

# Alma 7

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## Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub>'s record, or simply to the reiteration that the significant information is coming from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record that is important.

As with the previous sermon, this one will be quoted from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s record. Although it is obvious that Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub>’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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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*

Alma<sub>2</sub> begins by setting up a contrast between the people in the city of Gideon and the people in the city of Zarahemla. Alma<sub>2</sub> preached repentance to those in Zarahemla. In Gideon, he will preach the opposite.

Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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.

## Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> that this people were not in a state of apostasy, as were many in the city of Zarahemla. As Alma<sub>2</sub> 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, Alma<sub>2</sub> 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? Alma<sub>2</sub> 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, Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub>’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, Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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.

## **Alma<sub>2</sub> 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, Alma<sub>2</sub> 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 Alma<sub>1</sub> 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 Alma<sub>2</sub> 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.

## **Alma<sub>2</sub> 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***

Alma<sub>2</sub> 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. Alma<sub>2</sub> asks the rhetorical question of whether they believe them. It is rhetorical because the Spirit had already testified to him that they did. When Alma<sub>2</sub> 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, Alma<sub>2</sub> 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.

## **Alma<sub>2</sub> 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*

Alma<sub>2</sub> 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***

Alma<sub>2</sub> ends this sermon differently from the one in Zarahemla. There the final statements were invitations to repent. Here, Alma<sub>2</sub> rejoices in current efforts of the people. Therefore, rather than the invitation to repent, Alma<sub>2</sub> blesses them, their houses, lands, flocks and herds.

It is interesting to note that Alma<sub>2</sub> 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.

