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## Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 22—Alma the Elder

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*Theology*—Characters and Teachings  
of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 22—Alma the Elder

*Elder Leland H. Monson*

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, chapters 18, 23-26)

For Tuesday, March 2, 1954

Objective: To show how Alma established the Church of Jesus Christ and the influence and power for good which were exercised by Alma following his repentance.

*Alma Repents of His Sins*

Among the wicked priests who clamored for Abinadi's life, was a young man named Alma, who was a descendant of Nephi. The fiery words of Abinadi had made him think and feel. The spirit of the Lord penetrated his hardened heart, and he believed the teachings of the prophet Abinadi.

Sympathy for Abinadi and for his message led Alma to plead with King Noah not to be angry with Abinadi but to allow him to go in peace. Wrathful by nature, the king could not brook this interference with his command. He cast Alma out from among them and sent his servants to slay him.

Alma, however, fled to a place of secrecy. Concealed for many days, he wrote all the words which Abinadi had spoken. These words entered into Alma's heart. He sincerely repented of his many sins and iniquities and went about privately among the people to teach them the words of Abinadi. Per-

haps, he followed much the same procedures as our early missionaries to the Scandinavian countries when they were forbidden to call public meetings and preach to the people. These missionaries secured employment and talked individually to workmen and to their friends in the evening.

Alma told them of things to come, about the resurrection of the dead, and about the redemption of mankind "through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven" (Mosiah 18:2).

*At the Waters of Mormon*

Alma was so sincere and so convincing in his missionary activity that many believed what he had to say. Those who did believe went with him secretly to a place which was called Mormon, a place named after a king. It was located in the borders of the land, and was at certain times and seasons infested by wild beasts.

There was in Mormon a fountain of pure water. Near it was a thicket of small trees in which Alma hid in the daytime from searchers who were sent out by the king. Many who believed Alma followed him to this spot to hear him expound the gospel as he understood it.

After many days there was a goodly number of those whom Alma had converted assembled at the waters of Mormon to hear him speak, "Yea, all were gathered together that believed on his word, to hear him."

He said:

Here are the waters of Mormon . . . and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God . . . and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places . . . even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you (Mosiah 18:8-10).

The people were sincere in their desire to follow Alma. They expressed great joy and satisfaction with the possibility of making such a covenant and witnessing it by means of baptism. "They clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts" (Mosiah 18:11).

Alma took Helam, one of the first converts, and the two of them walked into the waters of Mormon.

Alma prayed saying: "O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart" (Mosiah 18:12).

The Spirit of the Lord rested upon Alma, and he said:

Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world (Mosiah 18:13).

After Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam "were buried in the water." They came forth, filled with the Spirit and rejoicing. Alma used the same words in baptizing the others, but he did not bury himself in the water again, though he immersed each candidate. He baptized about two hundred and four persons in the waters of Mormon.

#### *Alma Organizes the Church*

Alma then proceeded to organize the group into a church. They were called the Church of God, or the Church of Christ. Having been commissioned of God, Alma ordained priests, one to preside over each group of fifty converts. He instructed these priests to teach the people the things which he had taught them. He commanded them not to teach anything except repentance and faith in Jesus Christ who should come to redeem his people. He further commanded them "that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism,

having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another" (Mosiah 18:21).

He instructed the priests whom he had ordained that they were to labor with their own hands for their support, and were not to rely upon the membership for their livelihood. Alma commanded all the people to observe the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. He further instructed them to assemble together as often as they were able to receive instructions and to worship God.

Alma did more than to provide for the spiritual welfare of his people. Like Joseph Smith, Alma felt that if the people were not equal in temporal things, they would not be equal in spiritual matters. He therefore commanded the people to "impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had" (Mosiah 18:27).

And now it came to pass that all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon; yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon, how beautiful are they to the eyes of them who there came to the knowledge of their Redeemer; yea, and how blessed are they, for they shall sing to his praise forever (Mosiah 18:30).

But Alma could not keep this much activity from coming to the attention of the king. One day as they were gathered together to hear the word of the Lord, "they were discovered unto the king." Alma was accused of stirring up the people to rebellion and Noah sent an army to destroy them.

By this time the group had come to number about four hundred and fifty members. Cognizant of the coming of the king's army, they

took their tents and families and fled eight days into the wilderness.

#### *Land of Helam Becomes in Bondage to the Lamanites*

In a land they called "Helam," Alma and his people pitched their tents, constructed buildings, and began to till the earth.

The people wanted Alma to be their king, but he forbade it saying, "Ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free and . . . trust no man to be a king over you." Alma, as founder of their Church, however, became their high priest.

Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith. Nevertheless—whosoever putteth his trust in him the same shall be lifted up at the last day. Yea, and thus it was with this people (Mosiah 23:21-22).

Alma and his people were not free for long, for the Lamanites, in company with the wicked priests of Noah, took possession of the land of Helam. Before this time, the Lamanites had discovered the priests of King Noah, who had made Amulon their leader. When the Lamanites came upon the priests, Amulon had pleaded with them and sent forth the wives who were the daughters of the Lamanites to also plead, that the Lamanites would not destroy their husbands. Because of their wives the Lamanites allowed the priests of Noah to join them. The Lamanites were returning to the land of Lehi-Nephi from pursuing Limhi and his people, when they discovered and took into captivity the people of Alma. Most of the Lamanites left, but Amulon was

made king over the land of Helam.

Soon Amulon began to exercise unrighteous dominion over Alma and his brethren, to persecute them and their children. Knowing that Alma at one time was one of King Noah's wicked priests, Amulon was wroth with Alma. He assigned tasks to be performed, and put task-masters over the people.

So great were the people's afflictions that they began to cry unto the Lord. Then Amulon commanded them to stop their cries and he put guards over them so that whoever was found calling upon God should be put to death.

#### *The Lord Delivers Alma and His People From Bondage*

Then Alma and his people did not raise their voices to the Lord, but they poured out their hearts to him. And the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions saying that he would deliver them from bondage and would ease the burdens they were required to bear, until they would not be able to feel them on their backs.

The people submitted "cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord." "So great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again" and told them that they would be released from bondage on the morrow.

And he said unto Alma:

Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage (Mosiah 24:17).

The people prepared during the night for their departure. The next morning the Lord caused a deep

sleep to come upon their oppressors, and Alma and his people escaped. That night they pitched their tents in a valley which they called the valley of Alma, and poured out their thanks to God for delivering them from bondage.

They were then told to hasten out of the land for the Lamanites had awakened and were pursuing them. The Lord promised to stop the Lamanites in the valley so that they could pursue the people of Alma no further.

After a journey of twelve days through the wilderness, Alma and his people arrived in the land of Zarahemla, where they were received with joy by King Mosiah.

Mosiah then gathered together the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla (who was a descendant of Mulek) in two bodies, and Mosiah read and caused to be read to them the records of Zeniff and Alma. Those who were the children of Amulon and his brethren who had married the daughters of the Lamanites "were displeased with the conduct of their fathers and they would no longer be called by the names of their fathers, therefore, they took upon themselves the name of Nephi" (Mosiah 25:12) and were numbered among the Nephites.

And now all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites, and this because the kingdom had been conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi (Mosiah 25:13).

#### *Alma Given Authority Over Church*

Mosiah granted to Alma the right to establish churches throughout the land of Zarahemla. Alma organized seven different bodies called

churches, each one of which had priests and teachers, and every priest preached the word as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma. All were instructed not to teach anything but repentance and faith in God.

The people who repented and confessed their sins were forgiven; those who would not repent were not numbered among the Lord's people, and their names were blotted out. Persecution of believers or non-believers was forbidden, and equality among all men was enjoined.

Alma had repented and from a wicked priest of King Noah he had come to be the religious leader of all the people in the land of Zarahemla.

He had become one of God's chosen servants. If men like Alma, by repentance and by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, can be transformed into true citizens of the kingdom of God, and can come to be leaders in that kingdom, we can begin to see that the gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation. Alma was a great exponent of forgiveness, knowing that the man who cannot forgive others is in no position to ask forgiveness for his own sins.

### *Questions for Discussion*

1. By what power could Alma receive forgiveness for his sins?
2. How tolerant and forgiving should we be of the mistakes of others?
3. Can you see a comparison between Alma and Paul?

## *Visiting Teacher Messages*

### Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 22—"Ye Have Not Applied Your Hearts to Understanding; Therefore, Ye Have Not Been Wise" (Mosiah 12:27).

Leone O. Jacobs

For Tuesday, March 2, 1954

Objective: To urge that a conscious effort be made toward understanding the word of the Lord.

**WHAT** a precious possession is understanding! It tempers one's thoughts and actions, develops patience and kindness, removes prejudice and selfishness from one's heart.

From the context of the quotation from Mosiah, it is apparent that Abinadi was arraigning the priests for their lack of understanding the word of God to teach the people correctly. Surely if one is to

be wise he must apply his heart to understanding the word of the Lord. A conscious effort must be put forth, otherwise we may so easily become confused or led into erroneous beliefs. The great number of interpretations of the Lord's word that exist today attest to this fact.

Understanding the word of God correctly does not always come naturally to man, therefore, there