

ALMA 17–22

John W. Welch Notes



In reading the “account of the sons of Mosiah” in Alma 17–26, it helps to be mindful about time, place, and purpose. While keeping track of the times and places may be difficult, the purpose driving these four missionaries is always clear.

Alma 17 begins back at the time of the first year of the reign of judges. Everything that happens with the four sons of Mosiah in the ten chapters from Alma 17–26 took place during the same fourteen years with Alma the Younger in Alma 1–16. When King Mosiah relinquished the kingship in the land of Zarahemla and then died, his four sons left for fourteen amazing years—two whole seven-year sabbatical cycles. Their return and joyous reunion with Alma is exuberantly reported in Alma 26.

The events in this block of chapters took place in several lands. It helps to keep track of the separate places where the key events occur. Watch especially for lands or cities called the lands of Ishmael, Jerusalem, Middoni, and Nephi. In all, the brothers converted people unto the Lord in seven lands or cities (Alma 23:8–12). An important overview of the geography of these lands is given at the end of Alma 22, verses 27–34.

These four brothers—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni—left their previous life of privilege and aristocracy and went anonymously into different cultural settings with no purpose or motive other than to cultivate faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and faithful lives of righteousness based on his plan of salvation for all of mankind. Their hope was to break down barriers of tribal misunderstanding, doctrinal

forgetfulness, and the use of violence. Through patience and suffering, they facilitated spiritual conversions that led to peace among families and peoples.

Many personal and religious lessons can be learned by attentively reading the accounts of these courageous and inspired brothers. Only a few of those lessons will be pointed out here. These four sons of Mosiah had been present with Alma when they all saw and heard the angel of the Lord. That conversion taught them many things and changed their lives forever (Mosiah 27:32). The effects of their missions were strongly felt in their day and continue to be inspiring even today.

Alma 17

Alma 17:1–4 — Alma Rejoices in Seeing the Sons of Mosiah after Fourteen Years

Rather than becoming political leaders at home, the four sons of Mosiah decided to leave the Land of Zarahemla to serve a mission among the Lamanites. This was done for spiritual reasons, but their devotion also had political consequences. Their absence may have prevented them from becoming a political liability to Alma, the new chief judge, and Nephiah, who replaced Alma in that position after eight years, with people perhaps wanting to pressure them to insert themselves into positions of power (consider Mosiah 29:2). Their mission was a long one and lasted fourteen years. We do not have much of a record about the last twelve years of their mission. However, the record gives us considerable information about the first few years—how they were successful in establishing the conversion of King Lamoni and also his father. From then on, we only get a general accounting that a lot of impressive things were generally accomplished through their missionary efforts.

To see the sons of Mosiah again after so many years brought great rejoicing to Alma, but what added more to his joy was that “they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth” (17:2). That’s what matters most.

Alma 17:2–3, 9–12 — We Can Search the Scriptures to Gain the Spirit of Prophecy and Revelation

What lessons can we learn from how the sons of Mosiah approached their missions? What did they do to prepare? Obviously, there was no MTC available to help them prepare for their missionary call. Indeed, Alma 17 is used today as a primary scriptural source of study and training for newly-called missionaries in the MTC. These scriptures discuss principles that can also apply to any calling. How do you approach a difficult calling in the Church?

First and foremost, the sons of Mosiah spent a lot of time reading the scriptures. “[T]hey had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.” This helped them become “men of a sound understanding” as they “waxed strong in the knowledge of truth.” Apparently, these missionaries had some sort of scriptural record with them. We are not told the material on which those writings were written—perhaps it was something written on fig bark, a commonly used material. Metal was probably not used because such records would be very heavy to carry from place to place, and metal would also have been a liability if somebody wanted to rob them of something valuable.

When Ammon taught King Lamoni, he “rehearsed and laid before [the king] 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” (Alma 18:36). Ammon understood and used the scriptures to good effect as he taught. When it mentions that Ammon “rehearsed” the records, it could have meant either he was reciting from memory or reading from a scriptural text. To better understand how teaching was done by Ammon, it is important to note that reading in the ancient world was rarely done silently. Today when we read a book, we are quiet. However, even in the Middle Ages, monks would read out loud, even when reading by themselves, so that the words could be not just seen but heard. So, in a typical ancient setting, to “rehearse” a text meant to read it out loud.

We can follow the example of the sons of Mosiah when we get a new calling. We can ask ourselves, “What will the scriptures tell me about this new calling? What do the scriptures tell me about how to approach and work with people over which I have stewardship and accountability?” When we reread scriptural passages that we have read on other occasions, we often find that with a new set of problems the scriptures open themselves in ways that they had not before.

Next, after “much prayer and fasting,” the four missionary brothers and Alma received the “spirit of prophecy” and the “spirit of revelation.” One might wonder, is there a difference between the “spirit of prophecy” and the “spirit of revelation”? Why, when there was so little space on the plates, would both of these phrases be used?

The “spirit of prophecy” is a gift of the spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians. For the ancients, it meant prophesying beforehand about the future. During this time period of the Book of Mormon, the most important future thing that the righteous people were looking forward to was the coming of Christ. Perhaps, as these four missionaries read the scriptures, they were filled with the spirit of the prophets who had spoken about the coming of Christ. They certainly made the coming of Christ a major part of their missionary message—both Ammon and Aaron focused much of their preaching on this topic. We too can seek the

spirit to make the future second coming of Christ and events leading up to that inevitable arrival more vividly present in our hearts and minds.

The “spirit of revelation” then refers to moments when the veil is taken from our minds and we understand things a little better. When something is revealed, answers to a difficult problem are uncovered or some new insight or understanding is discovered and becomes clear. By reading the scriptures and by asking for the “spirit of revelation” in addition to the “spirit of prophecy,” we desire to think like a prophet—we want to have the mysteries of God open to our understanding by His influence, and not by our own rationalizations or limited perspectives.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Book of Mormon Prophets Quote Long Passages of Scripture? \(1 Nephi 19:22\),” *KnoWhy* 473 \(October 4, 2018\).](#)

Alma 17:3–4 — The Sons of Mosiah Serve with the Power and Authority of God

The sons of Mosiah had the ability to speak with power and authority of God (17:3). Why is special attention drawn to this point? Evidently, these missionaries had been called, they had been set apart, and received power not only by fasting and prayer, but they also had been given the appropriate authority.

How does this apply to us when we receive a church calling? We too need to have the authority to act. How do we get that authority? We receive the authority of God by the laying on of hands. We should not serve in a calling without being set apart for that particular calling. Undoubtedly, every bishop would be happy if members who were recently sustained to new callings in sacrament meeting would come and ask for that setting apart and blessing. It is hard for bishops to keep track of this sort of thing. There is no tracking system on your membership record to indicate that you have or have not been set apart for each calling you receive. The bishop may assume that one of his counselors has set you apart for your calling, and the counselors may assume that the bishop has done it. We should be sure that we are set apart for any calling, and thereby receive the appropriate authority and blessing. We should also listen carefully to the contents of the blessing, and remember and strive to live worthy of its promises.

These four missionaries had the right to serve as God’s missionaries. It is not something that a person simply takes upon himself or herself. We may assume this happened by some laying on of hands (as was typically done anciently in consecrating a priest or making a sacrifice; see particularly, Moroni 2:2). Then, by their righteous living they were able to speak with authority. An important principle about the Melchizedek priesthood is that it has the power to cause people to repent (see Alma 13:18). Righteous use of authority

is the key for opening up the hearts of people so that they will repent. There are other dimensions to the priesthood, of course; but every purpose—everything we do in the priesthood, when you think about it—is to bring people to repent. We have no need to wonder why the Book of Mormon instructs readers so thoroughly about the preparations of the sons of Mosiah as they undertook their calling as missionaries. Through the power and the authority that these missionaries had, they were, most notably, able to bring about repentance in the lives of many people—Lamoni, Lamoni’s father, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, and many individuals within these lands and kingdoms.

Alma 17:6 — Mormon Abridges and Inserts Flashback Narratives

As you may remember, there were several flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah after King Benjamin’s speech (see [chart 29](#) in *Charting the Book of Mormon*). Once again, here in Alma 17–26, Mormon abridges and compiles various underlying records with the result that more flashbacks are found here as well. Not only do these flashbacks remind us of the complex challenge anyone would face in trying to compose such a record, keeping track of these concurrent lines of narrative also helps us follow what happened to Alma the younger and the sons of Mosiah as these remarkable men were simultaneously involved in important works taking place in various far-off locations.

- Starting on the left-hand column of this chart (Alma 1–16), at the first year of the reign of judges, or 91 BC, that column tracks what happened in Zarahemla through the eleventh year of the reign of the judges and what Alma the younger was doing. It covers the execution of Nehor, the Amlicite civil war, the conversion of Amulek, the conversion of Zeezrom, and, in the eleventh year of the reign of judges, the attack on Ammonihah.
- In the next column (covering Alma 17–20), the narrative backtracks to 91 BC and picks up what happened to the four sons of Mosiah during those same years—specifically, events about Ammon, Lamoni, and the land of Ishmael.
- Then we have yet another flashback in chapters 21–27 of Alma (the third column), in which the reader learns what happened to Aaron. After Ammon converted Lamoni, he went to the land of Ishmael to teach the people there. Meanwhile, Aaron went on to the main city of the Lamanites where the father of Lamoni was king. Lamoni’s father lived in the old city of Nephi that was evacuated a few years earlier when Limhi left. We never learn the name of Lamoni’s father, but we know that he took over and ruled in the old city where King Noah used to rule. After all, it was probably a nice place—King Noah and others before him had done a lot of building there. We follow on through with subsequent events in the third column, and eventually we again run across Ammonihah being attacked. This is when the Anti-

Nephi-Lehies moved with Ammon north to Zarahemla and were given a land called Jershon for their inheritance. These people are often referred to as the Ammonites.

Flashbacks in the Book of Alma

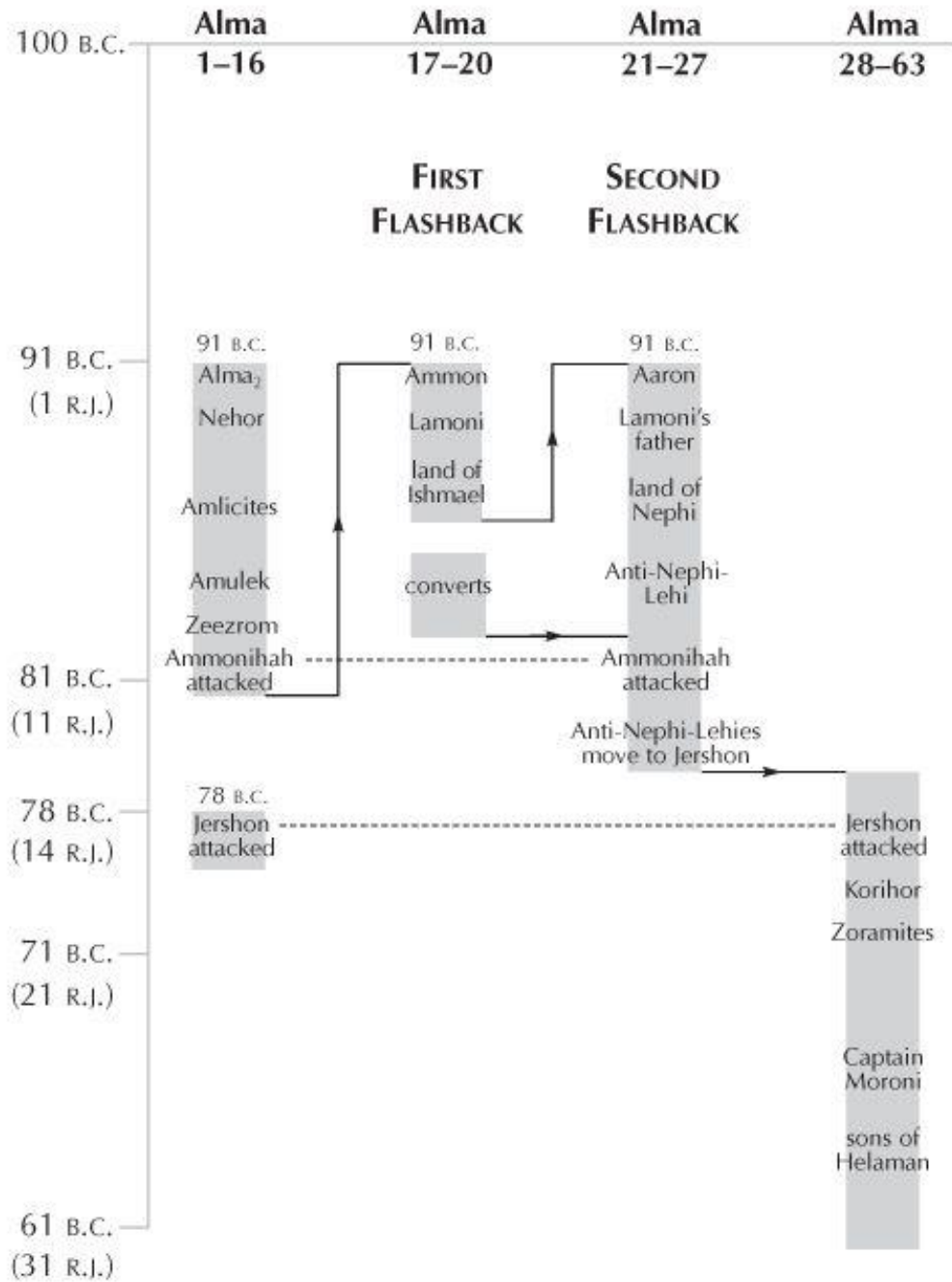


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Flashbacks in the Book of Alma," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 30.

- The final or fourth column (Alma 27–63) begins with the fourteenth year of the reign of judges and corresponds with the Ammonites being attacked as the Lamanites tried to get the converted people back. It then covers the rest of Nephite history through Alma 63, including Alma’s confrontation with Korihor, his mission to the Zoramites, his instruction to his sons, and the war chapters.

Keeping all these comings and goings straight is hard enough for readers. Imagine what it was like for Joseph Smith. It is strong evidence that Joseph Smith was translating an actual record. If he were just making it up off the top of his head, it would likely have been impossible for him to keep track of each of these people, their names, styles, concerns, and characters, as well as the smooth interconnections between these interlocking narratives, both in time and place. For, in addition to the dovetailing chronological details, the corresponding geography is also consistent throughout the Book of Mormon record. The complexity of these combined chapters, as well as the coherent accuracy of each individual account, are wonderful testimonies of Joseph Smith’s role as prophet in translating this ancient record.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Mormon Include Flashbacks in His Narrative? \(Alma 21:13\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 129 (June 24, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Mormon Give so Many Details About Geography? \(Alma 22:32\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 130 (June 27, 2016).

Alma 17:10–12 — The Lord’s Blessing on the Sons of Mosiah

The sons of Mosiah recorded the blessing that the Lord gave them at the beginning of their fourteen-year mission. It is found in Alma 17:10–12. They received a very special blessing. “It came to pass that the Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: ‘Be comforted.’” It was a very short blessing, but there are many times when that is just what people needed, and what we also need to hear when we are given a calling or a difficult assignment. A message of comfort from the Lord lets you know that he is mindful of you.

The very next sentence states that the sons of Mosiah indeed “were comforted.” If we do not accept messages of comfort with faith, and instead continue with fretting and worrying, the blessing may not take root, and it won’t have its full effect in your life. These four missionaries were comforted through all their difficulties. Their experience may remind us all of the second Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed will be those who mourn (*hoi penthountes*): for they shall be comforted (*paraklethesontai*).” The concept of “mourning” here certainly includes a penitent sorrow for sin and a mourning for sinners, hoping for their repentance and returning unto God. The concept of “being

comforted” in the biblical vocabulary includes meanings such as being encouraged, assured, accepted, as well as consoled. The biblical word for the Comforter is *parakletos*, the companion that helps, mediates, advocates, and advises. In Psalms 94:19, a traditional Israelite psalm, the faithful thank the Lord, for “thy consolations cheer [love or comfort] my soul.” All of these divine blessings were received and enjoyed by the sons of Mosiah as they went forth with a fullness of heart and devotion.

The missionaries were then instructed, “Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word.” Note that they were to “establish” the word. Missionary work among the Lamanites was going to be started for the first time by their efforts. They were opening up new territory for missionary work—opening a field of work where the gospel had not been taught for about 450 years. They were told to “be patient in long-suffering and afflictions.” Their blessing did not promise a mission of ease, they were promised patience and long-suffering in their afflictions. In the midst of their trials during the mission, they had the assurance from the Lord that things were unfolding according to God’s plan.

As faithful missionaries, their true desire—as ours should be as well—was to be “instruments in the hands of the Lord” (17:9), by which or through which the Lord’s will could be done. Often the objective in our callings is primarily to be transparent so that the light of Christ—the glory of God—will shine *through* us and not just *on* us. We receive this instruction in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ told his disciples to “let your light so shine before men” (Matt. 5:16). The word “so” is instructive and is key here. The directive is not simply to “let your light shine.” In the Greek, the meaning is very clear in this phrase— “Let your light shine *in such a way* that, when people see your good works, their reaction will be to glorify your Father which is in Heaven.” That is an interesting and significant way of telling us how one should be “an instrument in the hands of the Lord.”

Alma 17:20–21 — Ammon Is Captured and Brought before the King

The lengthy account of the labors of these four missionaries begins by following Ammon. Perhaps this was because he was the oldest of the brothers, but also because the compiler of these accounts knew ahead of time that Ammon’s phenomenal successes with King Lamoni and his wife would set the stage for the liberation of Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah from prison in Middoni, so the storyline had to first follow Ammon, who went alone, into the land of Ishmael.

Soon after arriving in Lamanite territory, Ammon was captured. At this time in Book of Mormon history, the Ishmaelites had merged with the Lamanites. There were no passports nor identification cards in this ancient world. It could be tense when an unknown person arrived in any area—especially someone from enemy territory. They did not know if the person came with dangerous designs, intents or purposes. The people of

the community likely hoped Ammon traveled alone—that he had just wandered into their territory. They had no idea what to expect from him. If Ammon had arrived with a group of people, that would have signaled more of a threat. For example, in Mosiah chapter 7, when a different man named Ammon and his explorers bumped into the watchmen of King Limhi, they were almost executed on the spot as trespassers or intruders. In this case, since Ammon had wisely traveled alone, he was simply taken to the king, and it was up to the king to determine Ammon’s fate.

Alma 17:22–23 — Ammon Offers to Be a Servant

Ammon made a long-term commitment to stay in the land with the Ishmaelites and to serve their king. Overall, he would not return home for fourteen years. Today, when missionaries go into a city, they know that they are not going to be there for very long. However, it is important that they connect with the people in their mission area and serve them in love, as if they would be there forever. It is also good for missionaries later to remember the people among whom they served and to continue to have contact with them and with their missionary companions, even after their mission. In modern times, we do not have the same kind of stability in our lives that people did in the ancient world. We move around a lot for school and career. But, building and maintaining long-term commitments to other people as friends is always beneficial—even if the only time you stay in touch is when you write your annual Christmas cards.

Ammon had a sincere interest in those he met on his mission and that built a strong relationship with the Lamanite people—evidenced by the fact that later, in order to save the lives of many of his converts, they followed him to the land of Jershon and became a new people with a new identity as the people of Ammon or Anti-Nephi-Lehies.

Alma 17:24–26 Ammon Makes a Positive First Impression on the King

Ammon was certainly effective during his initial face-to-face with king Lamoni. Having grown up in the home of King Mosiah, Ammon knew his way around amidst the political protocols of his world. The record states that “king Lamoni was much pleased with Ammon, and caused that his bands should be loosed.” Not only that, Lamoni “would that Ammon should take one of his daughters to wife.” Ammon clearly made a positive first impression on the king.

I had the occasion to listen to Elder Kim Clark not long ago at one of my own mission reunions. Elder Clark was Dean of the Harvard Business School, and later, President of BYU Idaho. He often taught students about first impressions. His theory was that when you first meet a person, you have about ten seconds to show interest in them. When you sit down on a bus next to someone, or in a class next to someone, or in a job interview, you should immediately connect—introduce yourself or ask their name. If you do not

show some interest in the first ten seconds, you may never be able to be effective in introducing yourself to that person. Even if you pick up the conversation a little later, they may not trust that you really care about them if you did not immediately reach out and try to show an interest in them in the first place. First impressions are important, but you have to follow through with the relationship afterwards. Following up is the second step in the process of building trust in a relationship.

Ammon followed up in building trust with the king and the Ishmaelites in many ways. He was only in the service of the king for three days when Ammon's loyalty to the king was demonstrated by his courageous act of protecting the king's flocks.

Ammon's father, king Mosiah, was promised that his sons would be kept safe. I am sure that gave him some confidence, but young men often push the envelope when it comes to safety. I have taken enough boy scouts out into the wilderness and have promised them that *if* they are smart, they will come back safely. Was Ammon pushing the envelope a little bit here? Regardless, many of Ammon's wonderful virtues came out in this episode.

Alma 17:36–38 — Alma Returns with the Severed Arms of the Marauders

King Lamoni had a problem. A particular watering place was used by him and others in tending their flocks. The king used servants to protect his animals, but they failed to carry out that duty. Biblical law protected such servants or hirelings if the animals are driven away "no man seeing it," or if it is "torn in pieces" by wild animals (Exodus 22:10, 13), in which cases they had no liability; but "if it be stolen from him [in his presence], he shall make restitution" (Exodus 22:12), which was the case in King Lamoni's case. His servants had not protected the flock from those who came to scatter them. Indeed, the problem was serious enough that Lamoni had killed some of his servants, whose flock had been scattered (Alma 19:20).

But Ammon rose to the challenge. When the marauders attacked again, Ammon killed six of them with his sling, and a seventh, their leader, he killed with his sword (perhaps a wooden blade studded with extremely sharp obsidian chip blades, called a "macuahuitl" in the Nahuatl language; Alma 17:38). The severed arms of all seven (Alma 19:16) were then presented to King Lamoni, who immediately wanted to reward him, by offering him one of his daughters in marriage (17:24).

All of this makes one wonder, Was it customary among Ishmaelites to return to their commander with the bloody body parts of defeated enemies? It is interesting to note that in the ancient world, especially in the ancient Near East, soldiers would often return from the battlefield with a designated body part of those they had killed. Such soldiers were not necessarily mercenaries, but they all expected to be properly rewarded for their skill

and valor in battle. The soldier would often receive piece-meal compensation for each enemy he killed. The designated body part brought from battle was often the right hand. This is because every person has only one right hand. Soldiers were not compensated for left hands because that could result double payment. This gruesome wartime practice is depicted in several Assyrian archeological murals showing soldiers bringing the arms or the legs (or whatever agreed-upon body part) in order to be paid for their service. The practice is also documented in Egyptian archaeology, as in the forecourt of a Hyksos palace where two deposits of seven right hands were found. Because the practice shows up in Mesoamerica as well, it is clearly possible that this same practice was traditional among the Ishmaelites and Lamanites.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did the Servant Present Lamoni with the Arms of His Enemies?](#) (Alma 17:39),” *KnoWhy* 125 (June 20, 2016).

Bruce H. Yerman, “[Ammon and the Mesoamerican Custom of Smiting Off Arms,](#)” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 44–47, 78–79.

John M. Lundquist and John W. Welch, “[Ammon and Cutting Off the Arms of Enemies,](#)” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 180–181.

Manfred Bietak, Nicola Math, Vera Müller, and Claus Jurman, “Report on the Excavations of a Hyksos Palace at Tell El-Dabca/Avaris,” *Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant* 22, no. 23 (2012): 17–53.

Alma 18

Alma 18:1–3 — The Servants of Lamoni Testify before Him

Ammon’s loyalty to the king became evident when the other servants reported that they did not know whether Ammon was the Great Spirit or simply a man, but they did know that when they were all scared to death, Ammon put his own life on the line. By his actions, the servants could testify that Ammon was a friend to the king. Ammon had proved his loyalty.

Alma 18:8–10 — Ammon Serves Lamoni Faithfully

After his heroics, Ammon did not sing his own praises before the king, but instead chose to return to the stables with the other servants. He was willing to do the dirty work, even anonymously. Likely, the other servants had no idea who Ammon was. It is probable that

Ammon had not disclosed to the servants that he was the son of a king. They probably did not even know much about his Nephite background.

Alma 18:14–16, 21–23 — Ammon Desires Lamoni to Listen to His Words

We have detected many virtues in Ammon, including unselfishness. He thought of these people as his brothers and wanted to serve behind the scene without praise or accolades. Ammon's courage, his physical strength, and faithful humility left the king speechless. Also, the Holy Ghost touches hearts and accompanies missionary work. Ammon was filled with the Spirit of God as he stood before Lamoni, and the king sensed this. Lamoni then made the following offer: "Whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee." What did Ammon ask for—riches, power, status? No. Ammon simply requested that the king listen to what he had to say. Ammon wanted to teach Lamoni about Christ and God's plan of redemption and mercy. Ammon was selfless; he was not in this for self-aggrandizement.

Alma 18:24–39 — Ammon Teaches Lamoni and His Servants

The first question Ammon asked king Lamoni was the same question that Aaron later asked Lamoni's father (Alma 22:7): "Do you believe there is a God?" That is the first Article of Faith— "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." If an investigator does not believe in God—if you are dealing with an atheist, secularist, or whatever—it is very difficult to construct any kind of ethical theory or accountability for what we do. So, both Ammon and Aaron began their missionary discussion with that crucial question. They must have understood, or even agreed, that this was a good way to begin teaching the gospel: "Do you believe in God?"

I wonder if somebody read the missionary accounts of Ammon and Aaron when writing the Church missionary manual, *Preach My Gospel*. I imagine they did.

Teaching the gospel follows a logical flow of divine principles. First, "Is there a God?" "Yes." Next, "Do you believe that he created all things?" "Yes." Then, by having created all things, he understands all things. That is an important principle of faith. If you look at the world and suppose that all things are random, it is difficult to believe in God and accountability to him. But if God is the designer—the creator—he knows the world that he has created. That is the next step in having faith in God. God, the creator, knows what he is doing and has a plan. All these principles of faith followed logically as Ammon and Aaron presented their missionary discussion to two different kings. Ammon and Aaron then talked of the creation of the world and the creation of Adam. They both talked about man being created in the image of God. They both talked about the fall of Adam and Eve, the plan of redemption which was laid from the foundation of the world, the coming of Christ, believing in his name, and so on.

Further Reading

For a parallelistic schematic of Ammon’s words to Lamoni, see “[Ammon’s Rehearsal](#),” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997–1998): 205:

Alma 19

Alma 19:6 — Lamoni Falls as If He Were Dead

Throughout scripture, there are occasions where a person has a spiritual experience which drains his strength, causing him to fall to the ground from exhaustion. The Book of Mormon has several of these accounts, and the case of Lamoni and his wife is one of them. After Lamoni laid still on his bed for two days and two nights, the queen asked to speak with Ammon, whom she believed might be “a prophet of a holy God,” as reported to her by her servants. Ammon explained to the queen that “the light of everlasting life was lit up in [the king’s] soul” and that this experience “had overcome his natural frame, and he was carried away in God,” but that he would rise on the next day (the third day). She believed and Ammon blessed her for her exceeding faith and faithfulness. Not only Lamoni, but also his queen and his household would be similarly affected.

The Book of Mormon records that after Lehi had a profound vision, he was “overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen” (Nephi 1:6–7). Nephi and Alma the younger also had similar experiences (1 Nephi 19:20; Mosiah 27:19). Old and New Testament prophets like Moses, Daniel, and Paul the Apostle did so as well (Moses 1:9–10; Daniel 8:27; Acts 9:4–19). Several modern-day accounts of extreme fatigue following spiritual manifestations are also recorded—especially those involving Joseph Smith. He describes what happened immediately after the First Vision: “When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home.” The vision had sapped Joseph’s strength so much that he actually needed to recover before he could make the short walk home.

Therefore, we see that Lamoni’s spiritual experience was not unique. The similarities between the accounts of those in ancient times and this dispensation suggest that depletion of physical strength related to spiritual experiences is a common element of such events. We should not be surprised to find that significant spiritual experiences may require the same of us.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Are People Exhausted After Powerful Spiritual Experiences?](#) (Alma 19:6),” *KnoWhy* 460 (August 21, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does the Lord Speak to Men According to Their Language? (2 Nephi 31:3)," *KnoWhy* 258 (January 6, 2017).

Mark Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium* (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2011), 243–257.

Alma 19:11–13 — Lamoni Sees His Redeemer

Why do you think King Lamoni was blessed with a vision of the premortal Christ? Partly because of his faith and because of the righteous and devoted relationship between this king and his wife. The first thing Lamoni does after he arises was to reach out to his wife and say, "Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou" (19:12).

In addition, this is an extraordinary event. How many missionary converts have an experience like this after the first discussion? Not very many. Visions like this come at certain times in history at important moments. For the same reason, why did Lehi see what he saw? The Lord needed to call Lehi to do something very unusual and to start a whole migration—so that a whole nation could be faithful. Likewise here, the Lord was trying to raise up a righteous people. Don't you think that the Lord must have known that there was a great opportunity here with king Lamoni? From Lamoni's conversion came the people of Ammon along with other converts in the lands of Ishmael and Nephi. The results of the work done by the four sons of Mosiah for fourteen years also prepared the way to a host of converts, including Samuel the Lamanite, who were brought to a testimony of the truth of the Gospel by the missionary work of Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman (in Helaman 5) about 55 years later.

Alma 19:16–17 — Abish Brings Others to Witness God's Power

Abish is one of only six women mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. Abish played a pivotal role in the account of King Lamoni's conversion. Having been previously but privately converted, it was Abish who "ran forth from house to house, making it known unto the people" of Lamoni's miraculous experience (19:17).

Often, when we think of missionary work in the Book of Mormon, we think of full-time missionaries like Alma, Ammon, or Aaron. However, one of the most important missionaries in the Book of Mormon was a "member missionary" who took advantage of a prime opportunity to share the gospel with her neighbors—Abish. She was a servant in the king's household who had been previously "converted to the Lord." 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.”

We are familiar with the principle, “Every member a missionary.” Abish provides an excellent example of how we can all be member missionaries today. She had kept her testimony alive and therefore readily recognized that it was the power of God that accounted for what was happening to Lamoni and the rest of the royal court. She quickly became anxiously engaged in inviting others to see and share in the experience. When others misunderstood what was happening in the royal household, she facilitated bringing them to the truth. She was in the right place at the right time, and took advantage of an opportunity to bring others to God.

Further Reading

Michael J. Call, “[Reading Competency in the Book of Mormon: Abish and Other Model Readers](#),” *BYU Studies*, 56, no. 2 (2017): 59–70.

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Can We Learn from Abish’s Member-missionary Work?](#) (Alma 19:17),” *KnoWhy* 374 (October 19, 2017).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Was Abish Mentioned by Name?](#) (Alma 19:16),” *KnoWhy* 127 (June 22, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Abish Story Signal About the Resurrection?](#) (Alma 19:29),” *KnoWhy* 449 (July 12, 2018).

Alma 19:18–36 — Lamoni and the Queen Arise and Some Are Converted

As a result, all kinds of people began assembling at the palace, including the family members of the seven men whom Ammon had killed at the Waters of Sebus. They were there, no doubt, seeing this as a time for revenge against Ammon. The brother of the leader (whom Ammon had killed with the sword) was about to extract vengeance by killing Ammon (19:22). This would have been the normal instinct, if not the duty, of a near kinsman as a “redeemer of blood.” Moreover, because Ammon was a Nephite, public biases would have naturally run against Ammon. While people began arguing over what kind of dreadful “monster” Ammon was (19:26), Ammon was protected and his assailant fell dead. The debate about Ammon was settled with the queen’s magnificent: “O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!” (19:29). The queen then said many other things, and she took the unconscious king by the hand, and “behold he arose and stood upon his feet” (19:30).

Some people there were converted, but many were not, as the crowd continued to be divided. Converts, however, saw angels, and were baptized, marking the establishment of the church and the commencement of the work of the Lord among the Lamanites. This memorable event vividly set the all-important Book of Mormon precedent that the arm of the Lord “is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name” (19:36).

Alma 20

Alma 20:1–8 — Ammon Receives Revelation to Free Aaron

Fairly soon afterwards, King Lamoni wanted to take Ammon to meet Lamoni’s father, the king of all the land of Nephi. But Ammon received a revelation telling him that his brother Aaron and two other missionaries were imprisoned and that he needed to go and free them. Ammon told king Lamoni about the situation, who responded with faith, “I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things” (20:4). Lamoni was curious as to how Ammon knew about the perilous situation of his brother, so Ammon told 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” (20:5). Lamoni decided to join Ammon on his journey to Middoni, promising to use his influence as king to persuade the king of Middoni, who was a friend of his, to release the missionaries from prison. On the way to Middoni, Ammon and Lamoni met up with Lamoni’s Father who was “king over all the land” (20:8).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Did it Mean to be ‘King Over All the Land?’ \(Alma 20:8\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 128 (June 23, 2016).

Alma 20:15–16 — Lamoni’s Father Draws His Sword to Smite His Son

Both kings, Lamoni and his unnamed father, had a lot of power, and they were used to wielding that power. Generally, they seemed to be quite deferential toward one other. However, Lamoni’s father was suspicious of Ammon as a Nephite (20:13) and was angry at his son for refusing his orders. He drew his sword and was about to kill his own son. In the ancient world, an ordinary father could kill his son with impunity. This right is known as *patria potestas* (the power of a father), which in most ancient civilizations gave the father the right to kill his offspring for any reason. Under such circumstances, the father could not be accused of homicide or punished by the society. After all, a father was the king in his own family. If the father also happened to be king of the land who controlled the life of all his subjects, he was twice over the king in this situation.

In our day, this event might strike us as odd. Why would king Lamoni's father threaten to kill his own son simply because he had been offended that the son had not attended a great feast thrown by the father. Because Lamoni's father was "king over all the land," the feast may have been an extremely important celebration for political and religious purposes. Lamoni's absence from an important kingly feast may have been regarded as dishonor and high disrespect, if not an act of high treason.

Alma 20:17–26 — Ammon's Selfless Requests

Once again, Ammon showed his skill with his very sharp sword as he defended Lamoni from the sword of his father. Of greater significance, Ammon's generous and subservient character was revealed to Lamoni's father. To save his own life, Lamoni's father offered Ammon anything he desired—even half of his kingdom. Ammon wasn't interested in riches. The father was astonished when all that Ammon requested was the release of his brethren from the prison in Middoni and assurance that Lamoni would retain his kingdom with free reign over his kingdom. Neither of Ammon's terms benefited himself personally. Ammon acted out of love and concern for his new convert, Lamoni. He acted unselfishly, once again. His great desire was to bring others to God through missionary work.

Alma 20:27 — Missionary Work among the Lamanites Continues

Ammon and Lamoni returned to the Land of Ishmael, while Aaron went to the city of Nephi to work with the father of King Lamoni, who now had a taste of the greatness and the generosity of Aaron's brother, Ammon. Ammon's love for Lamoni opened the door for Aaron to follow up on the "referral" to teach the father of Lamoni. The missionaries were invited to come to the city of Nephi to personally preach to Lamoni's father, the king over all the land. The king wanted to learn more because of his encounter with Ammon.

It is interesting that successful missionary work continues with this same pattern today. One missionary companionship may work with an investigator and plant a seed of interest or testimony in the gospel. Another missionary companionship may continue teaching the investigator until she or he is ready for baptism. They share and help each other. Throughout the process, members are essential in making referrals to missionaries of people they know who may be interested in hearing the gospel. There is a higher likelihood of success if an investigator is introduced to the missionaries by someone they already know. The work was divided up by the sons of Mosiah, and they traveled to different locations to preach. They may not have gone two-by-two as we usually do today.

Alma 21

The voice print for this section is quite different from the previous three chapters. The text now switches into third-party narrative accounts. It is difficult to determine whether the person writing the text is the same author in the previous chapters who is now simply using a different literary style, or whether a different author, or authors, are now writing the text.

We do not know who originally wrote these missionary stories. It could have been Ammon or maybe Aaron. Perhaps they combined and gave their homecoming report together when they returned home to Zarahemla and then filed their record. This text, however, is probably something that was written sometime later. It does not appear to be a contemporaneous record. It is retrospective, and the writer knew well how this was all going to turn out in the end as he began writing these narratives. He knew what was important to preserve in the record. There were undoubtedly many other things that happened to Ammon, Aaron, and the other missionaries that were not recorded.

In places where Ammon and Aaron were not the authors, possibly Alma the Younger fashioned the narratives in these reports. In Alma 17:2, it is recorded that Alma was thrilled to run into his four friends. He had not seen them for a very long time, and they rejoiced together. The record states that they swapped stories on what had happened since they were last together. After their reunion, Alma may have decided that their missionary experiences should be preserved. Under that scenario, Alma may have been the author of this section. Since Alma was chief judge for a period of time, it may even have been a court reporter continuing to work for Alma who recorded these missionary narratives. Because of his conflicts with Nehor and the Ammonihahites, Alma would have been particularly interested in tying in with the encounters of the sons of Mosiah with Amulon and the followers of Nehor in the land of Jerusalem. It also may be that Mormon wrote or reworked these accounts based on the records that were in his possession. Mormon would have been especially interested in the successes of these Nephites in converting Lamanite kings, which was something he himself would have yearned to do but never could accomplish.

Alma 21:1–11 — An Account of Aaron and His Brethren in Jerusalem

The next few chapters flash back to give an account of the work of Aaron and his brethren among the Lamanites at the same time Ammon was working with Lamoni. They traveled from city to city, while Ammon stayed put. Unlike Ammon, who was taken directly to teach Lamoni, Aaron and his companions fell among less noble individuals.

Around the first year of the reign of the judges in Zarahemla, they first went to a great city called Jerusalem that had been built by a coalition of the Lamanites, the Amalekites,

and also the Amulonites! The Amulonites were descendants of Noah’s priests who defected to the Lamanites about forty years previously. The record points out, “Now the Lamanites of themselves were sufficiently hardened, but the Amalekites and the Amulonites were still harder” (21:3). These people had built “synagogues after the order of the Nehors” (21:4), and Aaron dared to preach there. He was taunted there by people who knew already that Aaron “had seen an angel” (21:5), when he and his brothers had been with Alma when they were stopped by the angel of the Lord. To have learned reports of this angelic appearance, these people in the city of Jerusalem must have had contacts among the followers of Nehor in Zarahemla.

The city of Jerusalem was “joining the borders of Mormon” (21:1), which geographically links this account back to the record of Alma the Elder, who had taken refuge with his people in the land of Helam, not far from this place, about halfway between the Waters of Mormon and the city of Zarahemla. It was near this place, in Helam, where Alma’s people had been oppressed by Amulon himself (Mosiah 24:8), before they could finally escape. In Mosiah 24:1, we learn that Amulon had gained “favor in the eyes of the king of the Lamanites” and had managed to get his men appointed to teach the Nephite language throughout that king’s land (Mosiah 24:4). It is no wonder that the Amulonites were thus strong in that area, and that Aaron and his brethren suffered greatly there. They were cast out from place to place until they arrived in Middoni (Alma 21:12), where they were thrown in prison and treated very badly (Alma 21:12), which is when and where Lamoni and Ammon had come and had gotten them released from prison (Alma 20:28).

One wonders, did Aaron and these missionaries walk into the city of Jerusalem and the nearby land of Middoni unwittingly? Did they know the recent history of Alma the Elder in that area? Did they know that the descendants of Amulon were there? And if so, how did they think they were going to make headway in that area? Maybe they knew that the Lamanites there had at least been taught the Nephite language. The record does not state how or why Aaron and his brethren chose the cities where they proselyted.

Aaron and his companions went into the synagogues, which were full of unfriendly people who were “after the order of the Nehor” (21:4), and they preached to them out of the scriptures. This was a different kind of experience from Ammon’s. He had his own hardships, but at least Ammon was dealing with a very noble person. King Lamoni was a believing person. He believed in the Great Spirit. He believed the words of Ammon.

Alma 21:18–23 — Ammon Returns with King Lamoni to the Land of Ishmael

After getting Aaron and the others released from prison in Middoni, Alma returned with King Lamoni to the land of Ishmael. There they built synagogues, taught many things, and enjoyed freedom of belief, because Lamoni’s father had granted Lamoni

independence (Alma 20:26). Lamoni used that freedom to give his people the liberty of worshipping “in whatsoever place they were in” (21:22).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does the Book of Mormon Use an Ancient Storytelling Technique?”](#) *KnoWhy* 414 (March 8, 2018).

Alma 22

Alma 22:1–14 — Aaron Teaches and Converts Lamoni’s Father

Meanwhile, Aaron was led by the spirit to go to the palace of Lamoni’s father (22:1), not only to thank him for helping them to get out of prison in Middoni (22:2), but also to offer to be his servants. But he refused their offer and asked them to “administer unto [him]” (22:3). He had some questions about Ammon’s behavior and about the Spirit of the Lord.

In response, Aaron explains things to him “from the creation of Adam,” to the “fall of man,” and also “the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ . . . to be swallowed up in the hopes of glory” (22:13–14). As mentioned above, when comparing Ammon’s words to Lamoni in Alma 18:24–39 with the words of Aaron to Lamoni’s father in chapter 22:6–14, many similarities are readily apparent. Ammon’s rehearsal of the basic first principles of the Gospel also spoke of these same doctrines. And also closely aligned is the explanation given by Alma to the people in Ammonihah in Alma 12–13. We may conclude from these similarities that Alma and the four sons of Mosiah had come together in their hearts and minds, including the same basic missionary outline as they taught together “throughout all the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 27:35). Alma would have been readily inclined to see these parts of the reports of Ammon and Aaron included in the final record.

In speaking to the father of King Lamoni, Aaron began by emphasizing the primary importance of repentance (22:16). He knew that this was what Lamoni’s father needed most. We saw earlier that Lamoni’s father was a bit of a hothead. We also see, in several ways, that Lamoni’s father was not quite as spiritually inclined as Lamoni himself. The relationship between Lamoni and his wife, and the relationship between Lamoni’s father and his wife, were very different. How did king Lamoni feel about his wife? Their relationship was wonderful and very tender. We note the blessings that Lamoni gave to his wife, how much they understood each other, and how well they worked together. When we compare that with Lamoni’s mother and father, we see that they did not get along so well. She did not understand the effect of the Spirit on her husband, and thus this queen-mother was ready to kill the missionaries—she too easily flew off the handle and

did not get what was going on at all (22:19). Thus, repentance received the greater emphasis in Aaron's message, where previously Ammon had emphasized belief in his teaching to Lamoni.

Other differences are also worth noting. When Ammon spoke to Lamoni, he explained the history of the Old Testament prophets, how Lehi came across the sea, the rebellions of Laman, Lemuel, and Ishmael, and what eventually happened with the Nephites and the Lamanites. Aaron, however, apparently did not talk about these things. We might wonder why. He jumped over those points, and instead talked about God's commandments that were given to man. Maybe Aaron had less of a personal relationship with Lamoni's father. Ammon had won enough confidence of Lamoni that he could explain to Lamoni how the Nephites and Lamanites had become separated through what happened among Laman and Lemuel with Nephi. King Lamoni's father still believed that the Nephites robbed and stole their rights (20:10–13). Lamoni, on the other hand, was more open to accepting Ammon's explanation of the Nephite point of view.

Alma 22:15–18 — Lamoni's Father Desires to Repent

Aaron, talking to Lamoni's father, emphasized that because of the fall of man, man could not merit anything of himself. As you think about this, how would a king of that stature likely receive that teaching? King Benjamin was willing to admit that he was only "dust," but that was rare. King Benjamin's sentiments were not Lamoni's father's usual way of thinking about himself.

He was, however, impressed enough by Aaron's teaching that he asked, "What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken?" (22:15). That was the crucial question that was asked by the Pharisee who came alone to speak with Jesus and asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 18:18). Lamoni's father also asked, "What shall I do to be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast?" (22:15). People in the ancient world were very concerned about having wicked spirits in them and wanted to expurgate them. Lamoni's father wanted to see that wicked spirits were removed from having any influence over him. He also recognized his failings, and he wanted to get rid of those shortcomings. Aaron took the opportunity to tell Lamoni's father that he must repent, bow down before God, and call upon His name. And in response, this was the wonderful prayer that the king offered: "O God; if there is a God, . . . I will give away all my sins to know thee" (22:18)

When we urgently need an answer to a prayer, should we not be thinking of this same thing? We no longer make sacrifices of blood and sacrificial animals or grain offerings, but there are things we can sacrifice—things such as sins that we are willing to give up to know the Lord and his will. It is pleasing to the Lord when we say, "I would like to know,

O Lord, what the answer to this problem is, and this is what I will give up that I might know." Have you ever asked in that way, and how has it worked?

Remember in Alma 20:23, when Ammon was in a position to kill Lamoni's father, what did that king say? He pled, "If thou wilt spare me, I will grant unto thee . . . even to *half* of [my] kingdom." That was quite an offer, wasn't it? But now, after hearing Aaron's words, the king has made even greater progress. At first, he was only willing to give up half his kingdom. Now he is willing to "give up *all* that [he] possess[ed]" (22:15). He was even willing to "forsake [his] kingdom]" (22:5) and, more important, he was willing to give up "*all* [his] sins" (22:18).

With that, he was "struck as if he were dead" (22:18), and the queen orders the people to kill Aaron (22:21). But Aaron extended his hand and "raised the king from the earth" (22:22), and everyone in his whole household was converted unto the Lord (22:23). The king pacified his people "towards Aaron" (22:25), and then he sent a proclamation granting protection and freedom of religious expression to the four sons of Mosiah "throughout all the land" (22:27). Words from that proclamation are found in Alma 23:1–3. They will be discussed in the next installment of these Notes, together with the geopolitical description of the lands that were affected by that proclamation, as was inserted by Mormon in Alma 22:27–34.