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## Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 23—Righteousness and Good Government

Author(s): Leland H. Monson

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## LESSON DEPARTMENT

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

#### Lesson 23—Righteousness and Good Government

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Mosiah 27-29)

For Tuesday, April 6, 1954

Objective: To explain how spirituality undergirds good government.

#### *The Just Rule of King Mosiah*

**K**ING Mosiah, like his father Benjamin, worked diligently to have his people attain eternal life. They esteemed Mosiah more than any other man, for they felt the influence of his great and good personality. He had taught them the commandments of God, had labored assiduously to establish peace in the land, and had tried to eradicate contentions, stealing, plundering, murder, and all other types of iniquity. He punished according to the law whosoever committed iniquity.

Under divine guidance, King Mosiah had endeavored to govern the people in such a manner that his acts would be conducive to their eternal welfare. Recognizing Alma as a great spiritual leader, he had given him charge of the ecclesiastical affairs in the kingdom.

#### *Leadership of Alma*

Alma, you will recall, was early in his life one of the wicked priests of King Noah in the land of Nephi. Sincerely repenting, he had grown to the full stature of a great religious leader. Having had to plead with God for a forgiveness of his own sins, he had learned the need of forgiving other repentant sinners. He could throw the mantle of charity about the sins of others and usher them back into the fold of God. He knew the joy that is attached to repentance and forgiveness. He spent his life trying to induce all men to experience those joys.

These two great men, workers in a common cause to elevate the ideals, aspirations, and actions of the people in and around Zarahemla, found many difficulties to overcome.

### *Unbelief of Leaders' Sons*

Chief among the obstacles to righteous living was the fact that Alma's son, named Alma, and four of Mosiah's sons, Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni were numbered among the disbelievers. As a matter of fact, they were leaders in a movement to crush the work their fathers so zealously labored to accomplish.

Young "Alma was a very wicked and an idolatrous man." He was gifted with a smooth tongue and could use the language with a high degree of facility. He flattered the people and led them into all kinds of iniquities. He stole away the hearts of the people from his father and King Mosiah.

The sons of Mosiah were "the very vilest of sinners." They also worked, to the maximum of their ability, to destroy the righteous undertakings of their father and Alma the elder. These five recalcitrant sons were busily engaged in their work of destruction.

### *Miraculous Conversion*

One day as the five young men were "going about rebelling against God," an angel of the Lord appeared unto them. The angel spoke to them in a voice of thunder which made the earth shake. He commanded Alma to rise, for he had fallen to the earth, and then asked them:

Why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people . . . the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much

faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith. . . . And now I say unto thee, Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off (Mosiah 27:13 ff.).

Shocked by the appearance of the angel and by the words he had spoken, Alma the younger and the sons of Mosiah fell to the ground. They knew of a surety that it was the power of God which had made the earth tremble. The astonishment of Alma was so great he became dumb and could not open his mouth. He also became weak so he could not move his hands. He was carried in a helpless condition to his father.

His father, Alma, rejoiced, for he knew that the power of God had wrought upon his son. Alma called the priests and the people to assemble to witness what had happened. The priests fasted and prayed to the Lord, petitioning him to open the mouth of Alma the son and to bring strength to his limbs "that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God" (Mosiah 27:22).

After two days and nights of fasting and prayer, strength came into the limbs of Alma, and he began to speak saying, "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. . . . My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the

marvelous light of God" (Mosiah 27:24, 29).

### *The Five Sons Become Preachers of Righteousness*

From this time forth Alma and the four sons of Mosiah traveled throughout all the land confessing their sins and telling the people how God in his mercy had sent an angel from heaven to call them to repentance. They were greatly persecuted by unbelievers, being smitten by many of them; but amidst persecution they brought much consolation to the Church, confirming the people in their faith and exhorting them to diligence in keeping the commandments. Zealously, they worked to repair the damage which they had done to the Church. They became powerful instruments in the hands of God in bringing many people to a knowledge of their Redeemer.

### *The Sons of Mosiah Take a Mission to the Lamanites*

So impressed with the power of the gospel were the sons of Mosiah, that they asked their father, the King, for the privilege of taking the gospel to the Lamanites in the land of Nephi. They told him that they wanted to convince the Lamanites of the iniquity of their fathers and thus cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites and establish an era of peace between these two peoples, and also that they wanted the Lamanites to receive the gospel. It hurt them to think that any human soul should perish.

They had feared, at times, that they would be cast off forever, and they desired to make amends for

their wrongdoings. Mosiah submitted to the Lord the problem of sending his sons to the Lamanites and received in answer the following revelation

Let them go up, for many shall believe on their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites (Mosiah 28:7).

And these sons went on the mission to the land of Nephi.

### *Mosiah Proposes to Establish a Democratic Government*

Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon for there was not any of his sons who would accept the kingdom. They had renounced the kingdom to become humble missionaries to the Lamanites.

Mosiah determined, therefore, to give the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, and all the things which he had kept and preserved according to the commandments of God, with the twenty-four gold plates, to Alma, the son of Alma. Mosiah had translated these plates of gold [Book of Ether, see Ether 1:2] delivered to him by Limhi by means of the two stones fastened into the two rims of the bow, called interpreters. The people of Mosiah rejoiced in the knowledge that they thus gained of those people who formerly had dwelt upon the land and who had been destroyed because of their wickedness.

Mosiah wrote to his people recommending that they should not have a king but should establish a form of government where "the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part" (Mosiah 29:34).

Elder James E. Talmage, in his *Vitality of Mormonism*, copyright 1919, page 200, gives us an interesting summary of the political achievements of Mosiah:

In a stirring proclamation he set forth the potential dangers of kingly rule and admonished the nation to guard its liberty as a sacred possession, and to delegate the governing powers to officers of its own choosing, whom he called judges, who should be elected by popular vote, and who could be impeached if charged with iniquitous exercises of power and be removed if found unworthy. King Mosiah summarized in a masterful way the fundamentals of true democracy.

His reasons for discouraging the selection of a king were, in substance, as follows: (1) Aaron, his son, whose right it was to be king had refused the call. If the kingdom was conferred upon another, Aaron might regret his decision and seek through war to gain his rightful crown; (2) It is better to be judged by God than by man; (3) Sometimes people suffer under the rule of a wicked king, like King Noah in the land of Nephi, and are taken into bondage; (4) The wickedness of a king leads the people astray, and finally, it should be a land of liberty where justice and equality exist.

For these reasons Mosiah suggested to them that they establish another form of government, a democratic form where the people would elect judges and have the power to recall them in case they did not judge righteous judgments. The higher judges could be tried by a select group of lower judges, and the lower judges could be tried by the higher judges.

### *Alma the Son Becomes the First Chief Judge*

The people, acclaiming the wisdom and foresight of Mosiah, accepted his recommendations. Alma the son was appointed to be the first Chief Judge. Alma now had a dual mission, to serve as Chief Judge to the people, and to act as their religious leader, as High Priest, an office that had been conferred on him by his father.

The reign of the judges throughout all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who were called the Nephites, commenced in 91 B.C., with Alma the son as first Chief Judge. Mosiah died in the thirty-third year of his reign at the age of sixty-three. Alma the father, the founder of the Church, died about the same time, having lived eighty-two years.

Mosiah had lived to shape conditions in such a manner that he established a sound pattern of representative government in America at a very early period. He taught the people that America was to be a land of equality, a land of liberty, and that equality and liberty were products of a deep and abiding spirituality among both leaders and people.

### *Questions for Discussion*

1. What effect did the conversion of the four sons of Mosiah have upon Nephite government?
2. Why did Mosiah condemn the kingly form of government?
3. What values did he see in a representative democracy?
4. How much did Mosiah value liberty among the people?
5. What lesson can we learn concerning our representative democracy?