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Characters and Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Lesson 24—Alma, Son of Alma

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Abstract: The objective of this lesson is to point out the influence which righteous men can exert in a democracy.



LESSON DEPARTMENT

Theology—Characters and Teachings of The Book of Mormon

Lesson 24—Alma, Son of Alma

Elder Leland H. Monson

(Text: The Book of Mormon: Alma 1-8)

For Tuesday, May 4, 1954

Objective: To point out the influence which righteous men can exert in a democracy.

AFTER the death of Alma the father and King Mosiah, Alma the son had full responsibility for the ecclesiastical and secular affairs of the Nephites throughout the land of Zarahemla, he being chief judge and high priest. (See Mosiah 29:42.) The task of administering the government was based upon laws Mosiah had formulated, and these laws had been accepted by the people. Moreover, the people had elected their lesser judges and were aware of the responsibility which they had to protect and preserve their newly given liberties under their representative form of government.

Nehor

Always, however, there are people who will not work according to a pattern established by the majority. Nehor was one of these men. In the first year of the reign of the judges, he struggled to intro-

duce priestcraft among the people. He taught that every priest and every teacher ought to become popular, and ought not to labor for his own support, but should be supported by the people. He contended against members of the Church because they preached the gospel one to another without money and without price.

In lieu of the true gospel, Nehor taught that the Lord had created all men and had redeemed all men, and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

Nehor found many people who believed his words, and he even began to establish a church. But Nehor was not willing to rely upon his persuasive power alone, but sought to enforce his views by means of the sword.

One day Nehor met Gideon, who had been an instrument in the hands of God in delivering Limhi and his people out of bondage, a

teacher and a valiant defender of the faith. Altercations arose between them when Gideon opposed Nehor's point of view. As the argument became more heated, Nehor unsheathed his sword and slew Gideon, who was old and not able to withstand Nehor's blows.

Nehor was given a trial and was judged by Alma in accordance with the law which has been established among the people by Mosiah. By the law Alma condemned him to death as a murderer. He was also guilty of priestcraft and had sought to enforce it by the sword. Nehor was, therefore, taken to the top of the hill Manti and was put to death.

Nehor's death, however, did not end priestcraft, for there were other greedy souls who sought for riches and honor. These men contrived to preach false doctrines, feigning a sincere belief in them, because they knew that the laws of Mosiah punished a liar, but the law had no power on any man for his belief. Resultant conditions brought the withdrawal and excommunication of many from the Church.

Persecution of the members of the Church followed. This persecution solidified the group. Those who had sufficient food shared with the poor, the needy, and the afflicted. The people realized that all were equally precious in the sight of God, that the preacher was no better than the hearer, nor the teacher than the learner.

A spirit of greater co-operation entered among the members of the Church, and they increased in all kinds of wealth. They had an abundance of flocks, herds, grain, gold, silver, silk, linen, and other

precious things. They regarded their wealth, not as an end, but as a means; they did not set their hearts upon riches but were liberal to all. They clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and administered relief to the sick.

This condition did not exist among those who did not belong to the Church. Following such base and wicked practices as idleness, gossiping, idolatry, whoredoms, sorceries, and murderings, contentions arose among them and they wasted what they did gather together, showing how a lack of righteousness produces economic deterioration among a people.

Amlici

In the beginning of the fifth year of the reign of the judges, another complex problem arose. A minority group of the people sought to make Amlici their king. They realized, of course, that it must be done by the consent of the people. All the people gathered together "to cast in their voices concerning the matter . . . and the voice of the people came against Amlici." Dissatisfied with the result, and unwilling to abide by the decision of the majority, Amlici encouraged his followers to disregard the majority, and he was soon made king over the minority group.

In the terrible battle which followed, the Amlicites were defeated. Spies sent by Alma followed the fleeing Amlicites as far as the land of Minon, above the land of Zarahemla. They reported that the Amlicites had joined with a numerous host of Lamanites and were attacking the Nephites living in that territory.

Strengthened by the righteousness of their cause and by the hand of the Lord, the Nephites defeated the combined forces of the Lamanites and Amlicites "as numerous almost, as it were, as the sands of the sea" (Alma 2:27). Alma fought face to face with Amlici in the battle with swords, and Alma being strengthened by the Lord, slew Amlici.

By the sixth year of the reign of the judges peace was restored throughout the land. However, every soul had cause to mourn—mourning over the loss of their loved ones, and the destruction of their grain, flocks, and herds. The people believed "it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and . . . they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty" (Alma 4:3) and turned to their God for help. Many converts were baptized in the waters of the river Sidon, and they began to establish the Church more fully.

However, in the eighth year, pride entered the hearts of the people and wickedness sapped their vitality. They "set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world" (Alma 4:8) and did not put first things first, to seek after the real satisfactions of life.

Wickedness in the Church became a "great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church" (Alma 4:10).

Alma Delivers Up the Judgment-Seat

Recognizing this decline in spirituality and feeling the dire need for curbing it, Alma delivered the judgment-seat to Nephiah according to

the voice of the people, "and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy This he did that he himself might go forth among his people . . . that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:20, 19).

He preached to them in their cities and villages, denouncing their iniquities and calling upon them to repent. He frequently used the rhetorical question as a means of enforcing his ideas.

Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? . . . were they destroyed? What grounds had they to hope for salvation? have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? are ye stripped of pride? is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? (Alma 5:6 ff.).

He answered all of these questions at once by saying:

Wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it! Yea, he saith: . . . come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever . . . doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn (Alma 5:32 ff.).

Alma did more than call people to repentance. He gave them his personal testimony that Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father, should come to earth and atone for the sins of every man who would repent and believe in him. Infusing this testimony into the hearts of his people, was the most powerful means he had at his command to get them to repent and do works of righteousness, following the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Alma Preaches to People in Gideon

After this beginning to establish the order of the Church in Zarahemla (Alma 7:4), and after having ordained priests and teachers to preside and watch over the Church, he went to the valley of Gideon to continue his reform movement. He complimented them on being "in the paths of righteousness." He told them that the time was not far distant when the Redeemer would come and live among his people in a tabernacle of flesh. He said:

And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea even the Son of God (Alma 7:10).

Alma called upon non-members of the Church to cast aside their sins. He also warned them that God cannot dwell in unholy temples and urged them after baptism to walk blameless before him. He warned:

And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the com-

mandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive. And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works (Alma 7:23-24).

Having established the order of the Church in Gideon, as he had in Zarahemla, Alma returned to his own home to rest.

Alma Preaches to People of Melek

In the tenth year of the reign of the judges, Alma went to the land of Melek, west of the river Sidon. These people were responsive to his message and came to him throughout all the land of Melek for baptism.

Alma Journeys to Ammonihah

When he had finished his work at Melek, Alma entered Ammonihah. These people were wicked, and they would not hearken to his message. They "reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city," saying:

We know that because we are not of thy church we know that thou hast no power over us; and thou hast delivered up the judgment-seat unto Nephihah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us (Alma 8:12).

Weighed down with sorrow and anguish of soul, Alma started for the city of Aaron. But he did not reach that city, for an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said:

Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am

he that delivered it unto you (Alma 8:15).

This angel instructed him to return to Ammonihah and foretell the destruction of the people except they repented. Built up in his faith and knowing that God was pleased with his work, Alma returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah. As he entered the city, hungry and tired, he met a man whom he asked for something to eat. This man said to Alma:

I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision: Thou shalt receive (Alma 8:20).

This man, Amulek, became Alma's missionary companion. Together they were to preach repentance to the people of Ammonihah.

God strengthened them and they had power given to them so they could not be confined in dungeons or slain.

And it came to pass that they went forth and began to preach and to prophesy unto the people, according to the spirit and power which the Lord had given them (Alma 8:32).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Alma consider priestcraft dangerous? Discuss priestcraft as set forth in Alma 1:3; and 2 Nephi 26:29.
2. Why was Alma concerned about the efforts of Amlici to become king?
3. How does iniquity in our Church serve as a stumbling block to those outside the Church?
4. How industrious was Alma in the service of God?
5. What can we learn from this lesson concerning the solution of our national problems?

Visiting Teacher Messages

Book of Mormon Gems of Truth

Lesson 24—"... Seek Not to Counsel the Lord, But to Take Counsel From His Hand. For Behold, Ye Yourselves Know That He Counseleth in Wisdom, and in Justice, and in Great Mercy, Over All His Works" (Jacob 4:10).

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For Tuesday, May 4, 1954

Objective: To stress the wisdom of adherence to the counsel of God.

OFTEN we attempt to counsel the Lord, though perhaps we do not realize we are doing so. We tell the Lord what to give us, we beseech, plead, almost demand certain blessings, or special help from difficulties we are in, without remembering that he knows, far better than we, what is best for us.

In Mosiah (chapter 4, verse 9), King Benjamin says: "... man doth not comprehend all the things

which the Lord can comprehend." If we are always aware of this fact, then, when we petition the Lord for blessings and aid, we will say to him in substance, "Heavenly Father, we desire this blessing very much, but thou knowest what is best for us. We will accept thy decision and thy will."

A young woman was critically injured in an automobile accident. When friends called to express the