Nephites, and to draw away a part of their forces to that part of the land, while he had commanded those whom he had left to possess the cities which he had taken, that they should also harass the Nephites on the borders by the east sea, and should take possession of their lands as much as it was in their power, according to the power of their armies.

14 And thus were the Nephites in those dangerous circumstances in the ending of the twenty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

The new king, Amalickiah's brother (see verse 3), was able to leave the land of Zarahemla to report Amalickiah's death. In Mesoamerica, it was not infrequent that rulership would pass to a brother rather than directly to a son, and thus we see Ammoron becoming the new king. That fact is not mentioned here but is specifically noted in Alma 54:16. Among the Nephites, we see this happening more often among the record-keepers. Not only does Nephi give the records to his brother, Jacob, but we see it again when Amaron gives the records to his brother Chemish in Omni 1:8.

The attack on the west is an intentional tactic to divide the Nephite military strength. The Book of Mormon consistently indicates that there are more Lamanites than Nephites, so dividing the Nephite armies would have had a greater impact on the Nephites than this division of Lamanite armies had upon the Lamanites.

Mormon sets the tension of the times by noting that it was "in those dangerous circumstances" that the twenty-sixth year ended.

Moroni and Teancum Retake Mulek

Alma 52:15–18

15 But behold, it came to pass in the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, that Teancum, by the command of Moroni—who had established armies to protect the south and the west borders of

the land, and had begun his march towards the land Bountiful, that he might assist Teancum with his men in retaking the cities which they had lost—

16 And it came to pass that Teancum had received orders to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and retake it if it were possible.

17 And it came to pass that Teancum made preparations to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and march forth with his army against the Lamanites; but he saw that it was impossible that he could overpower them while they were in their fortifications; therefore he abandoned his designs and returned again to the city Bountiful, to wait for the coming of Moroni, that he might receive strength to his army.

18 And it came to pass that Moroni did arrive with his army at the land of Bountiful, in the latter end of the twenty and seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Mormon gives us very little information at this time about what was happening on the west, but he simply indicates that Moroni was able to stabilize the southern and western borders sufficiently to be able to turn his focus to the east and reinforcing Teancum. Additionally, Mormon commands Teancum to retake Mulek, although Teancum decides that it would be too costly, and might not have been effective.

Therefore, Teancum waits in the city of Bountiful for Moroni's reinforcements. They come near the end of the twenty-seventh year. Teancum's assassination of Amalickiah was on the very first day of the twenty-sixth year. It isn't until almost two years later that Moroni is able to come to his aid on the eastern front. Mormon gives us little information about what happened in those two years. Presumably, Teancum and the Lamanites were in a standoff on the eastern front, and Mormon was establishing at least a standoff on the western front.

Alma 52:19–21

19 And in the commencement of the twenty and eighth year, Moroni and Teancum and many of the chief captains held a council of war—what they should do to cause the Lamanites to come out against them to battle; or that they might by some means flatter them out of their strongholds, that they might gain advantage over them and take again the city of Mulek.

20 And it came to pass they sent embassies to the army of the Lamanites, which protected the city of Mulek, to their leader, whose name was Jacob, desiring him that he would come out with his armies to meet them upon the plains between the two cities. But behold, Jacob, who was a Zoramite, would not come out with his army to meet them upon the plains.

21 And it came to pass that Moroni, having no hopes of meeting them upon fair grounds, therefore, he resolved upon a plan that he might decoy the Lamanites out of their strongholds.

Comments

Even with the additional armies, it was difficult and costly to attack a well-defended position. Therefore, Moroni requests that the leader of the Lamanite armies in the city of Mulek, Jacob, come out to meet them in battle. This was not an unusual expectation, and the honor of warfare would have suggested that it was important to meet face to face. However, Jacob elected not to leave his fortifications, forcing Moron to result to stratagem.

Alma 52:22–24

22 Therefore he caused that Teancum should take a small number of men and march down near the seashore; and Moroni and his army, by night, marched in the wilderness, on the west of the city Mulek; and thus, on the morrow, when the guards of the Lamanites had discovered Teancum, they ran and told it unto Jacob, their leader.

23 And it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did march forth against Teancum, supposing by their numbers to overpower Teancum because of the smallness of his numbers. And as Teancum saw the armies of the Lamanites coming out against him he began to retreat down by the seashore, northward.

24 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that he began to flee, they took courage and pursued them with vigor. And while Teancum was thus leading away the Lamanites who were pursuing them in vain, behold, Moroni commanded that a part of his army who were with him should march forth into the city, and take possession of it.

Comments

It appears that there was some type of mountainous area, or other type of wilderness, in which Moroni might conceal his army on the west of Mulek. When Teancum makes a visible march to the north, they could be seen to be a much smaller army than was perhaps expected. Therefore, Jacob had his army leave the city for what he expected to be a relatively easy battle.

With significantly fewer men guarding the fortified city, Moroni was able to take his force and capture the city. As for Teancum's army, they had no intention of actually facing the pursuing Lamanite army.

Alma 52:25–30

25 And thus they did, and slew all those who had been left to protect the city, yea, all those who would not yield up their weapons of war.

26 And thus Moroni had obtained possession of the city Mulek with a part of his army, while he marched with the remainder to meet the Lamanites when they should return from the pursuit of Teancum.

27 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue Teancum until they came near the city Bountiful, and then they were met by Lehi and a small army, which had been left to protect the city Bountiful.

28 And now behold, when the chief captains of the Lamanites had beheld Lehi with his army coming against them, they fled in much confusion, lest perhaps they should not obtain the city Mulek before Lehi should overtake them; for they were wearied because of their march, and the men of Lehi were fresh.

29 Now the Lamanites did not know that Moroni had been in their rear with his army; and all they feared was Lehi and his men.

30 Now Lehi was not desirous to overtake them till they should meet Moroni and his army.

Comments

Teancum leads his men on a forced march towards Bountiful. He is not concerned with tiring his men, for they were heading toward safety. The Lamanite army, on the other hand, was tired from attempting to overtake them, and in that state they come upon Lehi₂'s "small army." Even if the Lamanites might have had superior numbers, Lehi₂'s men were fresh, and the Lamanites were tired, which did not bode well for their prospects in hand-to-hand warfare. Therefore, the Lamanites retreat, attempting to return to the safety of the city of Mulek.

Alma 52:31–34

31 And it came to pass that before the Lamanites had retreated far they were surrounded by the Nephites, by the men of Moroni on one hand, and the men of Lehi₂ on the other, all of whom were fresh and full of strength; but the Lamanites were wearied because of their long march.

32 And Moroni commanded his men that they should fall upon them until they had given up their weapons of war.

33 And it came to pass that Jacob, being their leader, being also a Zoramite, and having an unconquerable spirit, he led the Lamanites forth to battle with exceeding fury against Moroni.

34 Moroni being in their course of march, therefore Jacob was determined to slay them and cut his way through to the city of Mulek. But behold, Moroni and his men were more powerful; therefore they did not give way before the Lamanites.

Comments

The Lamanites were in an untenable position. They were tired and faced a fresher army at their rear, and now a fresher army in front of them. They were cut off from their intended place of retreat. Even though they fought hard, they were doomed.

Alma 52:35–40

35 And it came to pass that they fought on both hands with exceeding fury; and there were many slain on both sides; yea, and Moroni was wounded and Jacob was killed.

36 And Lehi pressed upon their rear with such fury with his strong men, that the Lamanites in the rear delivered up their weapons of war; and the remainder of them, being much confused, knew not whither to go or to strike.

37 Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood.

38 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had heard these words, their chief captains, all those who were not slain, came forth and threw down their weapons of war at the feet of Moroni, and also commanded their men that they should do the same.

39 But behold, there were many that would not; and those who would not deliver up their swords were taken and bound, and their weapons of war were taken from them, and they were compelled to march with their brethren forth into the land Bountiful.

40 And now the number of prisoners who were taken exceeded more than the number of those who had been slain, yea, more than those who had been slain on both sides.

Comments

As with the army of Zerahemnah, when Moroni had the clear advantage, he stopped the killing to attempt to bring a less bloody end to the battle (see Alma 44:1). Similar to the earlier story, there were some who surrendered, and others who would not. Mormon does not give us much information about how the two groups were treated differently, save that he only mentions that those who had not laid down their arms were bound as they were taken to the place where the prisoners would be held.

There is no a chapter ending at this point. The next chapter in our modern editions picks up with the story of these prisoners.

Alma 53

Alma 53:1–3

1 And it came to pass that they did set guards over the prisoners of the Lamanites, and did compel them to go forth and bury their dead, yea, and also the dead of the Nephites who were slain; and Moroni placed men over them to guard them while they should perform their labors.

2 And Moroni went to the city of Mulek with Lehi, and took command of the city and gave it unto Lehi. Now behold, this Lehi was a man who had been with Moroni in the more part of all his battles; and he was a man like unto Moroni, and they rejoiced in each other's safety; yea, they were beloved by each other, and also beloved by all the people of Nephi.

3 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had finished burying their dead and also the dead of the Nephites, they were marched back into the land Bountiful; and Teancum, by the orders of Moroni, caused that they should commence laboring in digging a ditch round about the land, or the city, Bountiful.

Comments

At the end of the previous chapter in our modern edition, we learned that many prisoners were taken. There was no chapter break in the 1830 edition, so these verses discussing what was done with those prisoners were part of the original story.

Rather than lock the prisoners away, they were organized into forced labor. The first requirement was to bury the dead. In a previous engagement, the Nephites had thrown the Lamanite bodies in the river. Since the Lamanites were the ones doing the burying, they were allowed to provide the same burial for both their dead and those of the Nephites.

There was no indication that any kind of oath was taken of these prisoners, and it was therefore prudent to have Nephites standing guard over them. Verse 3 picks up on the labors of the prisoners, which will continue in the next verses. That makes verse 2 feel like an interruption in the story. Rather than an interruption, however, it is a conclusion. Verse 2 finishes the story of what Chief Captain Moroni did, which was to install Lehi₂ in Mulek. As a seasoned leader, Lehi₂ significantly improved the defensibility of Mulek.

Alma 53:4–5

4 And he caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers; and thus they did cause the Lamanites to labor until they had encircled the city of Bountiful round about with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height.

5 And this city became an exceeding stronghold ever after; and in this city they did guard the prisoners of the Lamanites; yea, even within a wall which they had caused them to build with their own hands. Now Moroni was compelled to cause the Lamanites to labor, because it was easy to guard them while at their labor; and he desired all his forces when he should make an attack upon the Lamanites.

Comments

The prisoners continued with their forced labor, and part of those labors was to reinforce the city of Bountiful. The Lamanites had nearly reached the city, and it was an important defense against any enemies that might come from the north. Although we have not yet heard of any specifically, Moroni nevertheless wanted that critical point strengthened, and used captive Lamanites to do the work.

Eventually, these prisoners are housed in Bountiful, and Moroni's armies were freed to cover other locations.

Alma 53:6–7

6 And it came to pass that Moroni had thus gained a victory over one of the greatest of the armies of the Lamanites, and had obtained possession of the city of Mulek, which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites in the land of Nephi; and thus he had also built a stronghold to retain his prisoners.

7 And it came to pass that he did no more attempt a battle with the Lamanites in that year, but he did employ his men in preparing for war, yea, and in making fortifications to guard against the Lamanites, yea, and also delivering their women and their children from famine and affliction, and providing food for their armies.

Comments

This campaign ends with a victory in Mulek, and then, rather than continue the conflict, Moroni concentrates on defensive positions, and the very important task of making sure that there was food available. One of the typical problems of war, depending upon the season, was that it could easily lead to famine if the fields were trodden down, or if there were insufficient men available for either planting or harvest. In this case, it appears that this may have been earlier in the year and therefore planting season.

Two Thousand Sons of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies Join the War

Alma 53:8–9

8 And now it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites, on the west sea, south, while in the absence of Moroni on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions amongst them, had gained some ground over the Nephites, yea, insomuch that they had obtained possession of a number of their cities in that part of the land.

9 And thus because of iniquity amongst themselves, yea, because of dissensions and intrigue among themselves they were placed in the most dangerous circumstances.

Comments

The text is not particularly clear about the nature of the dissensions, but since it says that there was “some intrigue amongst the Nephites,” we may assume that it is internal Nephite issues that weakened some of their defenses. Thus, while Moroni has been in the east coast shoring up some defenses there, the Lamanites had been able to expand their hold “on the west sea, south.”

Alma 53:10–12

10 And now behold, I have somewhat to say concerning the people of Ammon, who, in the beginning, were Lamanites; but by Ammon and his brethren, or rather by the power and word of God, they had been converted unto the Lord; and they had been brought down into the land of Zarahemla, and had ever since been protected by the Nephites.

11 And because of their oath they had been kept from taking up arms against their brethren; for they had taken an oath that they never would shed blood more; and according to their oath they would have perished; yea, they would have suffered themselves to have fallen into the hands of their brethren, had it not been for the pity and the exceeding love which Ammon and his brethren had had for them.

12 And for this cause they were brought down into the land of Zarahemla; and they ever had been protected by the Nephites.

Comments

There is another event that occurs in this year, but it was unrelated to specific military actions. Therefore, Mormon introduces this new story, with a rather abrupt transition from a new threat near the west sea, south, about the people of Ammon. It has been a while since Mormon has mentioned them, and so he recapitulates enough of their story that his readers will know for certain the essential details that lay behind it.

The Ammonites were known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies when they lived in Lamanites lands, and they immigrated to Nephite lands and were originally given Jerushon as a land for their inheritance. These were

the people who had taken an oath not to take up arms. This story will develop the effect that oath had upon the Nephites.

The first important part of the story was that the Nephites knew and accepted the oath they had taken, and therefore the Nephites protected them (see Alma 27:24). The defection of the Zoramites in Antionum opened a direct threat against the Ammonites, so they had to be moved to Melek (see Alma 35:13).

Alma 53:13–15

13 But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defence of their country.

14 But behold, as they were about to take their weapons of war, they were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren, for they were about to break the oath which they had made.

15 And Helaman feared lest by so doing they should lose their souls; therefore all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions, in their dangerous circumstances at this time.

Comments

Even though Moroni had recaptured Mulek, there were still Lamanites entrenched in former Nephite lands on the eastern border of the Nephite lands. The situation was worsening on the western front. The people of Ammon could not help but understand the situation and the need of the Nephites to recruit all available men to be in the army. They clearly understood that the Nephites had taken them in and protected them, and therefore felt that they owed the Nephite nation what support they could give. They had already declared that they would support them with food, but it appeared that more was going to be needed.

They were “about to take their weapons of war.” However, Helaman₁ and his brethren learned of their intentions and worked hard to dissuade them. The reason was that they had taken an oath. While the Nephites could use their military expertise, Helaman₁ was afraid “lest by so doing they should lose their souls.” The covenant was taken that seriously. Helaman₁ felt it so strongly that he would not risk the souls of those who had once been Lamanites and therefore enemies, even given the great military need. Such was the power of covenants.

Alma 53:16–18

16 But behold, it came to pass they had many sons, who had not entered into a covenant that they would not take their weapons of war to defend themselves against their enemies; therefore they did

assemble themselves together at this time, as many as were able to take up arms, and they called themselves Nephites.

17 And they entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives; yea, even they covenanted that they never would give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage.

18 Now behold, there were two thousand of those young men, who entered into this covenant and took their weapons of war to defend their country.

Comments

Even though it is easy to see why some readers might suggest that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, now known as Ammonites, were pacifists, that reading is clearly incorrect. What they were is absolutely faithful to their covenants, even when their particular covenant was different from the Nephites around them, and when it might have led to problems for the Nephites. Their desire was not to avoid fighting, but to fulfill their covenant to lay down arms. The purposes were very different.

Those differences are made clear when they suggest that they have sons who had been too young to have made the covenant. Without having made the covenant, they were not bound by it, and they were able to fight. Checking through the timetables from the time of their covenant to these sons making their own covenant to fight, these young men might have been twelve to fourteen years of age.

Alma 53:19–23

19 And now behold, as they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites, they became now at this period of time also a great support; for they took their weapons of war, and they would that Helaman should be their leader.

20 And they were all young men, and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

21 Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him.

22 And now it came to pass that Helaman did march at the head of his two thousand stripling soldiers, to the support of the people in the borders of the land on the south by the west sea.

23 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Helaman, is selected as the leader of this force of young men. Mormon will tell more about these young men later, but at this time the point is to demonstrate the importance of covenants. The first covenant

was for the parents who had covenanted not to pick up arms, and how even though they desired to help, Helaman₁ would not allow them to break the covenant. Nevertheless, they were sufficiently desirous to help that they found a way, and their sons made a new covenant to fight in their stead. Mormon's moral for this part of the story is that these young men "were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted." Given what those young men learned from their parent's examples of the importance of keeping covenants, it is not very surprising that they should feel the same way about the covenant that they had made.

The chronology of these verses is somewhat confusing. In the last verse, Mormon tells us that it is the end of the twenty-eighth year. This original chapter began in the twenty-sixth year (Alma 52:1, where our current chapters 52 and 53 were originally the same chapter). Thus, this chapter told the events from the twenty-sixth year to the ending of the twenty-eight. This is important because we will learn that Helaman₁ marched out with his stripling soldiers in the twenty-sixth year. See Alma 56:9.

This ends a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 54

Ammoron and Moroni Exchange Letters

Alma 54:1–3

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year of the judges, that Ammoron sent unto Moroni desiring that he would exchange prisoners.

2 And it came to pass that Moroni felt to rejoice exceedingly at this request, for he desired the provisions which were imparted for the support of the Lamanite prisoners for the support of his own people; and he also desired his own people for the strengthening of his army.

3 Now the Lamanites had taken many women and children, and there was not a woman nor a child among all the prisoners of Moroni, or the prisoners whom Moroni had taken; therefore Moroni resolved upon a stratagem to obtain as many prisoners of the Nephites from the Lamanites as it were possible.

Comments

This is a new chapter in the 1830 edition, as it begins with a new year and a complete change of topic from the story of the stripling soldiers that ended our chapter 53. Early in chapter 53, Mormon had spoken of the Lamanite prisoners. Mormon returns to the issue of prisoners, but now to the question of Nephite prisoners, who the Lamanites were holding.

Mormon gives us an important insight into the nature of this particular war. The Lamanites had invaded Nephite lands, bringing their armies, which were all male. Although it would not be unusual for some women to accompany the armies, the women would not be among those fighting, and therefore it would be rare that a Lamanite prisoner were a woman. Thus, verse 3 confirms that “there was not a woman nor a child among all the prisoners of Moroni.”

The Lamanites, however, had invaded cities, and therefore had taken Nephites in their homes. They certainly had many women and children as prisoners (again as noted in verse 3). This disparity in the types of prisoners also suggests the reason that Ammoron desired a prisoner exchange. With the women and children, Ammoron had mouths to feed that were not available for forced labor. If he could exchange women and children for soldiers, he would be much further ahead.

On Moroni's side of the equation, these were Nephite women and children, and therefore much more valuable to the Nephites than to the Lamanites. Mormon wanted to free as many as possible.

Moroni's Letter to Ammoron

Alma 54:4–8

4 Therefore he wrote an epistle, and sent it by the servant of Ammoron, the same who had brought an epistle to Moroni. Now these are the words which he wrote unto Ammoron, saying:

5 Behold, Ammoron, I have written unto you somewhat concerning this war which ye have waged against my people, or rather which thy brother hath waged against them, and which ye are still determined to carry on after his death.

6 Behold, I would tell you somewhat concerning the justice of God, and the sword of his almighty wrath, which doth hang over you except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands, or the land of your possessions, which is the land of Nephi.

7 Yea, I would tell you these things if ye were capable of hearkening unto them; yea, I would tell you concerning that awful hell that awaits to receive such murderers as thou and thy brother have been, except ye repent and withdraw your murderous purposes, and return with your armies to your own lands.

8 But as ye have once rejected these things, and have fought against the people of the Lord, even so I may expect you will do it again.

Comments

The exchange of letters requires that there be some at the higher levels of both armies who could read and write. It also preserves the ability of the leaders to exchange information without fearing treachery upon their persons. Since the messengers were not politically important, there was less reason to break the truce required to exchange such messages.

Mormon begins by noting that Yahweh is on his side, and that Yahweh will see them destroyed unless they leave. They would not only be temporally destroyed, but eternally destroyed and consigned to hell.

In spite of that opening statement, Mormon moves to the more likely scenario, noting that “as ye have once rejected these things, and have fought against the people of the Lord, even so I may expect you will do it again.” Mormon remembers that Ammoron is an apostate Nephite who had joined with the Lamanites.

Alma 54:9–11

9 And now behold, we are prepared to receive you; yea, and except you withdraw your purposes, behold, ye will pull down the wrath of that God whom you have rejected upon you, even to your utter destruction.

10 But, as the Lord liveth, our armies shall come upon you except ye withdraw, and ye shall soon be visited with death, for we will retain our cities and our lands; yea, and we will maintain our religion and the cause of our God.

11 But behold, it supposeth me that I talk to you concerning these things in vain; or it supposeth me that thou art a child of hell; therefore I will close my epistle by telling you that I will not exchange prisoners, save it be on conditions that ye will deliver up a man and his wife and his children, for one prisoner; if this be the case that ye will do it, I will exchange.

Comments

Moroni's acquiescence to the reality that Ammoron won't fear God didn't mean that he wouldn't pursue Ammoron with full force. However, the subject finally moves to the prisoner exchange. Moroni is well aware that in a purely military exchange, delivering one Lamanite warrior for a single Nephite woman or child is not considered a fair exchange. Therefore, Moroni counteroffers one Lamanite warrior for a Nephite family.

Alma 54:12–14

12 And behold, if ye do not this, I will come against you with my armies; yea, even I will arm my women and my children, and I will come against you, and I will follow you even into your own land, which is the land of our first inheritance; yea, and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life; and I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth.

13 Behold, I am in my anger, and also my people; ye have sought to murder us, and we have only sought to defend ourselves. But behold, if ye seek to destroy us more we will seek to destroy you; yea, and we will seek our land, the land of our first inheritance.

14 Now I close my epistle. I am Moroni; I am a leader of the people of the Nephites.

Comments

Moroni concludes his letter by indicating that this is a firm offer, and if Ammoron does not accept it, then Moroni would take military action: "it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life." If Ammoron wants a one-for-one exchange, it could happen, but not in the way he had hoped.

Ammoron's Reply to Moroni

Alma 54:15–18

15 Now it came to pass that Ammoron, when he had received this epistle, was angry; and he wrote another epistle unto Moroni, and these are the words which he wrote, saying:

16 I am Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites; I am the brother of Amalickiah whom ye have murdered. Behold, I will avenge his blood upon you, yea, and I will come upon you with my armies for I fear not your threatenings.

17 For behold, your fathers did wrong their brethren, insomuch that they did rob them of their right to the government when it rightly belonged unto them.

18 And now behold, if ye will lay down your arms, and subject yourselves to be governed by those to whom the government doth rightly belong, then will I cause that my people shall lay down their weapons and shall be at war no more.

Comments

Ancient diplomacy was often more bluster than gentleness, and that is clear in this exchange of letters. Moroni had threatened the Lamanites, and Ammoron threatens back. In Ammoron's case, he brings up personal grudges (the death of Amalickiah, his brother) and adopted ones (the Nephites had usurped power from Laman).

Ammoron declares that his army is sufficiently powerful that Moroni's best option would be to lay down arms and surrender. Both men understand that this is all bluster, and neither will cease hostilities so easily.

Alma 54:19–20

19 Behold, ye have breathed out many threatenings against me and my people; but behold, we fear not your threatenings.

20 Nevertheless, I will grant to exchange prisoners according to your request, gladly, that I may preserve my food for my men of war; and we will wage a war which shall be eternal, either to the subjecting the Nephites to our authority or to their eternal extinction.

Comments

Even though both letters are filled with threats, the actual purpose of the letters is accomplished rather easily. For Ammoron, the issue really is that he needs to “preserve my food for my men of war.” He is far from his homeland and the supply lines are long. While he has captured cities, he has less access to the fields where the food is growing. Thus, feeding people who he doesn't care about removes food from those he needs in order to continue the war. Both men get just what they wanted, although they had to posture anyway.

Alma 54:21–24

21 And as concerning that God whom ye say we have rejected, behold, we know not such a being; neither do ye; but if it so be that there is such a being, we know not but that he hath made us as well as you.

22 And if it so be that there is a devil and a hell, behold will he not send you there to dwell with my brother whom ye have murdered, whom ye have hinted that he hath gone to such a place? But behold these things matter not.

23 I am Ammoron, and a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem.

24 And behold now, I am a bold Lamanite; behold, this war hath been waged to avenge their wrongs, and to maintain and to obtain their rights to the government; and I close my epistle to Moroni.

Comments

Ammoron rejected the Nephite religion while he and his brother were still in the land of Zarahemla and were Nephites by name. Therefore, he easily rejects the Nephite God again. When Ammoron declares that he is a “bold Lamanite,” he is underscoring his shift in belief and allegiance away from the Nephite religion and government, and completely accepting the beliefs and government of the Lamanites. The original manuscript has the word *now* in a different position. In the original, this sentence read: “I am now a bold Lamanite.” That change in the position of *now* emphasizes the change from Nephite to Lamanite.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 55

Moroni Frees Captives

Alma 55:1–3

1 Now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle he was more angry, because he knew that Ammoron had a perfect knowledge of his fraud; yea, he knew that Ammoron knew that it was not a just cause that had caused him to wage a war against the people of Nephi.

2 And he said: Behold, I will not exchange prisoners with Ammoron save he will withdraw his purpose, as I have stated in my epistle; for I will not grant unto him that he shall have any more power than what he hath got.

3 Behold, I know the place where the Lamanites do guard my people whom they have taken prisoners; and as Ammoron would not grant unto me mine epistle, behold, I will give unto him according to my words; yea, I will seek death among them until they shall sue for peace.

Comments

Mormon includes this story because it will turn out well for Moroni, but it should not be a model for our behavior. Mormon sent a letter that he should have known would incite anger, and when Ammoron responds in the same tone, Moroni decides to decline the prisoner exchange even though he got exactly what he wanted.

Moroni is reported as saying that he would not exchange prisoners unless Ammoron withdrew his purpose (verse 2). That purpose was to defeat the Nephites. Moroni surely would have known that Ammoron wouldn't simply leave because Moroni asked him to. Moroni therefore seems to swear the same kind of oath that Ammoron had. Mormon says that "I will seek death among them until they shall sue for peace."

Alma 55:4–7

4 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had said these words, he caused that a search should be made among his men, that perhaps he might find a man who was a descendant of Laman among them.

5 And it came to pass that they found one, whose name was Laman; and he was one of the servants of the king who was murdered by Amalickiah.

6 Now Moroni caused that Laman and a small number of his men should go forth unto the guards who were over the Nephites.

7 Now the Nephites were guarded in the city of Gid; therefore Moroni appointed Laman and caused that a small number of men should go with him.

Comments

Moroni knew where the prisoners were and decided to take them without an exchange. To do so, he creates a ruse that will make the process easier. What he requires is to “find a man who was a descendant of Laman.” He finds one who was one of the guards who had to flee when Amalickiah’s men killed the Lamanite king. The simplest reading of this ruse would be that Moroni was looking for someone who looked like a Lamanite and who had a dark skin.

The actual event proves the opposite. There was no visible difference between the Lamanite and the Nephites who went with him. If there were one dark-skinned man accompanied by several visibly “white” men, the ruse couldn’t have worked. It is therefore much more reasonable that what was needed was someone to speak in a language and perhaps an accent that would be convincing. Indeed, it was only the man named Laman who is depicted as speaking.

Alma 55:8–12

8 And when it was evening Laman went to the guards who were over the Nephites, and behold, they saw him coming and they hailed him; but he saith unto them: Fear not; behold, I am a Lamanite. Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites, and they sleep; and behold we have taken of their wine and brought with us.

9 Now when the Lamanites heard these words they received him with joy; and they said unto him: Give us of your wine, that we may drink; we are glad that ye have thus taken wine with you for we are weary.

10 But Laman said unto them: Let us keep of our wine till we go against the Nephites to battle. But this saying only made them more desirous to drink of the wine;

11 For, said they: We are weary, therefore let us take of the wine, and by and by we shall receive wine for our rations, which will strengthen us to go against the Nephites.

12 And Laman said unto them: You may do according to your desires.

Comments

The plan was to get the guards drunk, but critical to that plan was to make it their idea, and not Laman’s. Significantly, Laman tells the guards that he is a Lamanite and that he and those with him had escaped from the Nephites. There was no sufficient visible difference that caused the Lamanite guards to suspect that there was a ruse in place.

To help convince the guards, Laman does not immediately give them the wine, but suggests that it be kept for a future time. It is the guards who insist, and then Laman gives in, which is what he had planned to do all along.

In later Aztec culture, the official records suggest that they were a sober people that did not drink. The fact that there were so many laws and penalties, and even special words for drunkards, suggests that the ideal was that they would not drink intoxicating beverages; however, the reality was that drinking was often a real problem. Thus, the idea that the Lamanites might be tempted by the wine would not be foreign to that area of the world, despite some of the claims made in Aztec records that were intended to make them look good in a future Spanish conqueror's eyes.

Alma 55:13–17

13 And it came to pass that they did take of the wine freely; and it was pleasant to their taste, therefore they took of it more freely; and it was strong, having been prepared in its strength.

14 And it came to pass they did drink and were merry, and by and by they were all drunken.

15 And now when Laman and his men saw that they were all drunken, and were in a deep sleep, they returned to Moroni and told him all the things that had happened.

16 And now this was according to the design of Moroni. And Moroni had prepared his men with weapons of war; and he went to the city Gid, while the Lamanites were in a deep sleep and drunken, and cast in weapons of war unto the prisoners, insomuch that they were all armed;

17 Yea, even to their women, and all those of their children, as many as were able to use a weapon of war, when Moroni had armed all those prisoners; and all those things were done in a profound silence.

Comments

Although the drunken guards were one of the lines of defense, there were clearly others. Moroni did not feel that he could bypass the drunken guards and safely remove the prisoners. He arranges to have weapons of war delivered to those captives in the city. This suggests that someone was able to scale the wall to get in and to know where to put the weapons, and to warn the Nephite prisoners that weapons were coming and that they should arm themselves and prepare.

Alma 55:18–22

18 But had they awakened the Lamanites, behold they were drunken and the Nephites could have slain them.

19 But behold, this was not the desire of Moroni; he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but he delighted in the saving of his people from destruction; and for this cause he might not bring upon him injustice, he would not fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness.

20 But he had obtained his desires; for he had armed those prisoners of the Nephites who were within the wall of the city, and had given them power to gain possession of those parts which were within the walls.

21 And then he caused the men who were with him to withdraw a pace from them, and surround the armies of the Lamanites.

22 Now behold this was done in the night-time, so that when the Lamanites awoke in the morning they beheld that they were surrounded by the Nephites without, and that their prisoners were armed within.

Comments

Even though Mormon had vowed to “seek death among [the Lamanites] until they shall sue for peace” (verse 3), he does not kill the basically defenseless men. He has them surrounded when they come to in the morning and is therefore able to free the prisoners without bloodshed, and without exchanging Lamanite warriors for his Nephite families.

Alma 55:23–25

23 And thus they saw that the Nephites had power over them; and in these circumstances they found that it was not expedient that they should fight with the Nephites; therefore their chief captains demanded their weapons of war, and they brought them forth and cast them at the feet of the Nephites, pleading for mercy.

24 Now behold, this was the desire of Moroni. He took them prisoners of war, and took possession of the city, and caused that all the prisoners should be liberated, who were Nephites; and they did join the army of Moroni, and were a great strength to his army.

25 And it came to pass that he did cause the Lamanites, whom he had taken prisoners, that they should commence a labor in strengthening the fortifications round about the city Gid.

Comments

Having achieved his goal, Mormon tells what happened to two groups of people. All prisoners were freed, but those who were able joined Moroni’s army. The captured Lamanites were put to the task of strengthening the fortifications of the city of Gid, just as Lamanite captives had been forced to work on the cities of Lehi and Bountiful in the east.

Alma 55:26–28

26 And it came to pass that when he had fortified the city Gid, according to his desires, he caused that his prisoners should be taken to the city Bountiful; and he also guarded that city with an exceedingly strong force.

27 And it came to pass that they did, notwithstanding all the intrigues of the Lamanites, keep and protect all the prisoners whom they had taken, and also maintain all the ground and the advantage which they had retaken.

28 And it came to pass that the Nephites began again to be victorious, and to reclaim their rights and their privileges.

Comments

When these captives had finished with the city of Gid, they were sent north to Bountiful where the other prisoners were held. This placed the prisoners deep in Nephite territory where they could more easily be protected and where they were too far inside Nephite lands for the Lamanites to attempt to recover them.

For a while, Mormon is not interested in the specifics of the battles, only in noting that the Nephites slowly began to reconquer ground that they had prior to the Lamanite invasion.

Tides Turn in the Nephites' Favor

Alma 55:29–32

29 Many times did the Lamanites attempt to encircle them about by night, but in these attempts they did lose many prisoners.

30 And many times did they attempt to administer of their wine to the Nephites, that they might destroy them with poison or with drunkenness.

31 But behold, the Nephites were not slow to remember the Lord their God in this their time of affliction. They could not be taken in their snares; yea, they would not partake of their wine, save they had first given to some of the Lamanite prisoners.

32 And they were thus cautious that no poison should be administered among them; for if their wine would poison a Lamanite it would also poison a Nephite; and thus they did try all their liquors.

Comments

When the Lamanites learned of Moroni's defensive armor, they quickly copied it. They appear to have learned of the trick of getting guards drunk, for they also attempted to copy it. They attempted both intoxicating drinks and poison, but the Nephites had learned the same lesson. Therefore, they would not drink except that they tested it on a Lamanite prisoner. It may be assumed that the Nephites learned that the Lamanites had attempted to use poison because some of the prisoners who tested the "gifts" were poisoned, and probably died. Such ruses can work, but rarely more than once.

Alma 55:33–35

33 And now it came to pass that it was expedient for Moroni to make preparations to attack the city Morianton; for behold, the Lamanites had, by their labors, fortified the city Morianton until it had become an exceeding stronghold.

34 And they were continually bringing new forces into that city, and also new supplies of provisions.

35 And thus ended the twenty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Having finished with the story of freeing the Nephite prisoners by ruse, Mormon returns to specifics of the push to recover Nephite lands. Moroni turns his attention to the city of Morianton. We had seen this land before when the people of that city had a land dispute with the people of Lehi₂ and attempted to head north (see Alma 50:25–33). The city of Lehi had been fortified and was a strong Nephite holding. Morianton was close by, but it was held by the Lamanites. Moroni begins to push the Lamanites back south along the eastern coast.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 56

Helaman's Letter to Moroni

Alma 56:1–2

1 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, on the second day in the first month, Moroni received an epistle from Helaman, stating the affairs of the people in that quarter of the land.

2 And these are the words which he wrote, saying: My dearly beloved brother, Moroni, as well in the Lord as in the tribulations of our warfare; behold, my beloved brother, I have somewhat to tell you concerning our warfare in this part of the land.

Comments

In the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges, Helaman₁ sends a letter to Moroni to inform him of the actions of Helaman₁'s two thousand stripling warriors, who had begun their service at the end of the twenty-sixth year (see the comments on Alma 53:23). Thus, the contents of this letter reflect on the previous four years, but it was either written or received early in the thirtieth year.

The implication of this letter is that communication was difficult, from where Helaman₁ and his unit were serving, to where Moroni directed his armies.

Alma 56:3–5

3 Behold, two thousand of the sons of those men whom Ammon brought down out of the land of Nephi—now ye have known that these were descendants of Laman, who was the eldest son of our father Lehi;

4 Now I need not rehearse unto you concerning their traditions or their unbelief, for thou knowest concerning all these things—

5 Therefore it sufficeth me that I tell you that two thousand of these young men have taken their weapons of war, and would that I should be their leader; and we have come forth to defend our country.

Comments

Helaman₁ is going to tell the story of these two thousand young soldiers, but he wants to give Moroni enough background to realize just how remarkable their story is. Therefore, he gives Moroni some background that Moroni may or may not have known.

The very first thing that Helaman₁ mentions is that these young men were descendants of Laman: they were Lamanites, or at least had been. Although they were inheritors of the traditions of their fathers, they had spent most of their lives as Nephites. Still, the background of being descendants of the enemy, but taking up arms against that enemy, was important.

Alma 56:6–8

6 And now ye also know concerning the covenant which their fathers made, that they would not take up their weapons of war against their brethren to shed blood.

7 But in the twenty and sixth year, when they saw our afflictions and our tribulations for them, they were about to break the covenant which they had made and take up their weapons of war in our defence.

8 But I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us, insomuch that we should not suffer more because of the fulfilling the oath which they had taken.

Comments

Mormon copies this letter, even though it covers some of the history Mormon related in Alma 53:13–20. One thing we do learn is some of the timing of this event, which is a little more confusing in Mormon's text. Mormon introduced the twenty-sixth year in Alma 52:14, but at that point he continued to tell the story of Teancum's siege-like defense of the northeastern territory. Mormon often has to tell stories that occur at the same time, and he tends to do so by finishing one, and then returning back in time to tell the other. That is what happened with the story of the two thousand stripling soldiers.

Mormon also recapitulates the most important part of the young men's story. Their parents had made a covenant not to take up arms, and Helaman₁ had to stop them from breaking that covenant. The young men could take up arms because they had been too young to make the covenant themselves.

Alma 56:9–12

9 But behold, here is one thing in which we may have great joy. For behold, in the twenty and sixth year, I, Helaman, did march at the head of these two thousand young men to the city of Judea, to assist Antipus, whom ye had appointed a leader over the people of that part of the land.

10 And I did join my two thousand sons, (for they are worthy to be called sons) to the army of Antipus, in which strength Antipus did rejoice exceedingly; for behold, his army had been reduced by the Lamanites because their forces had slain a vast number of our men, for which cause we have to mourn.

11 Nevertheless, we may console ourselves in this point, that they have died in the cause of their country and of their God, yea, and they are happy.

12 And the Lamanites had also retained many prisoners, all of whom are chief captains, for none other have they spared alive. And we suppose that they are now at this time in the land of Nephi; it is so if they are not slain.

Comments

Verse 9 tells us that Helaman₁ marched out with his army of young men in the twenty-sixth year. This is a superficial contradiction to Alma 53:22–23, which spoke of Helaman₁ marching out, but noted that “thus ended the twenty and eight year.” This is only a conflict in the way Mormon reported the story. See the comments on Alma 53:22–23 for more information.

At least initially, this unit of young men were not put into serious combat. They are sent to a city to reinforce the defenses. Although much of the letter is about the young men, Helaman₁ also provides other important military details. Therefore, he notes that there have been many who have died, and that there have been many taken prisoner.

Alma 56:13–17

13 And now these are the cities of which the Lamanites have obtained possession by the shedding of the blood of so many of our valiant men:

14 The land of Manti, or the city of Manti, and the city of Zeezrom, and the city of Cumeni, and the city of Antiparah.

15 And these are the cities which they possessed when I arrived at the city of Judea; and I found Antipus and his men toiling with their might to fortify the city.

16 Yea, and they were depressed in body as well as in spirit, for they had fought valiantly by day and toiled by night to maintain their cities; and thus they had suffered great afflictions of every kind.

17 And now they were determined to conquer in this place or die; therefore you may well suppose that this little force which I brought with me, yea, those sons of mine, gave them great hopes and much joy.

Comments

When Helaman₁ brings his two thousand young men to aid Antipus, he finds him in the city of Judea. They are greeted with joy, perhaps in spite of the fact that they were so young, because Antipus and his

men had been fighting hard and were tired and depleted in numbers. They were laboring to fortify the city, and even the young hands would be helpful in that task.

Helaman₁ does praise Antipus and his men, noting that they might be “depressed in body as well as in spirit,” but that “they had fought valiantly by day and toiled by night.” They were doing the best that was possible, but the situation was difficult. It is no surprise that they welcomed reinforcements, no matter how young and inexperienced they were.

Alma 56:18–20

18 And now it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Antipus had received a greater strength to his army, they were compelled by the orders of Ammoron to not come against the city of Judea, or against us, to battle.

19 And thus were we favored of the Lord; for had they come upon us in this our weakness they might have perhaps destroyed our little army; but thus were we preserved.

20 They were commanded by Ammoron to maintain those cities which they had taken. And thus ended the twenty and sixth year. And in the commencement of the twenty and seventh year we had prepared our city and ourselves for defence.

Comments

The Lamanite spies or scouts were able to see that Antipus had received reinforcements, but probably assumed that they were older. Thus, they were not aware that the reinforcements might not have been that strong. Nevertheless, the simple fact that they were reinforced had Ammoron order his commanders not to come against Judea to battle. That bought them time to continue to build fortifications, and perhaps to have some time to rest and heal.

The twenty-sixth year ends on the western front with a number of important cities having been occupied by Lamanites. For a while, there is a break in the action.

The Nephites and Helaman’s Sons Defeat the Lamanite Army

Alma 56:21–26

21 Now we were desirous that the Lamanites should come upon us; for we were not desirous to make an attack upon them in their strongholds.

22 And it came to pass that we kept spies out round about, to watch the movements of the Lamanites, that they might not pass us by night nor by day to make an attack upon our other cities which were on the northward.

23 For we knew in those cities they were not sufficiently strong to meet them; therefore we were desirous, if they should pass by us, to fall upon them in their rear, and thus bring them up in the rear at the same time they were met in the front. We supposed that we could overpower them; but behold, we were disappointed in this our desire.

24 They durst not pass by us with their whole army, neither durst they with a part, lest they should not be sufficiently strong and they should fall.

25 Neither durst they march down against the city of Zarahemla; neither durst they cross the head of Sidon, over to the city of Nephihah.

26 And thus, with their forces, they were determined to maintain those cities which they had taken.

Comments

Helaman, and his two thousand had been sent as reinforcements to the city of Judea and find themselves in a critical defensive position. Judea was strong enough that the Lamanites did not want to attack, but they couldn't simply move on past, or as they moved to the next defended city northward the men of Judea could attack them from the rear. There was, at least for a little while, a stalemate that stopped overt military actions. The Lamanites couldn't advance, and the army in Judea was not strong enough to attempt to retake the cities that had been lost.

Alma 56:27–29

27 And now it came to pass in the second month of this year, there was brought unto us many provisions from the fathers of those my two thousand sons.

28 And also there were sent two thousand men unto us from the land of Zarahemla. And thus we were prepared with ten thousand men, and provisions for them, and also for their wives and their children.

29 And the Lamanites, thus seeing our forces increase daily, and provisions arrive for our support, they began to be fearful, and began to sally forth, if it were possible to put an end to our receiving provisions and strength.

Comments

The parents of the two thousand young men had previously committed to supporting their Nephite defenders with food, but they are slow fulfilling part of that promise. While these provisions came to where their sons were, we should expect that they also sent provisions to other Nephite armies. They were as concerned for their sons as any parents would be, but they had committed to the whole of the Nephite nation, not just for the support of their sons.

Even though the Lamanites felt that they were at a stalemate, they were interested in making sure that the Nephites could not get stronger. Thus, when they saw provisions being sent, they did what most armies would do. They attempted to cut off the supply lines.

Alma 56:30–34

30 Now when we saw that the Lamanites began to grow uneasy on this wise, we were desirous to bring a stratagem into effect upon them; therefore Antipus ordered that I should march forth with my little sons to a neighboring city, as if we were carrying provisions to a neighboring city.

31 And we were to march near the city of Antiparah, as if we were going to the city beyond, in the borders by the seashore.

32 And it came to pass that we did march forth, as if with our provisions, to go to that city.

33 And it came to pass that Antipus did march forth with a part of his army, leaving the remainder to maintain the city. But he did not march forth until I had gone forth with my little army, and came near the city Antiparah.

34 And now, in the city Antiparah were stationed the strongest army of the Lamanites; yea, the most numerous.

Comments

To attempt to turn the balance in the region, Antipus comes up with a plan. He has the young men set forth as decoys, and to march past the Lamanite stronghold in the city of Antiparah. Antipus and some of his army follow them, but far enough behind that they would not be seen. They hoped that the Lamanites would see Helaman, and his unit as an easy victory and leave the city to attack them.

Alma 56:35–37

35 And it came to pass that when they had been informed by their spies, they came forth with their army and marched against us.

36 And it came to pass that we did flee before them, northward. And thus we did lead away the most powerful army of the Lamanites;

37 Yea, even to a considerable distance, insomuch that when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, with their might, they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us; and, as we suppose, it was their intent to slay us before Antipus should overtake them, and this that they might not be surrounded by our people.

Comments

The ruse works, but not exactly as planned. It was perhaps assumed that when the Lamanites saw Antipus at their rear, that they would turn and fight. That would have put them between two forces. That wasn't what the Lamanites did.

The Lamanites marched even faster toward the two thousand, hoping to overtake and easily defeat them, and only then to turn and face Antipus.

Alma 56:38–42

38 And now Antipus, beholding our danger, did speed the march of his army. But behold, it was night; therefore they did not overtake us, neither did Antipus overtake them; therefore we did camp for the night.

39 And it came to pass that before the dawn of the morning, behold, the Lamanites were pursuing us. Now we were not sufficiently strong to contend with them; yea, I would not suffer that my little sons should fall into their hands; therefore we did continue our march, and we took our march into the wilderness.

40 Now they durst not turn to the right nor to the left lest they should be surrounded; neither would I turn to the right nor to the left lest they should overtake me, and we could not stand against them, but be slain, and they would make their escape; and thus we did flee all that day into the wilderness, even until it was dark.

41 And it came to pass that again, when the light of the morning came we saw the Lamanites upon us, and we did flee before them.

42 But it came to pass that they did not pursue us far before they halted; and it was in the morning of the third day of the seventh month.

Comments

The important information is in verse 39, where Helaman₁ states that his unit was “not sufficiently strong to contend” with the Lamanites. They only had one choice: to flee. They were pursued for two days, but finally they saw that they were no longer pursued. They were technically out of danger.

Alma 56:43–48

43 And now, whether they were overtaken by Antipus we knew not, but I said unto my men: Behold, we know not but they have halted for the purpose that we should come against them, that they might catch us in their snare;

44 Therefore what say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle?

45 And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites.

46 For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; we would not slay our brethren if they would let us alone; therefore let us go, lest they should overpower the army of Antipus.

47 Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

48 And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it.

Comments

Having been saved from the Lamanite pursuit, they could return to the city of Judea. However, it was highly likely that when the Lamanite army stopped pursuing them, they had turned to fight Antipus. Helaman₁ understood that likelihood but did not command his young soldiers to fight. Rather, he asked them.

It is possible that the reason he only asked them was that they were so young, and that they had never been in battle (verse 47). Running away from an enemy was one thing. Turning to fight soldiers was quite another.

This is where Helaman₁ is both surprised and proud. The young soldiers desired to go to battle. They clearly knew that soldiers died in battle, but they trusted in the promises of their parents. These were sons of fathers and mothers who had made a covenant not to take up arms. Their parents would have known many who died at Lamanite hands when they would not even take up arms to defend themselves. They knew the value of “the liberty of their fathers.” That liberty was the ability to live their religion (see comments on Alma 46:9–11, and 13–16).

It is possible that Helaman₁ intended to parallel the “liberty of their fathers” with “the words of their mothers.” Both were important. The first was their commitment to their belief, and the second was that the mothers had communicated that importance to their sons. Along with that understanding of the importance of their religious principles, their mothers apparently applied the promise of the land very personally. If their sons were righteous, they would be delivered.

Alma 56:49–51

49 And it came to pass that I did return with my two thousand against these Lamanites who had pursued us. And now behold, the armies of Antipus had overtaken them, and a terrible battle had commenced.

50 The army of Antipus being weary, because of their long march in so short a space of time, were about to fall into the hands of the Lamanites; and had I not returned with my two thousand they would have obtained their purpose.

51 For Antipus had fallen by the sword, and many of his leaders, because of their weariness, which was occasioned by the speed of their march—therefore the men of Antipus, being confused because of the fall of their leaders, began to give way before the Lamanites.

Comments

Helaman₁ has supposed correctly that the Lamanites had turned to fight. The battle was not going well for Antipus and his men. Antipus himself had fallen, and the loss of a leader in battle would have been

particularly disheartening. Combined with their fatigue from marching even faster to force the Lamanites to turn from Helaman₁'s two thousand, they were in even worse straits.

Before describing the battle, Helaman₁ tells Mormon what the outcome was: “had I not returned with my two thousand they would have obtained their purpose.” The Lamanites would have won, but they didn't.

Alma 56:52–54

52 And it came to pass that the Lamanites took courage, and began to pursue them; and thus were the Lamanites pursuing them with great vigor when Helaman came upon their rear with his two thousand, and began to slay them exceedingly, insomuch that the whole army of the Lamanites halted and turned upon Helaman.

53 Now when the people of Antipus saw that the Lamanites had turned them about, they gathered together their men and came again upon the rear of the Lamanites.

54 And now it came to pass that we, the people of Nephi, the people of Antipus, and I with my two thousand, did surround the Lamanites, and did slay them; yea, insomuch that they were compelled to deliver up their weapons of war and also themselves as prisoners of war.

Comments

Helaman₁ finishes the story he foreshadowed in verse 50. The arrival of the two thousand resulted in fighting, but also in the Lamanites being surrounded and eventually surrendering. The young men had been in their first fight, and they had been the reason for the Nephite victory.

Alma 56:55–57

55 And now it came to pass that when they had surrendered themselves up unto us, behold, I numbered those young men who had fought with me, fearing lest there were many of them slain.

56 But behold, to my great joy, there had not one soul of them fallen to the earth; yea, and they had fought as if with the strength of God; yea, never were men known to have fought with such miraculous strength; and with such mighty power did they fall upon the Lamanites, that they did frighten them; and for this cause did the Lamanites deliver themselves up as prisoners of war.

57 And as we had no place for our prisoners, that we could guard them to keep them from the armies of the Lamanites, therefore we sent them to the land of Zarahemla, and a part of those men who were not slain of Antipus, with them; and the remainder I took and joined them to my stripling Ammonites, and took our march back to the city of Judea.

Comments

In verse 47, Helaman₁ had noted that the young men's mothers had promised them that if they were faithful, then they would be preserved. In verse 56 he declares that their promise held true. None of the young men had died.

Perhaps to Helaman₁'s surprise, but certainly to his pride in these young men, they had fought well and hard, and had been instrumental in not only a victory but turning a defeat into a victory.

The prisoners were gathered together and sent to the land of Zarahemla, or to the land around that city. This appears to have been a standard practice (see Alma 57:11).

Helaman₁'s letter continues in the next chapter of our modern edition. There was no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 57

Helaman and His Army Take Antiparah and Cumeni

Alma 57:1–5

1 And now it came to pass that I received an epistle from Ammoron, the king, stating that if I would deliver up those prisoners of war whom we had taken that he would deliver up the city of Antiparah unto us.

2 But I sent an epistle unto the king, that we were sure our forces were sufficient to take the city of Antiparah by our force; and by delivering up the prisoners for that city we should suppose ourselves unwise, and that we would only deliver up our prisoners on exchange.

3 And Ammoron refused mine epistle, for he would not exchange prisoners; therefore we began to make preparations to go against the city of Antiparah.

4 But the people of Antiparah did leave the city, and fled to their other cities, which they had possession of, to fortify them; and thus the city of Antiparah fell into our hands.

5 And thus ended the twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

Helaman₁ relates a letter that he received from Ammoron requesting a prisoner exchange, perhaps similar to the request Ammoron had sent to Moroni (see Alma 54:1). These requests suggest that while Ammoron's troops have been successful in gaining territory and fortifying cities, they were also successful in capturing women and children who were a drain on the available food (see Alma 54:20). That we see a second letter suggests that the Lamanite supply lines were stretched thin and that Ammoron desired to increase his ability to provide for his armies, as opposed to providing for his prisoners.

Helaman₁'s response indicates that the Nephites were beginning to be successful in retaking territory. Helaman₁ had told the story of the stripling soldiers, and perhaps that was only one of several stories of Nephite victories. The result is that Helaman₁ refuses to exchange prisoners, and declares that they will, instead, attack the city of Antiparah.

The Lamanite situation was more dire than Ammoron's letter would have suggested, and therefore the Lamanites withdraw from Antiparah and the city is retaken without incident. That event is the last that Helaman₁ records for the twenty-eighth year, which corresponds in time to the ending of our chapter 53.

Alma 57:6–8

6 And it came to pass that in the commencement of the twenty and ninth year, we received a supply of provisions, and also an addition to our army, from the land of Zarahemla, and from the land round about, to the number of six thousand men, besides sixty of the sons of the Ammonites who had come to join their brethren, my little band of two thousand. And now behold, we were strong, yea, and we had also plenty of provisions brought unto us.

7 And it came to pass that it was our desire to wage a battle with the army which was placed to protect the city Cumeni.

8 And now behold, I will show unto you that we soon accomplished our desire; yea, with our strong force, or with a part of our strong force, we did surround, by night, the city Cumeni, a little before they were to receive a supply of provisions.

Comments

The implications of Ammoron's offer to exchange prisoners, and his ultimate withdrawal from Antiparah (as seen in verses 1–5), were that the Lamanite supply lines had become an issue. Perhaps Helaman, and the other captains learned from that example, and when they prepare to retake the city of Cumeni, they surround it prior to the time that it would have received new provisions.

In contrast to the limited supply lines of both new personnel and food for the Lamanites in Cumeni, Helaman's forces were able to receive six thousand new soldiers, and sixty more of the sons of the Ammonites. In addition to personnel, they received provisions. The Lamanites were besieged, and the Nephites had the advantage of being closer to their own lands and had more open supply lines. They used that advantage at Cumeni.

Alma 57:9–12

9 And it came to pass that we did camp round about the city for many nights; but we did sleep upon our swords, and keep guards, that the Lamanites could not come upon us by night and slay us, which they attempted many times; but as many times as they attempted this their blood was spilt.

10 At length their provisions did arrive, and they were about to enter the city by night. And we, instead of being Lamanites, were Nephites; therefore, we did take them and their provisions.

11 And notwithstanding the Lamanites being cut off from their support after this manner, they were still determined to maintain the city; therefore it became expedient that we should take those provisions and send them to Judea, and our prisoners to the land of Zarahemla.

12 And it came to pass that not many days had passed away before the Lamanites began to lose all hopes of succor; therefore they yielded up the city unto our hands; and thus we had accomplished our designs in obtaining the city Cumeni.

Comments

The Nephite army that was camped around Cumeni was able to cut off supplies, and thereby keep them for themselves. That made the situation more difficult inside the city. Two things happened. The first was that the Nephite armies had more than ample provisions, and they had prisoners. The prisoners were sent to the land of Zarahemla, and the excess of provisions went to Judea.

The second event occurred sometime later. The siege worked, and the lack of supplies essentially starved out the Lamanites in the city, who surrendered.

Lamanites Try to Retake Cumeni

Alma 57:13–15

13 But it came to pass that our prisoners were so numerous that, notwithstanding the enormity of our numbers, we were obliged to employ all our force to keep them, or to put them to death.

14 For behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs, or whatsoever thing they could get into their hands, insomuch that we did slay upwards of two thousand of them after they had surrendered themselves prisoners of war.

15 Therefore it became expedient for us, that we should put an end to their lives, or guard them, sword in hand, down to the land of Zarahemla; and also our provisions were not any more than sufficient for our own people, notwithstanding that which we had taken from the Lamanites.

Comments

Although the Lamanites had surrendered the city, they hadn't completely surrendered their hope of escape. Thus, they would attempt to break free, causing more fighting, such that two thousand of them were killed "after they had surrendered themselves prisoners of war."

This created a problem that had to be solved. As Helaman₁ noted, they needed to either take the prisoners to a place where there were more men to guard them, or they needed to kill them. Perhaps in accordance with the principles Moroni espoused, keeping them prisoners was preferred to killing them. The decision was made to send them to the land of Zarahemla, as had been previously done with Lamanite prisoners (see verse 11).

Alma 57:16–18

16 And now, in those critical circumstances, it became a very serious matter to determine concerning these prisoners of war; nevertheless, we did resolve to send them down to the land of Zarahemla; therefore we selected a part of our men, and gave them charge over our prisoners to go down to the land of Zarahemla.

17 But it came to pass that on the morrow they did return. And now behold, we did not inquire of them concerning the prisoners; for behold, the Lamanites were upon us, and they returned in season to save us from falling into their hands. For behold, Ammoron had sent to their support a new supply of provisions and also a numerous army of men.

18 And it came to pass that those men whom we sent with the prisoners did arrive in season to check them, as they were about to overpower us.

Comments

The prisoners were sent off with men to guard them. In the meantime, Ammoron had finally sent new provisions and a large army to relieve Cumeni. They were too late for that task, but they found a somewhat depleted Nephite army and attacked. Into this heated battle returned the men who had been sent to guard the prisoners. There had to have been a fairly large number of them, as there were apparently many prisoners. If two thousand had been killed attempting to escape, there may have been at least that many remaining.

When the men who were sent to guard the prisoners returned, they found a battle raging, and fought, presumably from the rear of the Lamanite army, causing them to fight on two fronts simultaneously.

Alma 57:19–23

19 But behold, my little band of two thousand and sixty fought most desperately; yea, they were firm before the Lamanites, and did administer death unto all those who opposed them.

20 And as the remainder of our army were about to give way before the Lamanites, behold, those two thousand and sixty were firm and undaunted.

21 Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them; and I did remember the words which they said unto me that their mothers had taught them.

22 And now behold, it was these my sons, and those men who had been selected to convey the prisoners, to whom we owe this great victory; for it was they who did beat the Lamanites; therefore they were driven back to the city of Manti.

23 And we retained our city Cumeni, and were not all destroyed by the sword; nevertheless, we had suffered great loss.

Comments

Helaman, credits the Nephite victory to those men who returned, and to his young Ammonite soldiers. The young men had at least one engagement behind them, and, in this one, they did everything that they were commanded to do.

They defeated the Lamanite army, which was driven back to the city of Manti, which was at the major entrance point to the Nephite lands from the Lamanite lands to the south. The army returns to Cumeni to assess their losses, and to heal.

Alma 57:24–27

24 And it came to pass that after the Lamanites had fled, I immediately gave orders that my men who had been wounded should be taken from among the dead, and caused that their wounds should be dressed.

25 And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of the loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and to our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, there was not one soul of them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds.

26 And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.

27 Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually.

Comments

In the previous engagement involving the young Ammonite soldiers, when they returned to aid Antipus's army, there were no significant injuries noted. This engagement, however, was more brutal, and there were more who were seriously wounded, with two hundred of the young men having fainted due to loss of blood. Nevertheless, none had been killed. Helaman₁ accounted their preservation to their faithfulness, as he had before. These young men become, for Helaman₁, the living verification of the Lord's covenant of the land. The righteous would be preserved. These young men were righteous. They were preserved.

Gid Explains What Happened to the Prisoners

Alma 57:28–32

28 And now it came to pass that after we had thus taken care of our wounded men, and had buried our dead and also the dead of the Lamanites, who were many, behold, we did inquire of Gid concerning the prisoners whom they had started to go down to the land of Zarahemla with.

29 Now Gid was the chief captain over the band who was appointed to guard them down to the land.

30 And now, these are the words which Gid said unto me: Behold, we did start to go down to the land of Zarahemla with our prisoners. And it came to pass that we did meet the spies of our armies, who had been sent out to watch the camp of the Lamanites.

31 And they cried unto us, saying—Behold, the armies of the Lamanites are marching towards the city of Cumeni; and behold, they will fall upon them, yea, and will destroy our people.

32 And it came to pass that our prisoners did hear their cries, which caused them to take courage; and they did rise up in rebellion against us.

Comments

With the battle ended, those who had remained at Cumeni were finally able to ask about the reason that the men who had guarded the prisoners had been able to return so quickly. Since those men were some of those credited with saving the Nephites, the questions were for information only, and not for suspicion.

What was discovered was that the guards had learned of the Lamanite attack, and the Lamanites being guarded also heard of it. That gave the Lamanite prisoners the courage to attack, which they did.

Alma 57:33–36

33 And it came to pass because of their rebellion we did cause that our swords should come upon them. And it came to pass that they did in a body run upon our swords, in the which, the greater number of them were slain; and the remainder of them broke through and fled from us.

34 And behold, when they had fled and we could not overtake them, we took our march with speed towards the city Cumeni; and behold, we did arrive in time that we might assist our brethren in preserving the city.

35 And behold, we are again delivered out of the hands of our enemies. And blessed is the name of our God; for behold, it is he that has delivered us; yea, that has done this great thing for us.

36 Now it came to pass that when I, Helaman, had heard these words of Gid, I was filled with exceeding joy because of the goodness of God in preserving us, that we might not all perish; yea, and I trust that the souls of them who have been slain have entered into the rest of their God.

Comments

The confusion of the moment doubtless resulted in the deaths of many of the Lamanite prisoners, but many of them also escaped. With no one to guard, the Nephites returned to assist in Cumeni.

Helaman₁ concludes this part of the story by declaring that Yahweh had preserved them. Certainly, the nearly miraculous return of the guards was an important part of their eventual defeat of the new Lamanite army at Cumeni; it was seen as evidence for that divine preservation.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition.

Alma 58

Zarahemla Sends Insufficient Support

Alma 58:1–3

1 And behold, now it came to pass that our next object was to obtain the city of Manti; but behold, there was no way that we could lead them out of the city by our small bands. For behold, they remembered that which we had hitherto done; therefore we could not decoy them away from their strongholds.

2 And they were so much more numerous than was our army that we durst not go forth and attack them in their strongholds.

3 Yea, and it became expedient that we should employ our men to the maintaining those parts of the land which we had regained of our possessions; therefore it became expedient that we should wait, that we might receive more strength from the land of Zarahemla and also a new supply of provisions.

Comments

The Nephites desired to recover all their lost territory, and Manti was a particularly important fortified site for it controlled one of the major passes that allowed travel between Lamanite lands in the south and the Nephite lands north of the strip of wilderness. Unfortunately, they were unable to fulfill their desire. The Lamanites had greater numbers and Manti was a fortified location.

The Lamanites were quick to learn that a feint might attempt them to split up their forces and might lead to a defeat. They refused to fall for it. A historical question to be asked is how they learned of the previous attempt, and the answer is that it would be highly unusual for every single Lamanite to have been killed. Some must have escaped, or perhaps even deserted. That allowed someone with the understanding of what had happened to make their way back to the Lamanite lines and let them know that they should beware of that particular ruse.

Alma 58:4–7

4 And it came to pass that I thus did send an embassy to the governor of our land, to acquaint him concerning the affairs of our people. And it came to pass that we did wait to receive provisions and strength from the land of Zarahemla.

5 But behold, this did profit us but little; for the Lamanites were also receiving great strength from day to day, and also many provisions; and thus were our circumstances at this period of time.

6 And the Lamanites were sallying forth against us from time to time, resolving by stratagem to destroy us; nevertheless we could not come to battle with them, because of their retreats and their strongholds.

7 And it came to pass that we did wait in these difficult circumstances for the space of many months, even until we were about to perish for the want of food.

Comments

The area around Manti was a connection between Lamanite and Nephite lands, and that meant that when the Lamanites controlled it, they could easily augment both their numbers and their provisions from the Lamanite homeland. The Nephites should have had that same advantage, but some circumstance that Helaman₁ did not know at the time was keeping his army from the same advantage. Thus, even though he was in a siege-like position, it was not an effective siege because they could not cut off the city from supplies.

On the other hand, the Nephites were suffering from the kinds of problems a sieged city might have undergone, because they were not receiving reinforcements and supplies. In verse 7 we learn that the situation was becoming dire.

Alma 58:8–10

8 But it came to pass that we did receive food, which was guarded to us by an army of two thousand men to our assistance; and this is all the assistance which we did receive, to defend ourselves and our country from falling into the hands of our enemies, yea, to contend with an enemy which was innumerable.

9 And now the cause of these our embarrassments, or the cause why they did not send more strength unto us, we knew not; therefore we were grieved and also filled with fear, lest by any means the judgments of God should come upon our land, to our overthrow and utter destruction.

10 Therefore we did pour out our souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, yea, and also give us strength that we might retain our cities, and our lands, and our possessions, for the support of our people.

Comments

Verse 7 had indicated that Helaman₁'s forces were in dire need of food. They finally received that food, and an additional two thousand men. This number, now merged with the two thousand stripling soldiers, suggests that there had been another exiting Nephite military unit that consisted of two thousand men. It is also possible that, because it was a military unit, that its military designation did not really indicate

the unit's personnel count. As an example, in the Roman army, a *centurion* commanded a *century*, which was considered to be one hundred soldiers, but could be less, and perhaps at times, more.

Although the food was essential and the two thousand men were useful, the number of extra soldiers could not counter the significantly larger number of Lamanite forces opposing them. Therefore, they prayed for what amounted to a miracle.

Helaman's Army Takes Manti

Alma 58:11–15

11 Yea, and it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him.

12 And we did take courage with our small force which we had received, and were fixed with a determination to conquer our enemies, and to maintain our lands, and our possessions, and our wives, and our children, and the cause of our liberty.

13 And thus we did go forth with all our might against the Lamanites, who were in the city of Manti; and we did pitch our tents by the wilderness side, which was near to the city.

14 And it came to pass that on the morrow, that when the Lamanites saw that we were in the borders by the wilderness which was near the city, that they sent out their spies round about us that they might discover the number and the strength of our army.

15 And it came to pass that when they saw that we were not strong, according to our numbers, and fearing that we should cut them off from their support except they should come out to battle against us and kill us, and also supposing that they could easily destroy us with their numerous hosts, therefore they began to make preparations to come out against us to battle.

Comments

The Nephites had essentially prayed for a miracle. What they got was Yahweh's assurance that he would deliver them. There are certainly times in our lives when we need a miracle, and if we listen, we may get assurances that all will be well. Nevertheless, we still need to go, and do. The Nephites could not sit back and wait for a miracle. They took action and took that action with the understanding that their God would preserve them. Yahweh gave them courage, not an immediate solution.

What the Nephites did was move around the city to create a real siege. They blockaded the pass with their troops so that the Lamanites in Manti would no longer receive supplies. That made a more difficult position for the troops in Manti. Therefore, they decided to go against the Nephites in order to remove the threat.

Alma 58:16–18

16 And when we saw that they were making preparations to come out against us, behold, I caused that Gid, with a small number of men, should secrete himself in the wilderness, and also that Teomner and a small number of men should secrete themselves also in the wilderness.

17 Now Gid and his men were on the right and the others on the left; and when they had thus secreted themselves, behold, I remained, with the remainder of my army, in that same place where we had first pitched our tents against the time that the Lamanites should come out to battle.

18 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did come out with their numerous army against us. And when they had come and were about to fall upon us with the sword, I caused that my men, those who were with me, should retreat into the wilderness.

Comments

Helaman₁ used a variant of the tactic of luring the Lamanites away from their fortified city. In this case, it was supposed that it was most of Helaman₁'s army that contended with the Lamanites, and when the engagement began, Helaman₁ had his men retreat as though fleeing from the greater numbers of Lamanites. In the heat of the battle, the Lamanites would have seen themselves as winning the battle, and therefore pursued the Nephites to finish them.

That pursuit led them past the secreted forces of Gid and Teomner, and thus the Lamanites inadvertently allowed Nephite soldiers to be at their rear.

Alma 58:19–22

19 And it came to pass that the Lamanites did follow after us with great speed, for they were exceedingly desirous to overtake us that they might slay us; therefore they did follow us into the wilderness; and we did pass by in the midst of Gid and Teomner, insomuch that they were not discovered by the Lamanites.

20 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites had passed by, or when the army had passed by, Gid and Teomner did rise up from their secret places, and did cut off the spies of the Lamanites that they should not return to the city.

21 And it came to pass that when they had cut them off, they ran to the city and fell upon the guards who were left to guard the city, insomuch that they did destroy them and did take possession of the city.

22 Now this was done because the Lamanites did suffer their whole army, save a few guards only, to be led away into the wilderness.

Comments

The value of the city of Manti's defensive position is underscored by the daring move the Nephite army makes. They are significantly outnumbered, and they were fleeing from what was an overwhelming

army. The whole purpose was to draw that army out of the defended position so that Gid and Teomner could capture the city. This they did.

The danger was that they could take the city, but that the larger number of Nephites who were being pursued might be lost. Apparently, that was deemed an appropriate exchange, again highlighting the value of Manti's defensive position.

Alma 58:23–26

23 And it came to pass that Gid and Teomner by this means had obtained possession of their strongholds. And it came to pass that we took our course, after having traveled much in the wilderness towards the land of Zarahemla.

24 And when the Lamanites saw that they were marching towards the land of Zarahemla, they were exceedingly afraid, lest there was a plan laid to lead them on to destruction; therefore they began to retreat into the wilderness again, yea, even back by the same way which they had come.

25 And behold, it was night and they did pitch their tents, for the chief captains of the Lamanites had supposed that the Nephites were weary because of their march; and supposing that they had driven their whole army therefore they took no thought concerning the city of Manti.

26 Now it came to pass that when it was night, I caused that my men should not sleep, but that they should march forward by another way towards the land of Manti.

Comments

Helaman, and his army were able to stay ahead of the pursuing Lamanites. Because the Nephites were heading into the land where they could easily be reinforced, the Lamanite army realized that their attempt had failed. Therefore, they turned to go back to Manti.

Manti was now in Nephite hands, and therefore they did not have a fortified position to return to. However, with their numbers, and the smaller force defending Manti, they might have been able to retake the city. Therefore, Helaman, had his army force march around the Lamanite army and return to assist in the defense of Manti.

Alma 58:27–30

27 And because of this our march in the night-time, behold, on the morrow we were beyond the Lamanites, insomuch that we did arrive before them at the city of Manti.

28 And thus it came to pass, that by this stratagem we did take possession of the city of Manti without the shedding of blood.

29 And it came to pass that when the armies of the Lamanites did arrive near the city, and saw that we were prepared to meet them, they were astonished exceedingly and struck with great fear, insomuch that they did flee into the wilderness.

30 Yea, and it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did flee out of all this quarter of the land. But behold, they have carried with them many women and children out of the land.

Comments

Even though Helaman₁'s forces had been tired from fleeing before the Lamanites, and then from marching through the night, they achieved their goal of arriving first to Manti. They then added themselves to the defense of the city. Even though tired, the Lamanites would not have known who they were, only that there was now a large army defending Manti. Thus, the Lamanites fled into the wilderness, apparently returning to Lamanite lands.

When Helaman₁ says that they took possession of the city of Manti “without the shedding of blood,” he was being more figurative than realistic. Gid and Teomner certainly killed some Lamanites when they took the depleted forces that remained. Perhaps they did not suffer casualties, but that was unlikely.

There was a conflict between the Lamanites and the Nephites before the Nephites fled, and it is possible that more blood was shed. The figurative use of the idea was to note that it was a stratagem that allowed them to take the city without the massive loss of life it would have taken had they not been able to draw out the Lamanite army.

Nephites Retake All Their Western Lands

Alma 58:31–33

31 And those cities which had been taken by the Lamanites, all of them are at this period of time in our possession; and our fathers and our women and our children are returning to their homes, all save it be those who have been taken prisoners and carried off by the Lamanites.

32 But behold, our armies are small to maintain so great a number of cities and so great possessions.

33 But behold, we trust in our God who has given us victory over those lands, insomuch that we have obtained those cities and those lands, which were our own.

Comments

Helaman₁ is starting the closing statements of his letter to Moroni. This was all one chapter in the 1830 edition which began in our chapter 56. It has been a long letter.

Helaman₁ reports that they have been successful at driving the Lamanites out of the Nephite lands on the west and south, but they still have problems. Their “armies are small to maintain so great a number of

cities and so great possessions.” They have been victorious and achieved the goal of sending the Lamanite army out of their western lands, but the victory is tenuous. Without reinforcements, they might not be able to hold on to the lands that they have regained.

Alma 58:34–38

34 Now we do not know the cause that the government does not grant us more strength; neither do those men who came up unto us know why we have not received greater strength.

35 Behold, we do not know but what ye are unsuccessful, and ye have drawn away the forces into that quarter of the land; if so, we do not desire to murmur.

36 And if it is not so, behold, we fear that there is some faction in the government, that they do not send more men to our assistance; for we know that they are more numerous than that which they have sent.

37 But, behold, it mattereth not—we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies.

38 Behold, this is the twenty and ninth year, in the latter end, and we are in the possession of our lands; and the Lamanites have fled to the land of Nephi.

Comments

Helaman₁ does not know why they have not received reinforcements. He clearly assumes that there are sufficient men available to reinforce them, but he does not understand why the government doesn't send them. Helaman₁ fears “that there is some faction in the government, that they do not send more men to our assistance.” He will be proven correct.

Even though Helaman₁ no longer has much faith in the government, yet ye maintains faith in God. God had delivered them and will yet deliver them.

Typically, the noting of the year ends the story, but here it is an end to the basic report, but Helaman₁ has one more thing to add in the next verses.

Alma 58:39–41

39 And those sons of the people of Ammon, of whom I have so highly spoken, are with me in the city of Manti; and the Lord has supported them, yea, and kept them from falling by the sword, insomuch that even one soul has not been slain.

40 But behold, they have received many wounds; nevertheless they stand fast in that liberty where-with God has made them free; and they are strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day;

yea, they do observe to keep his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments continually; and their faith is strong in the prophecies concerning that which is to come.

41 And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma.

Comments

Helaman₁ ends with the closing of the story with which he began. The two thousand stripling soldiers (augmented by sixty more), have continued to be valiant, and have continued to be delivered, “insomuch that even one soul has not been slain.” They continue to embody the positive promise of the land. They have been righteous. They have been protected from death.

Alma 59

Lamanites Take Nephihah

Alma 59:1–4

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, after Moroni had received and had read Helaman's epistle, he was exceedingly rejoiced because of the welfare, yea, the exceeding success which Helaman had had, in obtaining those lands which were lost.

2 Yea, and he did make it known unto all his people, in all the land round about in that part where he was, that they might rejoice also.

3 And it came to pass that he immediately sent an epistle to Pahoran, desiring that he should cause men to be gathered together to strengthen Helaman, or the armies of Helaman, insomuch that he might with ease maintain that part of the land which he had been so miraculously prospered in regaining.

4 And it came to pass when Moroni had sent this epistle to the land of Zarahemla, he began again to lay a plan that he might obtain the remainder of those possessions and cities which the Lamanites had taken from them.

Comments

Moroni saw two things as important in Helaman's letter. The first was that they had been able to remove the Lamanites from the western and southern lands. The second was that there was some problem with the government that prevented needed reinforcements to be sent. Based on those two important aspects of Helaman's letter, Moroni does two things. The first is that he sends a letter to Pahoran, the Chief Judge, and therefore the head of the government, pleading that he send the needed reinforcements to Helaman. The second was that he began to map out his own plan to remove the Lamanites from the eastern borders of the Nephite lands.

Alma 59:5–8

5 And it came to pass that while Moroni was thus making preparations to go against the Lamanites to battle, behold, the people of Nephihah, who were gathered together from the city of Moroni and the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton, were attacked by the Lamanites.

6 Yea, even those who had been compelled to flee from the land of Manti, and from the land round about, had come over and joined the Lamanites in this part of the land.

7 And thus being exceedingly numerous, yea, and receiving strength from day to day, by the command of Ammoron they came forth against the people of Nephihah, and they did begin to slay them with an exceedingly great slaughter.

8 And their armies were so numerous that the remainder of the people of Nephihah were obliged to flee before them; and they came even and joined the army of Moroni.

Comments

As Moroni is preparing his plans to drive the Lamanites out, he learns that the Lamanites are not only even stronger, but that they have also taken the land of Nephihah. Before Moroni gets the chance to try to make things better, they get worse.

Alma 59:9–13

9 And now as Moroni had supposed that there should be men sent to the city of Nephihah, to the assistance of the people to maintain that city, and knowing that it was easier to keep the city from falling into the hands of the Lamanites than to retake it from them, he supposed that they would easily maintain that city.

10 Therefore he retained all his force to maintain those places which he had recovered.

11 And now, when Moroni saw that the city of Nephihah was lost he was exceedingly sorrowful, and began to doubt, because of the wickedness of the people, whether they should not fall into the hands of their brethren.

12 Now this was the case with all his chief captains. They doubted and marveled also because of the wickedness of the people, and this because of the success of the Lamanites over them.

13 And it came to pass that Moroni was angry with the government, because of their indifference concerning the freedom of their country.

Comments

Moroni learns that in addition to not receiving reinforcements on the western front, there were cities on the eastern front that he felt were adequately manned so that he could keep his fighting army together. That plan is now in jeopardy. Not only is Helaman₁ in need of reinforcements to hold the west, Moroni will need reinforcements to proceed with his plans on the east, and to be able to hold any captured cities. The loss of Nephihah drove that point home.

There is no chapter break at this point in the 1830 edition. Orson Pratt decided to separate the information about the letter that Moroni sent to Pahoran (stating Moroni's demands) from the conditions affecting Moroni's disposition when the letter was written.

Alma 60

Moroni's Letter to Pahoran

Alma 60:1–4

1 And it came to pass that he wrote again to the governor of the land, who was Pahoran, and these are the words which he wrote, saying: Behold, I direct mine epistle to Pahoran, in the city of Zarahemla, who 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.

2 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 with swords, and with cimeters, and all manner of weapons of war of every kind, and send forth against the Lamanites, in whatsoever parts they should come into our land.

3 And now behold, I say unto you that myself, and also my men, and also Helaman and his men, have suffered exceedingly great sufferings; yea, even hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and all manner of afflictions of every kind.

4 But behold, were this all we had suffered we would not murmur nor complain.

Comments

In Alma 59:3, Mormon recorded that Moroni had sent a letter to Pahoran. He didn't give us the text of that letter. In Alma 60:1 (which was not a separate chapter in the 1830 edition), he writes another. This time, Mormon gives us the letter itself. The introduction to the letter is appropriately formal, worthy of a general addressing the political leader. However, it will soon turn to a more strident tone.

Mormon notes that as governor over all the land, it was his responsibility to support the armies. They had created the armies, and those armies had done well in difficult circumstances. Surely, when Pahoran read what we have as verse 4, that “were this all we had suffered we would not murmur nor complain,” Pahoran would have been warned that the rest of the letter would not refrain from murmuring and complaining.

Alma 60:5–8

5 But behold, great has been the slaughter among our people; yea, thousands have fallen by the sword, while it might have otherwise been if ye had rendered unto our armies sufficient strength and succor for them. Yea, great has been your neglect towards us.

6 And now behold, we desire to know the cause of this exceedingly great neglect; yea, we desire to know the cause of your thoughtless state.

7 Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren—

8 Yea, even they who have looked up to you for protection, yea, have placed you in a situation that ye might have succored them, yea, ye might have sent armies unto them, to have strengthened them, and have saved thousands of them from falling by the sword.

Comments

Mormon underscores the fact that the Nephite armies are fighting, and dying, protecting the whole of the Nephite nation. That devotion to the cause of the nation is contrasted to what appears to be “this exceedingly great neglect.” Pahoran hasn’t responded to the pleas to do what a good governor should do. He should support the men in the field who are protecting them.

Mormon’s condemnation is extremely harsh in verse 8, where Mormon clearly states that while Pahoran had been enjoying the protection supplied by the armies, he has neglected his duty to support those very armies. Mormon is accusing Pahoran of the unnecessary deaths of “thousands of [his] brethren” through neglect.

Alma 60:9–10

9 But behold, this is not all—ye have withheld your provisions from them, insomuch that many have fought and bled out their lives because of their great desires which they had for the welfare of this people; yea, and this they have done when they were about to perish with hunger, because of your exceedingly great neglect towards them.

10 And now, my beloved brethren—for ye ought to be beloved; yea, and ye ought to have stirred yourselves more diligently for the welfare and the freedom of this people; but behold, ye have neglected them insomuch that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance; yea, for known unto God were all their cries, and all their sufferings—

Comments

Not only has Pahoran failed to send more men, but he has also failed to send the provisions needed to support those already in the field. His anger easily comes through, even when he attempts more formal

prose: “my beloved brethren—for ye ought to be beloved.” The address as “beloved brethren” is part of polite speech, but Moroni cannot allow it to stand. It is an ideal that isn’t being fulfilled.

Yet again, in verse 10, Moroni declares that the responsibility for thousands of Nephite deaths lies firmly at Pahoran’s door. Moroni does not accuse Pahoran of direct evil, but rather “exceedingly great neglect.”

Alma 60:11

11 Behold, could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain.

Comments

Moroni comments, as part of his condemnation, that “ye could sit upon your thrones.” That is an interesting phrase, particularly in light of the Reign of the Judges. Why “throne,” and especially, why “thrones” in the plural?

Although there is one Chief Judge over all the land, we have seen that each separate land associated with a city had their own Chief Judge for that city and its beholden lands. Thus, there are “thrones” because there is more than one judge. However, why use a term that is usually associated with the symbolic seat of a king? Part of the answer lies in the fact that there is only a partial difference between the monarchy and the Reign of the Judges. The positions of the judges are as hereditary as the right of kingship had been. Thus, the symbol of visible authority of the Chief Judge might not have been so different from that of the king.

Another possibility, if we see the Book of Mormon in a Mesoamerican setting, is that the seat of the ruler was also symbolic, even when it was not elaborate. The texts speak of the “seating” of a king, and in the case of the Nephites, would have been the seating of the judge. Thus, the seat would still be an important symbol of power, and as such be appropriately translated as *throne*, even though the idea of a throne might conjure more elaborate images than the Nephite reality most likely had been.

Alma 60:12–15

12 Do ye suppose that, because so many of your brethren have been killed it is because of their wickedness? I say unto you, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain; for I say unto you, there are many who have fallen by the sword; and behold it is to your condemnation;

13 For the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked; therefore ye need not suppose that the righteous are lost because they are slain; but behold, they do enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

14 And now behold, I say unto you, I fear exceedingly that the judgments of God will come upon this people, because of their exceeding slothfulness, yea, even the slothfulness of our government, and their exceedingly great neglect towards their brethren, yea, towards those who have been slain.

15 For were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies that they could have gained no power over us.

Comments

The underlying theme of this part of Moroni's argument is the covenant of the land. There is protection upon principles of righteousness. In the current war, there have been many Nephites who have died, and Moroni makes certain that he notes that they died defending Nephite ideals, and not because they were unrighteously violating them.

The blame is not that those brave men who died were not living up to their covenants, but rather that the very fact that the Nephites were engaged in this war was evidence that those who were "at our head" had brought the war upon the nation through their unrighteousness.

Moroni is placing Pahoran among those who are unrighteously causing the overall protection of the Lord to be withdrawn. This is Moroni's message in verse 15.

Alma 60:16

16 Yea, had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; yea, were it not for these king-men, who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, at the time we were contending among ourselves, if we had united our strength as we hitherto have done; yea, had it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us; had they been true to the cause of our freedom, and united with us, and gone forth against our enemies, instead of taking up their swords against us, which was the cause of so much bloodshed among ourselves; yea, if we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies, for it would have been done, according to the fulfilling of his word.

Comments

Having declared in the previous verses that this war was brought about by the unrighteous desires of leaders, Moroni gets very specific. He lays the fault at the feet of the kingmen. "[Had] it not been for the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us," Moroni felt that if "we had gone forth against them in the strength of the Lord, we should have dispersed our enemies."

Moroni was more correct than he knew. He will not discover that until he reads the letter that Pahoran sends in response (chapter 61).

Alma 60:17–19

17 But behold, now the Lamanites are coming upon us, taking possession of our lands, and they are murdering our people with the sword, yea, our women and our children, and also carrying them away captive, causing them that they should suffer all manner of afflictions, and this because of the great wickedness of those who are seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men.

18 But why should I say much concerning this matter? For we know not but what ye yourselves are seeking for authority. We know not but what ye are also traitors to your country.

19 Or is it that ye have neglected us because ye are in the heart of our country and ye are surrounded by security, that ye do not cause food to be sent unto us, and also men to strengthen our armies?

Comments

The unrighteousness of some of the leaders allowed for the Lamanite aggression. Moroni is remembering that many of the kingmen were the judges, and the high-born among the people. As Moroni refocuses on the current needs, he wonders what might have caused the delays in sending reinforcements and provisions.

His first answer is that Pahoran and others are “traitors to [their] country.” That is harsh, and perhaps could only be said by a general with a large army behind him. Moroni backs away somewhat from calling Pahoran a traitor and suggests that perhaps it is only that he is so far from the conflict that he has simply forgotten the armies’ needs because he is not in need. It is still a condemnation, but not as severe as calling the political leader a traitor.

Alma 60:20–21

20 Have ye forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? Yea, have ye forgotten the captivity of our fathers? Have ye forgotten the many times we have been delivered out of the hands of our enemies?

21 Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?

Comments

An oversimplified reading of the question Moroni asks, “Have ye forgotten the captivity of our fathers?” would be that Yahweh’s miraculous deliverance in the past would similarly provide another miraculous delivery. That isn’t the lesson Moroni wants Pahoran to remember. While there were clear indications of a divine hand at play, the fathers had to do much to work out their own salvation, and they suffered much before the time of that salvation arrived.

Thus, Moroni sarcastically asks: “Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?” Moroni is clearly indicating that having faith in God does not mean that we are not to act on our own, to the best of our ability.

Alma 60:22–24

22 Yea, will ye sit in idleness while ye are surrounded with thousands of those, yea, and tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands round about in the borders of the land who are falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding?

23 Do ye suppose that God will look upon you as guiltless while ye sit still and behold these things? Behold I say unto you, Nay. Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also.

24 And now, except ye do repent of that which ye have done, and begin to be up and doing, and send forth food and men unto us, and also unto Helaman, that he may support those parts of our country which he has regained, and that we may also recover the remainder of our possessions in these parts, behold it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel, yea, even the great head of our government.

Comments

Moroni continues the theme from verses 20–21. Even though God is powerful to save, we are to work towards our salvation. “God will [not] look upon you as guiltless while ye sit still and behold these things.”

Moroni will not sit back and only watch. If Pahoran does not act to supply the armies, Moroni will turn those armies against him, and use them to take away those in the government who are not sufficiently supporting the troops in the field.

There is an interesting phrase used in verses 23 and 24. Moroni speaks of cleansing the “inward vessel.” This may be an allusion to the concept of purity under the law of Moses. There have been debates about whether or not the cleanliness of the inside of a vessel could be contaminated from the outside of the same vessel. In this case, Moroni is suggesting that the inward vessel (the government in Zarahemla) is impure, and that the outer vessel (the armies), would be required to cleanse the inward vessel.

Alma 60:25–27

25 And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom, and strive to strengthen and fortify our armies, and grant unto them food for their support, behold I will leave a part of my freemen to maintain this part of our land, and I will leave the strength and the blessings of God upon them, that none other power can operate against them—

26 And this because of their exceeding faith, and their patience in their tribulations—

27 And I will come unto you, and if there be any among you that has a desire for freedom, yea, if there be even a spark of freedom remaining, behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct.

Comments

Moroni again indicates that unless he receives the needed men and provisions, that he will bring his armies against Pahoran. He has already provided the possible justification, which was his accusation that Pahoran might be a traitor. If that had been the case, then Moroni could be justified in removing him by force.

Moroni invokes the image he had used with his title of liberty, that of a desire for freedom. As discussed in connection to the title of liberty, the freedom and liberty Moroni is interested in is more heavily religious than political. Moroni doesn't argue with the law, but rather uses the covenant of the land as the justification for desiring that the right things be done.

Alma 60:28–31

28 Yea, behold I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear; and it is according to his commandments that I do take my sword to defend the cause of my country, and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss.

29 Behold it is time, yea, the time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defence of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.

30 Behold, I wait for assistance from you; and, except ye do administer unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in 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.

31 For behold, the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people.

Comments

Moroni insists that his interests are just, and not related to politics. He is after what is *right*, and his definition of what is right is the preservation of the liberty of the people. What he means by that, is the ability to live according to God's covenants. Therefore, he says "it is my God whom I fear." What Moroni is suggesting that he do would actually be considered a rebellion, or a coup. Nevertheless, Moroni considers only that it would preserve the ability to live according to God's covenants.

Moroni is not currently ready to lead the armies. He has leveled the threat but awaits Pahoran's answer before moving. This is not a hasty decision, but one that is firm and calculated. The idea that it is motivated by what Moroni considers to be a religious responsibility is underscored by his declaration in verse 31 that "the Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people." Moroni, in his righteous anger, will be God's instrument to make sure that such a destruction will not happen.

Alma 60:32–36

32 Behold, can you suppose that the Lord will spare you and come out in judgment against the Lamanites, when it is the tradition of their fathers that has 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?

33 Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. 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.

34 And now behold, I, Moroni, am constrained, according to the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God; therefore I would that ye should adhere to the word of God, and send speedily unto me of your provisions and of your men, and also to Helaman.

35 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.

36 Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country. And thus I close mine epistle.

Comments

Moroni closes the letter with a final statement that the problem is one of covenant obligations to God. To be righteous, a Chief Judge must take care of his people. For Moroni, that is especially important in a time of war. Therefore, Moroni invokes God as the one who will mete out judgment on Pahoran, should he continue to shirk his responsibilities (Moroni does not yet know why Pahoran hasn't fulfilled those responsibilities).

The closing of the letter closes this chapter. Pahoran's response is in the next chapter.

Alma 61

Pahoran's Letter to Moroni

Alma 61:1

1 Behold, now it came to pass that soon after Moroni had sent his epistle unto the chief governor, he received an epistle from Pahoran, the chief governor. And these are the words which he received:

Comments

Verse 1 indicates that this response arrived “soon.” It is a response to the second letter, not the first. Pahoran does not explicitly mention the first letter, and it is possible, given the circumstances he relates in this letter, that he did not receive it.

What is important for this letter is that he did receive it, and that he didn't spend much time getting a response back to Moroni. Of course, we cannot know how long “soon” was, but given the slow nature of communications as well as the political unrest, it was certainly a longer time than modern readers would expect of something that happened “soon after.”

Alma 61:2–4

2 I, Pahoran, who am the chief governor of this land, do send these words unto Moroni, the chief captain over the army. Behold, I say unto you, Moroni, that I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul.

3 But behold, there are those who do joy in your afflictions, yea, insomuch that they have risen up in rebellion against me, and also those of my people who are freemen, yea, and those who have risen up are exceedingly numerous.

4 And it is those who have sought to take away the judgment-seat from me that have been the cause of this great iniquity; for they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people, which will be the cause of sore affliction among us; they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen that they have not come unto you.

Comments

The introduction to the letter provides the expected declaration of who sent it. This is a letter from Pahoran. What Moroni had said to him was harsh, and accusatory. Pahoran understood that Moroni was angry, but angry at a situation about which he was not sufficiently informed. Therefore, Pahoran notes that he does grieve for the army's predicament, but that there is a situation that Moroni must understand.

Moroni was absolutely correct that the problems with the king-men were at the heart of the problem, but he wasn't aware of the full nature of the situation. The king-men, who had originally declined to fight, and wanted to invite the Lamanites into their lands, had become even more active. They had rebelled. What Moroni declared he would do to preserve liberty, the king-men had already done something contrary to destroy it. Pahoran had to flee because the king-men had gained control of the city and of the government of Zarahemla. Pahoran declares that it was they who withheld reinforcements and provisions. Moroni would have found that completely believable, because the king-men had already attempted once to allow the Lamanites to have a victory in Nephite lands. This action was in keeping with what Moroni knew of them.

Alma 61:5–7

5 And behold, they have driven me out before them, and I have fled to the land of Gideon, with as many men as it were possible that I could get.

6 And behold, I have sent a proclamation throughout this part of the land; and behold, they are flocking to us daily, to their arms, in the defence of their country and their freedom, and to avenge our wrongs.

7 And they have come unto us, insomuch that those who have risen up in rebellion against us are set at defiance, yea, insomuch that they do fear us and durst not come out against us to battle.

Comments

While Helaman₁ was securing the western border, and Moroni working to secure the east, the center was under attack. The attack in the center was not from the Lamanites, but from Nephites who had risen in rebellion. Remembering that the Lamanite army that was attacking was being led by an apostate Nephite, it is again apostate Nephites who are the most dangerous. In this case, it is a rebellion from the inside while the more faithful Nephite troops have been occupied on the borders. That vacuum allowed the change in the balance of power within Zarahemla.

Pahoran notes that he has fled to Gideon, which is the homeland of the people who had come down out of the land of Nephi with Limhi and Alma₁. In that more favorable location, he has issued a call for more men to come to the aid of the government, and therefore recover the city of Zarahemla.

Between the king-men having their supporters and Pahoran finding any he could that would support him, the lack of extra men to send to the armies in the borders is even more understandable.

Alma 61:8

8 They have got possession of the land, or the city, of Zarahemla; they have appointed a king over them, and he hath written unto the king of the Lamanites, in the which he hath joined an alliance with him; in the which alliance he hath agreed to maintain the city of Zarahemla, which maintenance he supposeth will enable the Lamanites to conquer the remainder of the land, and he shall be placed king over this people when they shall be conquered under the Lamanites.

Comments

Those who had taken over the government of Zarahemla were called king-men for a good reason. These were they who were inheritors of attitudes that had been part of Zarahemla society from the arrival of the Nephites. Zarahemla had a king, but then the Nephites arrived, and Mosiah, a Nephite, was made king. That meant that there were families, who had previously been in a position to inherit power, now outside of the inheritance lines. They might no longer be in the direct line, but they did have a historical connection to the previous king in Zarahemla.

Those who desired a king were the rulers in many of the cities, and it is easy to extrapolate that they were the ones in the position where they had historical ties to power but had been sidelined by the arrival of the Nephites. It is therefore only the fulfillment of the inevitable that they should appoint a king.

This new king wrote to the king of the Lamanites to establish an alliance. It would be surprising if the new Zarahemlaite king had not known of Amalickiah or Ammoron. Thus, it was an attempt to create an alliance with a people who already had sympathy for their cause. It was also required because the king-men did not have the army needed to hold their acquired land.

Alma 61:9

9 And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart. I, Pahoran, do not seek for power, save only to retain my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free.

Comments

Moroni had been harsh in his letter; very harsh. Pahoran clearly got that message, but just as clearly understood the reason for Moroni's direct censure. Therefore, Pahoran diffuses Moroni's wrath by accepting it, and not reciprocating. He tells Moroni that he is not angry with him. That was important, because it could have created a rift between them that would have made it more difficult to repair the nation's problems.

Alma 61:10–13

10 And now, behold, we will resist wickedness even unto bloodshed. We would not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land.

11 We would not shed the blood of our brethren if they would not rise up in rebellion and take the sword against us.

12 We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us so to do.

13 But behold he doth not command us that we shall subject ourselves to our enemies, but that we should put our trust in him, and he will deliver us.

Comments

Pahoran has clearly read the letter Moroni sent, because this argument responds directly to issues Moroni raised. Yahweh had given the Nephites commands of how they were to conduct war. Those definitions were required to understand what actions might be considered righteous, and therefore invoke the Lord's protection.

Pahoran notes that they are defending themselves, and not seeking blood. That puts him squarely in line with the Lord's commands on warfare, and thereby Pahoran declares to Moroni that he is ready to keep covenants, while returning the people to the covenants that led them to liberty.

Alma 61:14–18

14 Therefore, my beloved brother, Moroni, let us resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, yea, such as rebellions and dissensions, let us resist them with our swords, that we may retain our freedom, that we may rejoice in the great privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God.

15 Therefore, come unto me speedily with a few of your men, and leave the remainder in the charge of Lehi and Teancum; give unto them power to conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the spirit of freedom which is in them.

16 Behold I have sent a few provisions unto them, that they may not perish until ye can come unto me.

17 Gather together whatsoever force ye can upon your march hither, and we will go speedily against those dissenters, in the strength of our God according to the faith which is in us.

18 And we will take possession of the city of Zarahemla, that we may obtain more food to send forth unto Lehi and Teancum; yea, we will go forth against them in the strength of the Lord, and we will put an end to this great iniquity.

Comments

Pahoran has responded to Moroni, accepted the reasons for Moroni's anger, and understood that that anger came from a righteous concern. Pahoran has also declared that he is willing to fight in order to keep the Nephite lands free to practice their religion and keep their covenants. Pahoran provides a show of faith in sending some provisions.

Therefore, at the end of the letter he asks Moroni to bring his army to the aid of the government. Pahoran understands that Moroni cannot abandon the east; nevertheless, he personally requests Moroni to come to his aid. Pahoran expects, correctly, that Moroni has a good standing with the people and could serve as a symbol, as well as a military leader.

Alma 61:19–21

19 And now, Moroni, I do joy in receiving your epistle, for I was somewhat worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren.

20 But ye have said, except they repent the Lord hath commanded you that ye should go against them.

21 See that ye strengthen Lehi and Teancum in the Lord; tell them to fear not, for God will deliver them, yea, and also all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free. And now I close mine epistle to my beloved brother, Moroni.

Comments

Moroni had invoked God in his condemnation of Pahoran. Pahoran shows that he is still faithful by also invoking God as part of his request for Moroni's assistance. The covenant provides protection for the righteous, and those who usurped the government in Zarahemla cannot be protected unless they repent (verse 20).

The arguments deal with covenants and with righteousness, but they continue to be described with the term *liberty*: "For God will deliver . . . all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free."

With the close of the letter, the chapter ends in the 1830 edition.

Alma 62

Moroni and Pahoran Retake Zarahemla

Alma 62:1–2

1 And now it came to pass that when Moroni had received this epistle his heart did take courage, and was filled with exceedingly great joy because of the faithfulness of Pahoran, that he was not also a traitor to the freedom and cause of his country.

2 But he did also mourn exceedingly because of the iniquity of those who had driven Pahoran from the judgment-seat, yea, in fine because of those who had rebelled against their country and also their God.

Comments

These two verses are Mormon's introduction to what happened after Moroni received Pahoran's letter. It represents an interesting aspect of Mormon's style. We will often see Mormon presenting emotions in opposite pairs. In this case, we have the "exceedingly great joy" followed immediately by "also did mourn exceedingly." The things that caused joy were certainly present, as were the reasons for mourning. It is the presentation of the two emotions as opposing pairs that perhaps underscores one of the ways in which Mormon viewed the world. For Mormon, it was not infrequent that he would write of things in terms of this type of opposition. There was good and evil, and while Mormon might have realistically seen the shades of gray in between, we more often see him describe the world in the stronger opposites.

Alma 62:3–5

3 And it came to pass that Moroni took a small number of men, according to the desire of Pahoran, and gave Lehi and Teancum command over the remainder of his army, and took his march towards the land of Gideon.

4 And he did raise the standard of liberty in whatsoever place he did enter, and gained whatsoever force he could in all his march towards the land of Gideon.

5 And it came to pass that thousands did flock unto his standard, and did take up their swords in the defence of their freedom, that they might not come into bondage.

Comments

If we read verses 4 and 5 in isolation from Moroni's letter to Pahoran, we might think that when Moroni raised the standard of liberty again that it was a declaration of political preference. It certainly had those overtones, for there was only the slightest separation between religion and politics. However, as has been noted before, Moroni's prime considerations had to do with the covenant of the land. Preserving liberty was to preserve the Nephite ability to keep their covenants, and keeping those covenants was essential to their preservation in the land.

Thus, the people really did "take up their swords in defense of their freedom, that they might not come into bondage," but the nature of their freedom was deeply rooted in their ability to worship God and keep his commandments.

Alma 62:6–8

6 And thus, when Moroni had gathered together whatsoever men he could in all his march, he came to the land of Gideon; and uniting his forces with those of Pahoran they became exceedingly strong, even stronger than the men of Pachus, who was the king of those dissenters who had driven the freemen out of the land of Zarahemla and had taken possession of the land.

7 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran went down with their armies into the land of Zarahemla, and went forth against the city, and did meet the men of Pachus, insomuch that they did come to battle.

8 And behold, Pachus was slain and his men were taken prisoners, and Pahoran was restored to his judgment-seat.

Comments

Mormon included two complete letters discussing this situation. When it came to what happened to resolve it, Mormon gave only the briefest of descriptions. That should inform us, as readers, that it was not the military action that was important, but rather the principles that we might discern from the two letters.

The resolution is that Moroni combined with Pahoran, and that gave them a military advantage in numbers, which they used to defeat Pachus, who had been declared king. Mormon took longer than that single sentence, but not much longer.

Alma 62:9–11

9 And the men of Pachus received their trial, according to the law, and also those king-men who had been taken and cast into prison; and they were executed according to the law; yea, those men of Pachus and those king-men, whosoever would not take up arms in the defence of their country, but would fight against it, were put to death.

10 And thus it became expedient that this law should be strictly observed for the safety of their country; yea, and whosoever was found denying their freedom was speedily executed according to the law.

11 And thus ended the thirtieth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; Moroni and Pahoran having restored peace to the land of Zarahemla, among their own people, having inflicted death upon all those who were not true to the cause of freedom.

Comments

The defeat of the king-men meant the reestablishment of the rule of law. Therefore, Mormon makes sure to note that those captured king-men received their trial, according to the law. They were executed, but also according to the law.

The thirtieth year ended with this particular crisis having been contained. There were still Lamanites to worry about in the eastern borders, but the internal division had been resolved. The armies in the field would now be able to receive reinforcements and provisions needed to defend the lands already retaken, and to begin the task of retaking the rest.

Alma 62:12–14

12 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, Moroni immediately caused that provisions should be sent, and also an army of six thousand men should be sent unto Helaman, to assist him in preserving that part of the land.

13 And he also caused that an army of six thousand men, with a sufficient quantity of food, should be sent to the armies of Lehi and Teancum. And it came to pass that this was done to fortify the land against the Lamanites.

14 And it came to pass that Moroni and Pahoran, leaving a large body of men in the land of Zarahemla, took their march with a large body of men towards the land of Nephiah, being determined to overthrow the Lamanites in that city.

Comments

Soon after the resolution of the problems in the center of the Nephite lands, Moroni turns his attention again to the larger military problem in the land. In the west, Helaman, still needed more men to hold on to the territory they had regained. In the east, the campaign needed to begin to retake captured lands.

Moroni sends men and provisions to his generals, and then takes the army that had been created to retake Zarahemla and sent its strength to the east, specifically to begin retaking Nephiah.

Moroni and Pahoran Retake Nephihah

Alma 62:15–18

15 And it came to pass that as they were marching towards the land, they took a large body of men of the Lamanites, and slew many of them, and took their provisions and their weapons of war.

16 And it came to pass after they had taken them, they caused them to enter into a covenant that they would no more take up their weapons of war against the Nephites.

17 And when they had entered into this covenant they sent them to dwell with the people of Ammon, and they were in number about four thousand who had not been slain.

18 And it came to pass that when they had sent them away they pursued their march towards the land of Nephihah. And it came to pass that when they had come to the city of Nephihah, they did pitch their tents in the plains of Nephihah, which is near the city of Nephihah.

Comments

This is an interesting incident that Mormon relates with minimum detail. Mormon's interest is in the retaking of Nephihah, but he does give us the information that while Moroni's newly enlarged army is marching to Nephihah, that they meet, and defeat, a Lamanite army that they find in the field.

Why does Mormon add this incident? Possibly, it is because of the way that Moroni dealt with the captured Lamanites. Mormon has often pointed out that Moroni was not bloodthirsty. Here again we see him extracting a covenant from the captives rather than killing them. When the captives accepted the covenant, they were sent to be among the Ammonites, who were a people who did not even have weapons that the Lamanites might take and therefore, attempt to fight against the Nephites again.

Mormon admires Moroni as a military genius, but also as a man of God. Mormon certainly understood the need for both traits, as Mormon also had to walk that line between living the gospel and defending his people through might of arms.

Alma 62:19–23

19 Now Moroni was desirous that the Lamanites should come out to battle against them, upon the plains; but the Lamanites, knowing of their exceedingly great courage, and beholding the greatness of their numbers, therefore they durst not come out against them; therefore they did not come to battle in that day.

20 And when the night came, Moroni went forth in the darkness of the night, and came upon the top of the wall to spy out in what part of the city the Lamanites did camp with their army.

21 And it came to pass that they were on the east, by the entrance; and they were all asleep. And now Moroni returned to his army, and caused that they should prepare in haste strong cords and ladders, to be let down from the top of the wall into the inner part of the wall.

22 And it came to pass that Moroni caused that his men should march forth and come upon the top of the wall, and let themselves down into that part of the city, yea, even on the west, where the Lamanites did not camp with their armies.

23 And it came to pass that they were all let down into the city by night, by the means of their strong cords and their ladders; thus when the morning came they were all within the walls of the city.

Comments

There were certainly many battles that were incredibly bloody. Mormon has had to relate some of them, such as the one that inspired Alma₂'s great "O, that I were an angel" soliloquy. That battle "has brought to pass the destruction of many thousand lives; yea, it has brought to pass an awful scene of bloodshed" (Alma 28:10). Even with the terrible loss of life, there was no description of the tactics involved or the battles themselves.

When Mormon describes tactics, it is typically to show how smaller numbers would defeat larger, or how the objective was won with lesser (or no) loss of life. Mormon clearly prefers incidents where he can report that an objective was taken without the terrible costs of many of the battles that had been fought, and certainly the battles that Mormon had seen in his lifetime, and will yet see, at Cumorah.

Alma 62:24–26

24 And now, when the Lamanites awoke and saw that the armies of Moroni were within the walls, they were affrighted exceedingly, insomuch that they did flee out by the pass.

25 And now when Moroni saw that they were fleeing before him, he did cause that his men should march forth against them, and slew many, and surrounded many others, and took them prisoners; and the remainder of them fled into the land of Moroni, which was in the borders by the seashore.

26 Thus had Moroni and Pahoran obtained the possession of the city of Nephihah without the loss of one soul; and there were many of the Lamanites who were slain.

Comments

As noted in the commentary on the previous verses, Mormon prefers to give details where there is little loss of life. That perspective must be amended to note that what Mormon is most interested in is the loss of Nephite life. Thus, in verse 26 he notes that Moroni and Pahoran took the city of Nephihah without the loss of Nephite life, even though "there were many of the Lamanites who were slain."

Alma 62:27–29

27 Now it came to pass that many of the Lamanites that were prisoners were desirous to join the people of Ammon and become a free people.

28 And it came to pass that as many as were desirous, unto them it was granted according to their desires.

29 Therefore, all the prisoners of the Lamanites did join the people of Ammon, and did begin to labor exceedingly, tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind; and thus were the Nephites relieved from a great burden; yea, insomuch that they were relieved from all the prisoners of the Lamanites.

Comments

One of the sad realities of war is that many of the participants are, of themselves, good people. They might be called enemies due to the nature of the conflict, but they are still, essentially, simply good people, doing what they feel they must, or what they were commanded to do.

Moroni's practice of allowing prisoners to take an oath, or make a covenant, allowed those people to survive the terrible nature of war, and be able to return to simply being good people. We must remember that in Book of Mormon times, armies were made up of people who came and volunteered; they were not a professional standing army. Thus, they were typically farmers, and these Lamanite farmers were given the chance to be somewhat normal again. It isn't surprising that they would choose to return to farming, rather than fighting.

The result, for the Nephites, was that there was an increase in crop production, since there were laborers available to plant and harvest while the armies were in the field of battle.

Moroni Joins Lehi and Teancum

Alma 62:30–33

30 Now it came to pass that Moroni, after he had obtained possession of the city of Nephidah, having taken many prisoners, which did reduce the armies of the Lamanites exceedingly, and having regained many of the Nephites who had been taken prisoners, which did strengthen the army of Moroni exceedingly; therefore Moroni went forth from the land of Nephidah to the land of Lehi.

31 And it came to pass that when the Lamanites saw that Moroni was coming against them, they were again frightened and fled before the army of Moroni.

32 And it came to pass that Moroni and his army did pursue them from city to city, until they were met by Lehi and Teancum; and the Lamanites fled from Lehi and Teancum, even down upon the borders by the seashore, until they came to the land of Moroni.

33 And the armies of the Lamanites were all gathered together, insomuch that they were all in one body in the land of Moroni. Now Ammoron, the king of the Lamanites, was also with them.

Comments

The enlarged army that Moroni was able to field was able to begin the task of retaking lands and cities that the Lamanites had been holding. Some of the cities fell without an engagement. However, the retraction of Lamanite armies served to concentrate them again, and they were gathered in the land of Moroni. This would have been a significant army, and their king, Ammoron, was with them.

Teancum Slays Ammoron

Alma 62:34–36

34 And it came to pass that Moroni and Lehi and Teancum did encamp with their armies round about in the borders of the land of Moroni, insomuch that the Lamanites were encircled about in the borders by the wilderness on the south, and in the borders by the wilderness on the east.

35 And thus they did encamp for the night. For behold, the Nephites and the Lamanites also were weary because of the greatness of the march; therefore they did not resolve upon any stratagem in the night-time, save it were Teancum; for he was exceedingly angry with Ammoron, insomuch that he considered that Ammoron, and Amalickiah his brother, had been the cause of this great and lasting war between them and the Lamanites, which had been the cause of so much war and bloodshed, yea, and so much famine.

36 And it came to pass that Teancum in his anger did go forth into the camp of the Lamanites, and did let himself down over the walls of the city. And he went forth with a cord, from place to place, insomuch that he did find the king; and he did cast a javelin at him, which did pierce him near the heart. But behold, the king did awaken his servants before he died, insomuch that they did pursue Teancum, and slew him.

Comments

Once before, Teancum had faced a large Lamanite army that was led by their king. At that time, he entered by stealth and killed Amalickiah. No doubt emboldened by his previous success, he attempts it again. Teancum achieved the goal of killing Ammoron, but this time he could not escape. He was pursued and killed.

Alma 62:37–39

37 Now it came to pass that when Lehi and Moroni knew that Teancum was dead they were exceedingly sorrowful; for behold, he had been a man who had fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty; and he had suffered very many exceedingly sore afflictions. But behold, he was dead, and had gone the way of all the earth.

38 Now it came to pass that Moroni marched forth on the morrow, and came upon the Lamanites, insomuch that they did slay them with a great slaughter; and they did drive them out of the land; and they did flee, even that they did not return at that time against the Nephites.

39 And thus ended the thirty and first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and thus they had had wars, and bloodsheds, and famine, and affliction, for the space of many years.

Comments

The description of this engagement with the Lamanite army is sparse. When Teancum killed Amalickiah, it had a great effect on the Lamanite army, and they fled. In this case, we don't hear whether or not they were in any disarray, but Mormon does note that Moroni came upon them the very next day. If there was any advantage to be seized, it was to be seized soon, and Moroni did just that.

The Lamanites were driven out of the land. The thirty-first-year ends. Mormon declares in his frequent literary fashion, that there was a stark contrast between the many years of war, bloodshed, and famine, and the result of this campaign, which was freedom from those troubles for the space of many years.

Alma 62:40–41

40 And there had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi; nevertheless for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared.

41 But behold, because of the exceedingly great length of the war between the Nephites and the Lamanites many had become hardened, because of the exceedingly great length of the war; and many were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God, even in the depth of humility.

Comments

Mormon provides the moral of the story. There had been terrible death and destruction, but it had led to an increase in humility, and therefore devotion to God. That increased devotion would have been Mormon's definition of better keeping the commandments, and therefore meriting the blessings of the promise of the land. That message is made clear when he declared: "Nevertheless for righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous, they were spared."

Alma 62:42–44

42 And it came to pass that after Moroni had fortified those parts of the land which were most exposed to the Lamanites, until they were sufficiently strong, he returned to the city of Zarahemla; and also

returned to the place of his inheritance; and there was once more peace established Helaman among the people of Nephi.

43 And Moroni yielded up the command of his armies into the hands of his son, whose name was Moronihah; and he retired to his own house that he might spend the remainder of his days in peace.

44 And Pahoran did return to his judgment-seat; and Helaman did take upon him again to preach unto the people the word of God; for because of so many wars and contentions it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church.

Comments

Mormon begins to wrap up this chapter by quickly noting the major events of the aftermath of the wars. Healing began. Moroni still fortified cities, but then he retired. Helaman, “returned to the place of his inheritance,” which also meant that he returned to his task of being the record keeper and the religious leader. Pahoran is reestablished as the Chief Judge over the land.

As with other conflicts, one of the means of preserving peace was to increase the righteousness of the people, thus, to merit the promise of the land. This is what was meant by “it had become expedient that a regulation should be made again in the church.” The ideas of the king-men were both political and religious, and it was the religious aspect of those ideas that meant that there was much to do to renew the Nephite understanding of God’s doctrine.

Alma 62:45–48

45 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth, and did declare the word of God with much power unto the convincing of many people of their wickedness, which did cause them to repent of their sins and to be baptized unto the Lord their God.

46 And it came to pass that they did establish again the church of God, throughout all the land.

47 Yea, and regulations were made concerning the law. And their judges, and their chief judges were chosen.

48 And the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceedingly rich.

Comments

Helaman, and his brethren take up the task of preaching, and they were successful. This led to the renewal of the church and to the rule of law. By noting both the church and the judges, Mormon is simply noting that things are returning to stability, and to a stability that reflected righteous principles.

Because the people were becoming more righteous, they “began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceedingly strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceedingly rich.” That is, of course, just as the covenant of the land had promised.

Alma 62:49–52

49 But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him.

50 Yea, they did remember how great things the Lord had done for them, that he had delivered them from death, and from bonds, and from prisons, and from all manner of afflictions, and he had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies.

51 And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper in the land.

52 And it came to pass that all these things were done. And Helaman died, in the thirty and fifth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

Comments

Many times, Mormon has written that the Nephites prospered, but it was simply an introduction to their prideful fall. In this case, Mormon suggests that they really did prosper, precisely because “they were not lifted up on the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God.” Mormon recognizes that it isn’t the wealth, or the strength, or any other indicator of prosperity that is the problem, but rather what we do with that prosperity. If we live the gospel, care for others as ourselves, and do not think ourselves better than others, we can live both prosperously and righteously. Nephite history, however, also teaches us that those are hard lessons to learn, or to learn and to put into practice for the long term.

At the end of the thirty and fifth year, Helaman₁ dies. This ends this chapter, which was also a chapter in the 1830 edition.

Alma 63

Alma 63:1–3

1 And it came to pass in the commencement of the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Shiblon took possession of those sacred things which had been delivered unto Helaman by Alma.

2 And he was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God; and also did his brother.

3 And it came to pass that Moroni died also. And thus ended the thirty and sixth year of the reign of the judges.

Comments

The previous wars had ceased in the thirty-first year of the Reign of the Judges (Alma 62:39). Now, in the thirty-fifth year, both Helaman₁ and Moroni, two of the great leaders during those war years, have died. We do not know how old they were, or whether there were injuries that they had sustained in the battles that might have complicated their health. We only know that they died in the same year.

Rather than giving the job of record keeping to his son, Helaman₁ designates his brother, Shiblon, as the record keeper. Helaman₁ does have a son, but we are not told why he does not get the records at this time.

Alma 63:4–9

4 And it came to pass that in the thirty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, there was a large company of men, even to the amount of five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children, departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward.

5 And it came to pass that Hagoth, he being an exceedingly curious man, therefore he went forth and built him an exceedingly large ship, on the borders of the land Bountiful, by the land Desolation, and launched it forth into the west sea, by the narrow neck which led into the land northward.

6 And behold, there were many of the Nephites who did enter therein and did sail forth with much provisions, and also many women and children; and they took their course northward. And thus ended the thirty and seventh year.

7 And in the thirty and eighth year, this man built other ships. And the first ship did also return, and many more people did enter into it; and they also took much provisions, and set out again to the land northward.

8 And it came to pass that they were never heard of more. And we suppose that they were drowned in the depths of the sea. And it came to pass that one other ship also did sail forth; and whither she did go we know not. 9 And it came to pass that in this year there were many people who went forth into the land northward. And thus ended the thirty and eighth year.

9 And it came to pass that in this year there were many people who went forth into the land northward. And thus ended the thirty and eighth year.

Comments

Mormon has been paying more attention to the north, and he continues that trend in these verses. Without giving much information, other than the brief notice here, he notes that “five thousand and four hundred men, with their wives and their children” went north. That is a very large number of people. We will see more northward migrations early in the book of Helaman.

Mormon also briefly relates the story of Hagoth. He helps many migrate by sea, rather than by land. Although Mormon doesn’t say where they went, he notes that they launch near the narrow neck leading into the land northward. Perhaps he was hinting that they, as well as the five thousand four hundred men (and their families) had gone north.

For Mormon’s purposes, it is sufficient that he document the movement of people who were Nephites toward the more northern lands. He will be even more explicit, starting in Helaman 3:3.

Alma 63:10–13

10 And it came to pass in the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges, Shiblon died also, and Corianton had gone forth to the land northward in a ship, to carry forth provisions unto the people who had gone forth into that land.

11 Therefore it became expedient for Shiblon to confer those sacred things, before his death, upon the son of Helaman, who was called Helaman, being called after the name of his father.

12 Now behold, all those engravings which were in the possession of Helaman were written and sent forth among the children of men throughout all the land, save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth.

13 Nevertheless, these things were to be kept sacred, and handed down from one generation to another; therefore, in this year, they had been conferred upon Helaman, before the death of Shiblon.

Comments

Helaman₁ was the oldest brother. His next younger brother, Shiblon, does not survive him by many years. Apparently, it was considered that the sacred records, and relics, were to be handed to Corianton, but Corianton was unavailable. Notably, he had gone northward, reinforcing Mormon's increasing attention to that land.

The story now begins to move to Helaman₂, son of Helaman₁. He becomes the keeper of the sacred records when Shiblon realized that he was dying.

Alma 63:14–17

14 And it came to pass also in this year that there were some dissenters who had gone forth unto the Lamanites; and they were stirred up again to anger against the Nephites.

15 And also in this same year they came down with a numerous army to war against the people of Moronihah, or against the army of Moronihah, in the which they were beaten and driven back again to their own lands, suffering great loss.

16 And thus ended the thirty and ninth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

17 And thus ended the account of Alma, and Helaman his son, and also Shiblon, who was his son.

Comments

In addition to people going north, there were some dissenters who went south. The Lamanites are in the south, and as has happened before, the dissenters incite the Lamanites to attack. Moroni's son, Moronihah, leads the victorious Nephite army, and the Lamanites are beaten back. There are no tactics discussed, and other than simply saying that there was an attempt that was defeated, we know very little about this war, save that it occurred in the thirty-ninth year, and that Moronihah led the Nephite armies.

The "account of Alma, and Helaman₁, his son, and also Shiblon, who was his son" ends in the fortieth year. This is an appropriate time to end a record, particularly if Mormon is following Mesoamerican calendrics. Mesoamericans used a base-20 system, and in that system, twenty had the symbolic significance that ten would in a decimal system. In Maya, a twenty-year period was given a name: *katun*. Thus, the book ends in a very symbolic two-*katun* year.

This will be more important as we begin the book of Helaman, and as we note why the beginning of the book of Helaman perhaps was more properly the ending of the book of Alma, save for the desire to end on the symbolic forty-year count.

