

# ALMA 36–38

John W. Welch Notes



Before reading and discussing Alma 36–38, it is a good idea to remember and consider, to the extent possible, what can be known about the setting in which Alma delivered these three very distinct messages to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton, in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of judges.

## **Alma 36–42 — Alma and His Sons**

Alma was a diligent and devoted father. He had worked and traveled with these sons. He trusted them among his missionary companions when he went to Antionum in an effort to correct the situation with the Zoramites there. Alma knew the needs and characters of each of these individual sons. While his words to them do not sound to our ears like patriarchal blessings, in an important way these chapters preserve the father’s blessings given by Alma to his boys. Alma the Elder was a good father to Alma the Younger, and he in turn was a faithful father to these three sons. His blessings and instructions in chapters 36–38 will soon turn out to be a major part of his legacy to them, as Alma will depart later that same year from their midst and this life (Alma 45:18).

When he left, Alma had equipped his sons well. Corianton will repent of his youthful misbehavior and will “go forth among the people” with his brothers “to declare the word” (Alma 43:1). Helaman will become the high priest and head of the Church, as well as the leader of the Ammonite stripling warriors. When Helaman dies only 17 years after his father’s blessings, Shiblon will become the faithful keeper of the sacred records (Figure 1), likely because Helaman’s son Helaman was too young to assume that full responsibility. But soon Shiblon will pass the records on to Helaman, the son of Helaman, when Shiblon dies only four years after his brother Helaman had died (Alma 63:1, 10). Both of them died relatively young, perhaps due to disease or hardships

# Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon?

## Lineage of Lehi



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Nephi <sub>1</sub>	615 B.C.	Born in Jerusalem	1 Nephi 1:4
	600 B.C.	Begins record when about 15 years old	1 Nephi 1:1
	540 B.C.	Dies about 75 years old	
Jacob	592 B.C.	Born son of Lehi, brother of Nephi <sub>1</sub>	1 Nephi 18:7
	544 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jacob 1:1
	495 B.C.	Dies about 97 years old	Jacob 7:27
Enos	515 B.C.	Born son of Jacob	Jacob 7:27
	420 B.C.	About to Die	Enos 1:25
	417 B.C.	Dies about 98 years old	
Jarom	440 B.C.	Born son of Enos	Jarom 1:1
	420 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jarom 1:1
	361 B.C.	Gives plates to Omni	Jarom 1:15
	355 B.C.	Dies about 85 years old	
Omni	390 B.C.	Born son of Jarom	Omni 1:1
	361 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Jarom 1:15
	317 B.C.	Writes 3 verses on plates in 44 years	Omni 1:1-3
Amaron	315 B.C.	Dies about 75 years old	Omni 1:3
	350 B.C.	Born son of Omni	Omni 1:4
	317 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:4
Chemish	277 B.C.	Dies about 73 years old	Omni 1:8
	330 B.C.	Born son of Omni, brother of Amaron	Omni 1:9
	279 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:9
Abinadom	250 B.C.	Dies about 80 years old	Omni 1:9
	270 B.C.	Born son of Chemish	Omni 1:10
Amaleki	180 B.C.	Dies about 90 years old	Omni 1:10
	210 B.C.	Born son of Abinadom	Omni 1:12
	150 B.C.	Nephites move to Zarahemla	Omni 1:13
	138 B.C.	Dies about 72 years old	Omni 1:30

## Benjamin and Mosiah



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Benjamin	190 B.C.	Born son of Mosiah <sub>1</sub>	Omni 1:23
	140 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Omni 1:25
	121 B.C.	Dies 69 years old	Mosiah 6:5
Mosiah <sub>2</sub>	154 B.C.	Born son of Benjamin	Mosiah 6:4
	91 B.C.	Dies about 63 years old	Mosiah 29:46

## Lineage of Alma<sub>1</sub>



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Alma <sub>1</sub>	174 B.C.	Born a descendant of Nephi <sub>1</sub>	Mosiah 17:2
	149 B.C.	“Young Man” 25 years old; Abinadi martyred	Mosiah 17:2, 20
	120 B.C.	Becomes high priest in Zarahemla	Mosiah 23:16
	91 B.C.	Dies about 83 years old	Mosiah 29:47
Alma <sub>2</sub>	126 B.C.	Born son of Alma <sub>1</sub>	Mosiah 27:8
	91 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Mosiah 29:42
	73 B.C.	Departs out of the land; possibly translated	Alma 45:18, 19
Helaman <sub>2</sub>	97 B.C.	Born son of Alma <sub>2</sub>	Alma 36:3
	73 B.C.	Becomes high priest	Alma 45:20
	64 B.C.	Leads 2,000 Ammotie warriors; 33 years old	Alma 53:22
	57 B.C.	Dies about 40 years old	Alma 62:52
Shiblon	95 B.C.	Born son of Alma <sub>2</sub> , brother of Helaman <sub>2</sub>	Alma 63:1
	57 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Alma 63:1
	53 B.C.	Dies about 42 years old	Alma 63:13
Helaman <sub>3</sub>	76 B.C.	Born son of Helaman <sub>2</sub>	Helaman 2:2
	53 B.C.	Becomes record keeper	Helaman 2:2
	39 B.C.	Dies about 37 years old	Helaman 3:37
Nephi <sub>2</sub>	54 B.C.	Born son of Helaman <sub>3</sub>	Helaman 3:37
	A.D. 1	Departs out of the land	3 Nephi 1:3
Nephi <sub>3</sub>	A.D. 13	Dies about 67 years old	
	30 B.C.	Born son of Nephi <sub>2</sub>	3 Nephi 1:1
	A.D. 1	Becomes record keeper	3 Nephi 1:1
	A.D. 34	One of 12 disciples	3 Nephi 12:1
	A.D. 60	Dies about 90 years old	
Nephi <sub>4</sub>	A.D. 100	All but 3 disciples have passed away	4 Nephi 1:14
	A.D. 50	Born son of Nephi <sub>3</sub>	
Amos <sub>1</sub>	A.D. 90	Born son of Nephi <sub>4</sub>	
	A.D. 110	Becomes record keeper for 84 years	4 Nephi 1:19
	A.D. 194	Dies about 104 years old	4 Nephi 1:21

Amos <sub>2</sub>	A.D. 174	Born son of Amos <sub>1</sub>	
	A.D. 194	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:21
	A.D. 305	Dies about 131 years old	4 Nephi 1:47
Ammaron	A.D. 190	Born son of Amos, brother of Amos <sub>2</sub>	
	A.D. 305	Becomes record keeper	4 Nephi 1:48
	A.D. 320	Dies about 130 years old	Mormon 1:5

## Mormon and Moroni



Record Keeper	Dates*	Comments	Reference
Mormon <sub>2</sub>	A.D. 311	Born	Mormon 1:2
	A.D. 321	Told by Ammaron that at age 24 he would become the record keeper	Mormon 1:2
	A.D. 326	Visited by the Lord; leads Nephite armies	Mormon 1:15
	A.D. 335	Becomes record keeper	Mormon 2:18
	A.D. 385	Delivered plates to Moroni; buried other plates in the hill Cumorah	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 401	Killed about 90 years old by the Lamanites	Mormon 8:3
Moroni <sub>2</sub>	A.D. 360	Born son of Mormon <sub>2</sub>	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 385	Becomes record keeper	Mormon 8:1
	A.D. 421	"soon go to rest," about 61 years old	Moroni 10:34

© Copyright Book of Mormon Central

\*dates are approximate

Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Who Kept the Records in the Book of Mormon? (By Lineages)," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 17.

Inflicted on their bodies during the miseries of the seven years of war in the twenty war-chapters here in the last part of the Book of Alma.

In spite of these challenges, they passed the mantle of recordkeeping and spiritual leadership on down through the lineage of Alma, clear down to the end of Nephite history when the records were finally entrusted to the youthful leader Mormon. No doubt the words of Alma, found in the seven chapters Alma 36–42, were deeply inspiring to all of Alma's posterity.

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, "'The Age of Man' and Longevity in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Collegium Aescalapium* (1985): 35–45.

### **Alma 36–42 — Alma’s Counsel and Commandments to His Sons**

When Mormon introduces chapters 36 through 42, he states, “And we have an account of his [Alma’s] *commandments*, which he gave unto them [his sons] according to his own record” (35:16; emphasis added). Notice that Alma’s words to his sons in these chapters are described as *commandments*. We often refer to them as Alma’s blessings to his sons, and there are indeed words of blessings in them, but these are not what we would consider to be Patriarchal Blessings. They do not read like that.

Alma begins his speech to Helaman by saying, “Hear my words and learn of me” (Alma 36:3). The very first thing that Alma taught both Helaman and Shiblon was: “[I]nasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 36:1). Alma also added the inverse at the end for Helaman: “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” (Alma 36:30). For Shiblon, Alma began with both promises of the covenant at the beginning—clearly his main teaching point to Shiblon: “[I]nasmuch 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” (Alma 38:1). With Corianton, Alma began his speech by sorrowing that his son had not kept the commandments of God.

Judging from Alma’s words of commandment, we learn a little about the personalities, attitude, and characters of these three sons. Coupled with that, let us consider what kind of a relationship Alma may have had with each one of them. Did Alma know his sons well? I believe he did. We might ask what lesson may be in this for parents? Before we try to counsel our children, we may need to get to know them a little better than we sometimes do.

Alma’s sons probably lived in his home. He did not just send them off to public school or away to boarding school, which didn’t exist in those days. Who would have taught them in a home setting? In the Hebrew and Israelite tradition, it was the responsibility of the father to teach his sons (Deuteronomy 6:7–9). We know that King Benjamin taught his sons. He instructed them not just how to be good leaders but also many other things, including languages such as Egyptian and Hebrew. Benjamin had been their tutor and mentor, and therefore he surely had a lot of contact with them. In the modern world, parents have not always had that same level of interaction with their children. We send them off to school. We send them off to Primary, Young Men and Young Women, and that is good. But do we know them as well as we ought to?

When Alma gave these commandments to his sons, did he think that these would become part of world religious literature and that people all over the world would be

reading his private communication to his family members? I don't think so. It was likely Mormon who decided that this needed to go into the Nephite national history. These were found in Alma's records—we are privileged here to look into personal his family history.

When Alma wrote out these lessons, he apparently took great thought and care for their wording and content. He certainly worked with the Spirit, and he also worked with his literary skills. He was giving his very best in every way, even though his remarks were likely only for his three sons. That is really the audience here, isn't it? One son for each of his three messages. What does that tell you about the time, preparation, and attention that we ought to give when we sit down to write a letter to our children? Would we be better parents if we wrote the kind of wisdom literature—world-class writing—that Alma gave to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton?

### **Alma 36–42 — A Possible Passover Setting for These Chapters**

Thirty-five years ago (about 1985), I was sitting around a table with some of my colleagues. We were sharing our thoughts on the Book of Mormon, and one of them had just read an account of what happens during a Jewish Passover. The Passover is a family celebration—usually observed with extended family. After eating the Passover meal, they gather together in a type of Family Home Evening in which they sing and tell stories. Similar to how we may act out the Christmas Story at Christmas festivities, they act out the story of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, including the painting of the doorposts with blood, Pharaoh and his soldiers being smitten, and God delivering them. Family members celebrate the Passover story by taking on assigned roles. Following the Passover reenactment, the father asks three boys in the extended family one question each. This is done to keep the law, which was specified in Exodus 10:2, that commands the Jews to “tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt.” We know that this was not just a traditional custom in antiquity—it was a required part of keeping the Law of Moses.

From the plates of brass, which Alma had, he would very likely have done something similar on Passover. For example, the Passover commemorates the *destroying angel* passing over the faithful Hebrews in Egypt. In Alma's conversion account, he spoke about the angel coming and threatening to destroy him. Indeed, the word “destroy” is mentioned six times in Alma's narrative in Alma 36, seven times in Alma 37, and four times in Alma 42. In the Passover story, God prepares his people and delivers them from bondage and captivity. Alma also talked about being delivered from bondage and captivity (36:2, 29; 38:5). Being freed from slavery in Egypt was like being given a new life, like being born again and becoming his sons and daughters, belonging to him and serving him alone as Lord. In these and other ways, Alma's commandments to his sons thematically interact with the ancient Passover traditions.

Although we do not have Passover records going back as far as we would like in early Israelite history, we can trace them back to about the time of Christ and probably earlier. According to recorded Passover traditions, after gathering his family, the father instructed his sons and answered their questions. His words were not fixed but were “to fit the knowledge and understanding of the child” and were supposed “to spell out the sequence of sin, suffering, repentance, and redemption.” The father was to select three different sons and ask each boy one of three questions, based on his character and personality.

The first question was, “What is the meaning of the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?” The use of the word “testimonies” in this question meant the *ēdhōth*—the records. That question comes from Deuteronomy 6:20. According to recorded Jewish history, the wise son was assigned the role to approach the father and ask, “What is the meaning of the records, the statutes and the judgments?” The father would then address the wise son and give an answer to that question. Obviously, Helaman was the wise son in this scenario. We do not have the question that Helaman might have asked, but we do have the answer that Alma gave in chapter 37. Alma’s words to Helaman were all about the records and about the meaning of the statutes, and how they were a type and symbol of things. Alma’s words fit very nicely into a Passover setting as he, the father, instructed Helaman.

Another son was then supposed to approach the father and ask the question from Exodus 12:26: “What mean ye by this service?” This question was supposed to be asked by a son playing the role of a less righteous son. His assigned question was, “What is going on here? Why are we doing this? Why do we celebrate Passover?” According to Jewish practice, the father was supposed to tell this son—in stern terms and in a way that would set the son’s teeth on edge—that he will be punished for his own sins and that he would not have been redeemed had he been in Egypt during the first Passover with Moses. Corianton fits this role snugly (see Alma 41–42). But, in this situation, he would not have just been role-playing. Corianton really needed this advice from his father because he had been involved in unrighteous acts.

Finally, the third question comes from Exodus 13:14. It is a very short question: “What is this?” It is the understanding of the Jews that this question is intentionally ambiguous. Whether it is sarcastic or serious, we do not know. Regardless, in the Israelite tradition, this question was supposed to be asked by a son who played the role of an uninformed son—one who needed to be taught. The father was to answer by giving that son preventative instruction to keep him away from any risk of breaking the law. This happens to be a very good description of the instruction Alma gave to Shiblon in Alma 38.

Although it is uncertain if Alma’s exhortation to his sons directly coincided with the Nephite remembrance of the Passover, the method and content of his instruction was certainly reminiscent of Passover themes, including suffering in captivity and affliction, crying for deliverance, the appearance of a powerful angel, and deliverance from darkness and bitter pains. As you read Alma’s words to these three sons, and as you study more about the Passover, how many Passover connections can you find here? Perhaps Alma and his family had gathered for a Passover celebration and that is why Alma gathered his sons together on this occasion and chose to give fatherly instruction in at this traditional time.

And here is another lesson for us in these chapters. On special family occasions—like graduation or celebrating Easter—we should celebrate as a family with more than opening presents and decorating with Easter bunnies, or things like that. We should gather our family together on these serious traditional moments and take the opportunity to teach them and impress upon them the things they must do to continue in righteous living.

This perspective on a Passover setting for these chapters in Alma was first discovered and identified by Gordon Thomasson in 1984—more than thirty years ago. It was introduced in a chapter in the book *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Were Nephite Prophets Familiar with the Passover Tradition? \(Mosiah 13:30\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 429 (March 29, 2018).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Did Alma Counsel His Sons During the Passover? \(Alma 38:5\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 146 (July 19, 2016).

Gordon C. Thomasson and John W. Welch, “[The Sons of the Passover](#),” 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), 196–198.

## Alma 36

### Alma 36 — Chiastic Structure in Alma’s Words

In the 2020 *Come Follow Me* manual, p. 115, the lesson rightly points out that “Alma 36 is a great example of a form of Hebrew poetry called chiasmus, in which words or ideas are presented in a certain order, leading to a central idea, and then repeated in reverse order.” This definition is a perfect description of Alma 36. For further information, the



manual invites readers to consult the *Book of Mormon Student Manual* which has been used for many years in seminary and institute classes.

That manual presents material based on the groundbreaking articles I have published over the years about chiasmus, beginning in *BYU Studies* in 1969 and in the *New Era* in 1972, listed below. There and elsewhere I have specifically discussed chiasmus in Alma 36, both in LDS publications and also in scholarly books and reference works. Of all the passages in world literature that have ever been found to be chiasmic, Alma 36 is among the very best examples of this form of composition. It truly ranks as a masterpiece of world religious literature.

This is not the place to revisit all of these publications about Alma 36, but I would like to draw attention here to a couple particular introductory points.

First, I have often told the story about my discovery of chiasmus in King Benjamin's Speech on August 16, 1967. It's readily available on [YouTube](#). But I have not before told the story of the discovery of chiasmus in Alma 36, the details of which I just recently ran across in a stack of letters that I wrote home in 1968–1969.

I had returned home from the mission field to resume studying as a Junior at BYU in September 1968. I began reporting my findings about chiasmus to my professors and directors of the Honors Program, and soon was invited to speak in classes and firesides about this new discovery. I was also called to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher in my student ward, and that year the Sunday School curriculum covered the Book of Mormon. On Friday, March 7, 1969, I was introduced to a beautiful and charming graduate student. I would never again date anyone else. On Saturday, March 8, I went to the Manti Temple with my ward, my first time to that amazing pioneer house of holiness. Then, on Sunday, March 9, I taught a Sunday School lesson that “went real well—we drew up a character sketch of Alma Jr.,” as my letter home stated. In the process of considering what Alma cared most about, we read his accounts of his conversion, in Mosiah 27, Alma 5, and Alma 36.

It was in that context that I first found the chiasmic structure of Alma 36. Writing in pencil in the margins of the printing of the Book of Mormon I was using, I noted nine elements in the first half of Alma 36 and the same nine elements in the second half in the opposite order. At the turning point in the middle I just drew an arrow, and at the top of the page wrote “Great!” That Sunday night when I wrote my weekly letter home to my parents, I noted, just in passing, “I also just found a gorgeous pattern in Alma 36.”

That has to be one of the greatest weekends in my life. I believe I was blessed for going to the temple and for taking my church calling seriously. I was blessed by finding what I

## Chiasmus in Alma 36

My son give ear to my *words* (v. 1)  
*Keep the commandments* and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 1)  
 Do *as I* have done (v. 2)  
*Remember the captivity* of our fathers (v. 2)  
 They were in *bondage* (v. 2)  
 He surely did *deliver* them (v. 2)  
*Trust* in God (v. 3)  
 Support in *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 3)  
 Lifted up at the *last day* (v. 3)  
*I know* this not myself but *of God* (v. 4)  
*Born of God* (v. 5)  
 I sought to destroy the church (vv. 6-9)  
 My *limbs* were paralyzed (v. 10)  
 Fear of being in the *presence of God* (vv. 14-15)  
*Pains* of a damned soul (v. 16)  
*Harrowed up by the memory of sins* (v. 17)  
 I remembered *Jesus Christ, a son of God* (v. 17)  
 I cried, *Jesus Christ, son of God* (v. 18)  
*Harrowed by the memory of sins no more* (v. 19)  
 Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (v. 20)  
 Long to be in the *presence of God* (v. 22)  
 My *limbs* received strength again (v. 23)  
 I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)  
*Born of God* (v. 26)  
 Therefore *my knowledge is of God* (v. 26)  
 Supported under *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 26)  
*Trust* in him (v. 27)  
 He will *deliver* me (v. 27)  
 And *raise me up at the last day* (v. 28)  
 As God brought our fathers out of *bondage* and captivity (vv. 28-29)  
 Retain a *remembrance of their captivity* (v. 29)  
 Know *as I* do know (v. 30)  
*Keep the commandments* and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 30)  
 This according to his *word* (v. 30)

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Chiasmus in Alma 36," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 132.

think is the greatest chiasmic composition ever written. I was also blessed by finding the wonderful woman to whom I have been married now for fifty-one fabulous years. Life's blessings don't get much better than that.

Second, I want to thank and celebrate the many people who have independently refined and reformatted the layout and typesetting of the distinct chiasmic structure in Alma 36. In several of my various publications involving Alma 36, I have modified my presentation from time to time, depending on the purposes and typesetting options available in different book or journal settings. In my 1989 report on Chiasmus in Alma 36, I replicate seven different layouts that had been published, to that date, by myself and others. Here is a [standard chart](#) (Figure 2), following number 132, that is often used to highlight the basic inversion and central turning point in Alma 36:

Since then, in the last twenty years, there have been several other proposals advanced, as careful examiners continue to analyze and appreciate the skill with which Alma tells his conversion story here in Alma 36. The best and most detailed recent studies have been published by Noel Reynolds and Stephen Ehat.

#### Further Reading and References

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon](#)," *BYU Studies* 10 no. 1 (Autumn, 1969): 83; reprinted in John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon](#)," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 206; reprinted also in Lawrence J. Trudeau, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, vol. 321 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2016), 211.

John W. Welch, *A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors* (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970), 129.

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Or the Book of Mormon Does It Again](#)," *New Era*, February 1972, 9.

John W. Welch, "[Chiasmus in Alma 36](#)" (*FARMS Report*, 1989), 43 pp. plus Appendix 1, "Table of Words Appearing Only a Single Time in Alma 36, First Half and Second Half," and Appendix 2, "Table of Words Appearing More than Once in Alma 36, First Half and Second Half."

John W. Welch, "[A Masterpiece: Alma 36](#)," reworked in John L. Sorenson and Melvin Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT; FARMS, 1991), 114–131.

Stephen Kent Ehat, "Brief Introduction to Chiasmus in Alma 36," video (2016), 11 minutes.

Stephen Kent Ehat, "Words, Phrases, and Ideas in Macro-Chiasms," in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 335–339.

Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," in *Give Ear to My Words: Test and Context of Alma 36–42*, ed. Kerry M. Hull et al. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2019), 451–472.

### **Alma 36 – Chiasmus in the Full Text of Alma 36**

In Alma 36 and 38, Alma tells his conversion story twice. Once to Helaman, which is an outstanding example of Hebrew poetic form. For present purposes, as I go through Alma 36, the lines have been numbered in order to coordinate with the similar elements included in Alma's second telling, to Shiblon in Alma 38, discussed much further below.

Because the web allows for unlimited space, here you have the complete text of Alma 36, so you can see the development of this structure in its full context. As seen here, it is obvious that not everything is identically reversed, and some sections are longer or shorter than are their matches. There are reasons for these differences, which you can ponder quite productively. For example, this is because certain things—such as the pain and wickedness in the first half, and the joy, successful preaching, and mighty deliverance in the second half—call for great attention in those places respectively. Also, as the articles by Ehat and Reynolds have shown, these longer subsections often have their own internal well-ordered structures. And overall, accommodating these apparent infelicities, the first half of Alma 36 and the second half of Alma 36 are very closely balanced in total words, in individual word pairs, and in several other minute respects, as is tabulated in Appendices 1 and 2 in my 1989 Report.

Alma said to Helaman and wrote in his record:

- 1) My son, give ear to **my words**;
- 2) for I swear unto you, that **inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land**.
- 3) I would that ye should do **as I have done**,
- 4) 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
- 5) God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and **he surely did deliver them** in their afflictions.
- 6) 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**;
- 7) for I do know that whosoever shall **put their trust in God**

8) shall be **supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions**, and shall be **lifted up at the last day**.

9) 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**.

10) Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been **born of God** I should not have **known** these things;

11) but **God has**, by the mouth of his holy angel, **made these things known unto me**, not of any worthiness of myself;

12) 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.

13) 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. But behold, the voice said unto me: Arise. And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel. And he said unto me: If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God. 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**. 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.

14) But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. 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. 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. 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. And now for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the **pains** of a damned soul.

15) 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**,

16) behold I **remembered** also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people

17) concerning the coming of one **Jesus Christ, a Son of God**,

18) **to atone** for the sins of the world.

[Up to this point, Alma has gone through the basic elements leading up to the moment of his conversion to Jesus Christ. That was the moment when Alma remembered and called on Jesus Christ to have mercy upon him. That was the turning point of his life. He makes it the turning point of this elegant chapter, the most extensive of his several retellings of his conversion story.

From this central turning point, Alma works his way back out, through the same pervious content but now in the reverse order. In the second half, his words and phrases will be largely the same as in the first half, but in the opposite order. Each step of that way, Alma's attitudes and behaviors have now completely changed and are opposite to what he had previously experienced.]

18) Now, as my mind caught hold upon **this thought**,

17) 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.

16) And now, behold, when I thought this, I could **remember** my **pains** no more;

15) yea, I was **harrowed up by the memory of my sins** no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! 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.

14) 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' [1 Nephi 1:8]; yea, and my soul did long **to be there**.

[In the first half of this text, Alma had feared to even be brought into the presence of God. Now he longs to be there in God's presence. As in each step along this way, his attitudes have completely switched.]

13) 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.

12) 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. Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; For because of the word which he has imparted unto me,

- 11) behold, many have been **born of God**, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen;
- 10) therefore they do **know** of these things of which I have spoken, as I do **know**;"
- 9) and the knowledge which I have is **of God**.
- 8) 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;
- 7) yea, and I do put my **trust in him**, and he will still deliver me.
- 6) 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,
- 5) 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. 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. Yea, and he has 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
- 4) 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.
- 3) But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know **as I do know**,
- 2) 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.
- 1) Now this is according to **his word**.

We can see here how everything builds up to and then away from the central turning point when Alma remembered that his father had prophesied about the coming of Jesus Christ, and when he cried out, "O Jesus Christ, thou Son of God, have mercy on me." This is the submissive plea that sends Alma's life and his story going in the opposite direction.

Note also that Alma gave his oldest son, Helaman, a "doubled story" of his conversion, while Shiblon's blessing in Alma 38 will repeat only (but almost exactly) the first half of this account. Perhaps this was done meaningfully by Alma for a subtly symbolic purpose. Under Biblical and Jewish law the oldest son, the firstborn son, was entitled to get what was called the "double blessing"—a double portion of his father's estate (Deuteronomy 21:17). When the father died and his estate was divided, the oldest son would receive twice as much as what the other sons each would receive. In Alma's case, assuming he just had three sons, his estate would have been divided into four parts—Helaman would get two of those portions of the estate, while Shiblon and Corianton

would each get one. Because the eldest son had the responsibility to take care of his mother, his unmarried sisters, and the other women in the family whose circumstances required his care, the double portion was given to him to allow him to fulfill those responsibilities.

We do not know whether Alma owned much by way of land, goods, or money. I would not expect that he did. He had spent his entire life preaching. He had been the high priest, so his job had been working in the temple and taking care of sacred things—not working in a profession that would have profited him materially. Alma knew that worldly things did not matter as much as the spiritual testimony he could share, and so he gave Helaman a double portion of what he had—a doubled text of his testimony and conversion story. And was that related to Alma then requiring and enabling Helaman, the oldest son, to perform special responsibilities? Yes. As would have been expected, in chapter 37, Alma gave Helaman major responsibilities, particularly a charge to keep the records and sacred artifacts as the leader of the Church.

In sum, this stunning composition is truly amazing. It meets all of the “Chiasmus Criteria” generally accepted for determining whether or not a text should be identified as chiasmic, as Neal Rappleye has most carefully defined. Moreover, Alma uses chiasmus in Alma 36 for many reasons, all of which are discussed in my chapter asking the question, “What Does the Presence of Chiasmus Prove?” These articles are conveniently listed here below. Moreover, assuming that Joseph dictated his translation of this intricate text to Oliver Cowdery at their normal average rate of about 15 words per minute, Joseph would have only had about one hour and twenty minutes to bring this text forth, going through it one time only, with no opportunity ever for revisions or adjustments. As I’ve said many times before, this is phenomenal.

### Further Reading

Neal Rappleye, “[Chiasmus Criteria in Review](#),” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art* (Provo: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 289–310.

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Can We Learn from 10 of the Best Chiasms in the Book of Mormon: Part 3?](#)” *KnoWhy* 355 (August 20, 2017).

John W. Welch, “[A Masterpiece: Alma 36](#),” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114–131.

John W. Welch, “[What Does the Presence of Chiasmus Prove?](#)” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 199–224.



### **Alma 36:1–3 — Father’s Blessings**

As parents, we have the authority to bless our children. Worthy fathers also have the priesthood power to promise them serious things in a father’s blessing. When moved by the spirit, we know that the Lord’s promises are available and we can promise our children what the Lord will support. Do we do that very often? We usually bless our children with little more than a general blessing. It is not often a very specific or concrete blessing.

I know that when we give a blessing and are moved by the spirit, the Lord will not let us down if we feel inspired to go out on a limb. We go out on that limb by beginning to speak, and then letting the words of the Lord fill in the rest. If we begin by saying, “I promise you,” we have to stop and think what the promise is going to be. Then the Lord can tell us what it should be. If we do not begin, we may never open the channels of revelation to receive the words of a much-needed promised blessing.

### **Alma 36:35 — Confessing the Follies of Our Youth**

Notice that Alma begins his words to both Helaman and then to Shiblon by saying something like, “This is what I did when I was a young man.” How many of us begin talking to our children by saying, “Let me tell you all the mistakes I made when I was in high school”? Most of us would rather pretend those things never happened. I don’t think I have ever told my children all about the unwise mistakes of my youth.

Would it help our children if we were to open up more so that they could share their experiences or difficulties with us? When should we share this personal information with our children? When they are young, when they are teenagers, or when they are young men? Alma advised Helaman, “learn wisdom in thy youth” (37:35). If young children hear about your mistakes and what you learned from those experiences, they may better relate with you, love you more, and accept you more. I wonder, if you wait to share your vulnerabilities and the mistakes you have made until they are 16 or 17, they may feel betrayed by suddenly realizing that you are not as perfect as they thought you were. In their later teens, your children have already built up a certain impression about you. Maybe “learning wisdom in youth” means that we need to be open to discussing some of these things when our children are still relatively young.

### **Alma 36:22 — Alma’s Joy and His Quotation of Lehi**

While Alma spent three days in some kind of spiritual state—shock, coma, or something not defined—he was cognizant of what was going on. He had agonized, his soul was being wracked with eternal torment. He said he felt the pains of a damned soul, but then he remembered his father had spoken “concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (36:17). He then felt “joy” and “marvelous light” (36:20).

Alma explained, that his “joy” was “as exceeding as [had been his] pain!” He then stated, I “thought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded by numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God.” Alma is directly quoting Lehi’s words found in 1 Nephi 1:8. Why didn’t Alma put quotation marks around the quoted text? Quotation marks did not exist in Alma’s day. Punctuation marks were invented in Late Antiquity or in the Middle Ages. Greek and Hebrew texts of antiquity had no punctuation marks at all. Instead of using quotation marks, authors of ancient texts would say something like, “as Lehi said.” The reader was expected to realize that a direct quote was being used. And here, Alma quotes Lehi precisely. That’s pretty amazing, when you stop and think about it.

### Further Reading

On a few of the several, precise, intertextual quotations within the Book of Mormon, see John W. Welch, “[Textual Consistency](#),” 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), 21–23.

## Alma 37

### Alma 37:1–8 — The Value of Sacred Records

After Alma gave the plates to Helaman, he explained the sacred responsibility that Helaman had over them. The plates of brass contained their genealogy, which was important, however, Alma pointed out that the plates also “contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them” (Alma 37:3). The plates were to be handed down from generation to generation, and “kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord” (Alma 37:4). In other words, the plates were of such significance to the Lord that he would directly assist those charged with responsibility over them. The Lord had a plan and purpose for the records. As Alma explained, “they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon.” I wonder how Helaman felt about this heavy responsibility.

Verse 6 begins, “Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me.” Helaman had just been told that parts of these brass plates would end up going forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Has that prophecy been fulfilled? Of course, we do not have the brass plates preserved as one distinct book, but we certainly have large parts of the record in the Book of Mormon—the Isaiah material, the Zenos text that was used in Antionum, and his Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob 5. All of those holy passages came off the brass plates, and a lot of unique material from the brass plates has gone forth to the whole world in the Book of Mormon, as well as through the Book of Moses and

through the canonical Bible. This important prophecy is reiterated in D&C 133:37 where it states, “And this gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”

Joseph Smith also made a similar prophecy. When my wife and I were at the John Johnson farm, we were shown a place behind the house where a few early priesthood holders had met with the Prophet. The men at that gathering were talking about the priesthood and Joseph asked them to bear testimony of the priesthood. After their expressions of testimony, Smith said to them, “Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. ... It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world” (see [Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith](#)).

That was an amazingly courageous prophecy to make. You can stand at the John Johnson farm today and look 360 degrees, in every direction, and see nothing. There was nothing there at the time Joseph made this prophecy, and there are only a few fields there now. It is amazing that Joseph could stand in a place of no real significance, among a few men, and prophesy that the Church would fill the earth. We have seen part of this prophecy come to pass in our own lifetimes. Not long ago, my wife and I housed a student in one of our spare bedrooms who spent her time translating the Book of Mormon into Malagasy for the Island of Madagascar. In a relatively short time, and now with the Internet especially, we have seen this work go to every far corner of the world.

Why has the Lord chosen the Book of Mormon as a means of spreading his gospel to the entire world? Alma gave the following explanation as to why the plates were going to be so valuable and useful: “[F]or 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” (Alma 37:8). Those three purposes still stand today as reasons why the Book of Mormon is what this world needs now.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Is the Book of Mormon Like Any Other Nineteenth Century Book? \(Alma 37:6\).”](#) *KnoWhy* 502 (February 16, 2019).

### **Alma 37:14–22 — Alma Encourages Helaman in His Responsibilities**

Alma didn’t want Helaman to feel overwhelmed with the burden of preserving the plates. Alma had given him a heavy load and entrusted him with enormous responsibility. However, this responsibility came with a promise: “And now remember, my son Helaman, 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” (37:14). Alma continued: “For [God] will fulfill all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers” (37:17).

At times, we may feel overwhelmed by the trials we face as we endeavor to fulfill our life missions. If we do, we can think about the promises that God has made to us. There are important promises in the covenants we have made with God—especially in his temples.

### **Alma 37:25–34 — The Lord Uses the Jaredite Record to Teach His Children**

Alma then gave another set of plates to Helaman—the 24 gold Jaredite plates. This set of plates was not filled with good news for people of the future, but it could be read as a warning. The people of Jared were destroyed and obliterated. They fought to the bitter death, and their civilization fell, was destroyed, and lost.

Alma taught Helaman that God had said, “I will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations” (37:25). In the face of injustices and struggles, it is at least of some comfort to know that all things will be brought out into the open. There is nothing that is hidden that will not eventually be brought to light and to judgment. There may be trials, troubles and tribulations, but they will not last forever. And we will eventually be lifted up at the last day if we are faithful.

Speaking of the destructions and curses on the land, Alma added:

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. 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. 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. (37:32–34)

Alma’s words enabled Helaman to see the brighter side of a very difficult situation. This can help us in our world today. We live in troubled times, but there are things we can do to be happy, find peace, and remain positive as trials of the world surround us.

## Alma 38

### **Alma 38:2 — Alma Has Joy in Shiblon**

I like what Alma does when he talks to these sons. In Alma 38:2, he said to Shiblon, “And now, my son, I trust that I shall have great joy in you.” Wow! Our children need to

know that we are confident and that they are going to give us joy. They need to know that they are loved. As a grandparent, have you told your grandchildren that you are happy with who they are—that they give you joy? If so, it surely meant a lot. Alma then described two specific attributes of this young boy—“steadiness” and “faithfulness unto God.” “Steadiness”—that is a remarkable adjective to use to describe a young person. Do we build up confidence in our children and our grandchildren by describing their positive attributes?

### **Alma 38:1–8 — Shiblon Receives a Single Blessing**

Alma’s teaching of his conversion to Shiblon follows the same pattern as the conversion story given to Helaman in Alma 36, but Shiblon was given only the first half of it. Each line of both narratives led directly to the main central point. However, the story given to Shiblon ends at the center and does not continue working its way out and back to the beginning.

[Note: The line numbers in the discussion below refer to the element numbers in the chiasmic structure of this account given to Helaman in Alma 36 above.]

Alma begins in Alma 38:1 with the words, “My son, give ear to my words.” This matches line 1 in the beginning of the blessing given to Helaman.

Next, still in 38:1, Alma says, “For I say unto you *even as I said to Helaman* [expressly recognizing these repetitions], that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.”

These words match words in line 2 in Alma 36.

At the end of 38:4, Alma recognized that Shiblon had faced many trials and bore them with patience “and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.”

Those words are found in line 5 in Alma 36.

In 38:5, Alma said, “Now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God [see line 7] . . . ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day” see line 8.”

Then in 38:6 he says, “Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself.” That matches line 9. “But it is the spirit of God which is in me.” In other words, Alma knew this by the Holy Ghost, which is line 11.

Continuing in 38:6, Alma says to Shiblon, “For if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things.”

That is in line 10 in the Alma 36 telling.

Alma then states in verse 7: “But behold, the Lord in his great mercy sent his angel.” This has reference to the angel in line 13.

This is followed in verse 7 with other words from lines 12 and 13, as Alma continues in 38:7, “to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people.”

In 38:7, Alma added a bit of important information that was not mentioned when he spoke to Helaman, “Yea, and I have seen an angel face to face, and he spake with me and his voice was as thunder . . .”

Then, after that addition, Alma resumes with line 13 in the Helaman version, “. . . and it shook the whole earth.”

Verse 8 states, “And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul.”

These details about the “three days and three nights” and “pains” were mentioned in line 14.

Alma continues in 38:8, “Never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins.” And with that, we have reached the words in the turning point of Alma 36, line 15’.

And finally, to Shiblon, Alma said in 38:8, “But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul” and “a remission of my sins.”

In 36:19, Alma had similarly told Helaman, “I could remember my pains no more” and was “harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” lines 16’ and 15’.

Shiblon’s blessing ends at the center of Helaman’s blessing. While the climax of Alma’s conversion story is reached essentially at the same point in both speeches, for Shiblon Alma gave just half the account he had given in his blessing to Helaman.

And then, as Alma continues, he gave Shiblon a short section of wise practical advice in the rest of Alma 38, whereas he had given Helaman a long set of administrative instructions in Alma 37.

Thus, in effect and on two counts, Helaman got a double blessing, and Shiblon got the single blessing, all of which is consistent with the normal rule that the oldest son was entitled to the double blessing.

### **Alma 38:9 — Christ is the Source of True Wisdom**

In Alma 38:9–15, Alma pleads with Shiblon to “learn wisdom,” that salvation comes 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.” Alma goes on to give Shiblon about a dozen valuable lines of proverbial wisdom and spiritual advice to guide and encourage him in his life.

### **Alma 38:10–12 — Boldness, Not Overbearance**

Alma told Shiblon to “continue to teach.” Sometimes we stop teaching too soon. We should not give up. Shiblon was also told to be diligent and temperate in all things. This couplet strikes a delicate balance. Diligence can become compulsive, and temperance can become too mild. Avoiding pride is crucial, but boasting may be fine, so long as it is not about our own wisdom or strength.

Likewise, to speak with boldness, but not overbearance. This also makes an important and fine distinction. For example, parents do not want to be overbearing with our children. But at the same time, we certainly do not want to dodge discussing important issues, be ambivalent, or send mixed messages. We should be clear when communicating; this is an important parenting skill that we could all work on.

### **Alma 38:13–14 — How to Pray**

Alma continued advising Shiblon, giving him, and us also, guidance in how to pray. Shiblon was told not to pray like the Zoramites. Do not pray “to be heard of men” or “to be praised for . . . wisdom.” Do not say, “O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren.”

Alma also mentions something we should include in our prayers: “Oh Lord forgive me my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.” Alma 38:14 is a model for something we can include in our prayers.

### **Alma 38:15 — What Does Alma Mean by “Sober?”**

Alma’s last word of advice to Shiblon was, “Be sober.” The word “sober” may derive from the root “*sofia*” which means “wisdom.” Now days, when we describe people as “sober” (other than in an alcoholic context), we are saying that they are deliberate, they are thoughtful, they are in control. These are all strong attributes. Also included could be serious, sensitive, and solemn, as well as practical, dignified and restrained. Thus, Alma’s admonition to be sober is closely related to his most famous advice given to Shiblon, in verse 12, to “see that ye bridle all your passions,” together with the most consequential contrast of them all, “that ye may be filled with love.”