



Type: Magazine Article

The Zoramites

Author(s): George Reynolds

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 14, No. 23 (1 December 1879), pp. 272–273

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: Retells the story of the Zoramites, explaining their heresies, their persecution of poor people, and the resulting war.

The patriarch, Israel, lived to bless his children, and to receive knowledge of the future destinies of the sons of Joseph. The history of his descendants, Lehi, Laban, Nephi and those who left Jerusalem in the days of Zedekiah, continues the story of Joseph and his descendants upon this continent; and the future destiny of Israel is being developed in these days, in the midst of the nations, by the Latter-day Saints.

THE ZORAMITES.

BY G. R.

IN the various apostasies, partial or total, that from time to time disgraced the Nephites, there is one characteristic feature that seems universal to them all, however much they may have differed on other points. At one time we find false teachers advocating doctrines nearly allied to Armenianism, while at another the dogma of predestination and election is vigorously promulgated. Other vagaries, which have since had their counterparts in the fallacies of the self-styled Christian churches of modern Babylon, were also zealously advocated at different periods of this people's history. But the grand distinguishing heresy peculiar to them all was the denial of the coming of the Savior in the flesh, and of the necessity of His atonement for the sins of the world. This was the evil ore's strong point in his efforts to mislead the ancient Nephites. Let him but persuade any people to reject this, the foundation of the gospel scheme, and little he cares what else they believe or disbelieve; for when this fundamental truth is rejected their spiritual enslavement is secured.

One of the most flagrant and pernicious of these apostasies took place in the days when Alma, the younger, was the presiding high priest in the Nephite church. Under the leadership of a man named Zoram, a sect arose, whose members claimed to be a chosen and holy people, separate from their fellow-men, and elected of God to eternal salvation, while all around were predestined to be cast down to hell. This atrocious creed naturally resulted in its adherents and advocates being puffed up in vanity and consumed with pride. They became haughty, uncharitable, tyrannical, and oppressors of their poorer neighbors. They covered their bodies with the finest apparel, and profusely adorned their persons with costly ornaments of gold and jewels. In their arrogance and self-righteousness they became the Pharisees of their age and country; but in other phases of iniquity they far exceeded their counterparts in the Holy Land. They bowed down to idols; they denied the coming of Christ; they declared the doctrine of the atonement to be a foolish tradition; and, like many of the sects of Christendom, they misinterpreted the teachings of holy scripture with regard to the being of God. Their declaration of faith was: "Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever." They were idolaters and Unitarians, Presbyterians and Pharisees, with a confusion of several other things, all thoroughly mingled and mixed together.

This strange medley of ideas gave birth to corresponding vagaries of worship. They left off praying; being chosen and elected to be God's holy children, they had no need of prayer. Once a week they assembled in their synagogues and went through an empty form, which was a little prayer, a little praise and considerable self-glorification. Having done this, they never mentioned God or holy things again throughout

the week; indeed, it was a portion of their creed that their synagogues were the only places in which it was lawful to talk or think of religious matters.

Their ceremonies were as absurd as their creed. In the center of each of their synagogues was erected a holy stand, or pulpit, called rameumptom, which stood high above the congregation. From the slight description given, we judge it to have been somewhat pyramidal in form, the top being only large enough for one person to stand upon. Each worshiper mounted to the top, stretched out his hands towards heaven, and, in a loud voice, repeated their set form of worship. Having done this, he descended, and another took his place, and so on, until all who desired to go through the mummery had satisfied their conscience or gratified their pride.

The tidings of this defection having reached Alma, he selected several of the leading members of the priesthood, and as soon as possible proceeded to the land Antionum, where the Zoramites had gathered. Those who accompanied him were his two younger sons, three of the sons of King Mosiah, Amulek and Zeezrom. To his anxiety to bring these dissenters back from the error of their ways, and to avert heaven's righteous wrath from falling upon them, was added the fear that if they remained in their wickedness they would affiliate with the Lamanites and bring trouble upon their more faithful fellow Nephites by urging the renewal of hostilities.

The country which Zoram had chosen for the gathering place of his followers rendered such a movement easy. It lay to the east of Zarahemla (the Nephite capital), and was bordered on the north by the land of Jershon, from whence it stretched down to the great southern wilderness, which was full of Lamanites.

On the arrival of Alma and his fellow-laborers at the seat of this apostasy they at once commenced their ministrations. They taught in the synagogues; they preached in the streets; they visited the people from house to house, using every possible effort to bring these misguided dissenters to an understanding of their perilous condition. To these labors we are indebted for some of the plainest and most powerful gospel teachings contained in the Book of Mormon, which will well repay our perusal, though we cannot give them in their entirety here. Suffice it to say, that many of the poor and humble, those who were oppressed, abused and trodden down by their false priests and unrighteous rulers, as well as by the wealthier portion of the community, received the words of salvation, while the majority rejected it with contemptuous scorn. Some of the missionaries were maltreated. Shiblon, the son of Alma, was imprisoned and stoned for the truth's sake, whilst others fared but little better. Unfortunately the work of God was retarded by the misconduct of Corianton, the brother of Shiblon, who deserted his ministerial duties for the company of a harlot. This folly caused Alma great sorrow, as it gave the ungodly a pretext for rejecting the gospel, of which they were not slow to avail themselves.

When Alma and his associates had done all the good they deemed possible they withdrew to the neighboring land of Jershon. No sooner had they left than the more crafty of the Zoramites devised a plan to discover the feelings of the community. They gathered the people together throughout the land and consulted with them concerning that which they had heard. In this way they discovered who favored the truth and who rejected it. Finding that the poor and unimportant were those who had received it, they resorted to persecution and plunder. They drove the believers from their homes and out of the land. Most of those expatriated for the gospel's

sake fled to the land of Jershon, whither the priesthood had preceded them.

The land of Jershon was inhabited by a colony of Lamanites, who, a few years previously, had accepted the gospel when carried to them by Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah. They also had left home and country for the truth's sake, and now, that others were suffering from the same cause, they received them with open arms. They fed and clothed those who needed such help, and gave them lands whereon they might build up new homes.

When the wicked Zoramites heard of the kind reception their injured fellow-citizens had received in Jershon they were greatly angered. They were not content to spoil them themselves, but they wanted to make them fugitives and vagabonds on the face of the whole earth. Their leader, a very wicked man, sent messages to the Ammonites, as the people of Jershon were called, desiring them to expel the refugees, adding many threats of what would follow, should his cruel demand not be complied with. But the Ammonites were a brave people; they had already suffered unto death for the cause of God and they were not of the stamp to desert their afflicted brethren. Rather than do so, they would again forsake their homes and find in some other region a land of peace. For we must remind our readers that the Ammonites had entered into covenant with God never again to bend the bow or draw the sword to take human life. They, therefore, withdrew to the land of Melek, whilst the armies of the Nephites occupied the land of Jershon.

The cause which led the Nephite armies to occupy Jershon was that the Zoramites finding that their haughty and unjust demands would not be complied with, had excited the Lamanites to invade the territory of the Nephites. The Lamanite forces, which were commanded almost entirely by Nephite apostates, on account of their fierce hatred to their former associates, marched first into the land of Antionum. Here they were joined by the Zoramites, when the whole of the invading hosts, under the command of a dissenter named Zarahemnah, advanced northward towards the land of Jershon.

This was a day of peril for the Nephites. Their enemies were much more numerous than they, and filled with a spirit of savage bloodthirstiness which was especially directed against those who were of their own race and kindred who had bowed in obedience to heaven's commands. At this juncture the Lord raised up one of the greatest heroes ever born on American soil. Not only a military leader, but a priest and prophet, and by his inspiration and devoted courage the Nephites were for many years led to uninterrupted victory. Such was Moroni, who now, though but twenty-five years old, took the chief command of the armies of his nation.

Though the forces of the Lamanites were much more numerous, all other advantages were on the side of their foes. The discipline of the Nephites was better by far; the bodies of their soldiers were protected by armor, breastplates, helmets, shields, etc., and they were fighting for the sacred cause of their religion and their country, their altars and their firesides, their wives and their little ones. Inspired with a realization of the justness of their cause and the extremity of their circumstances, they fought with a courage and a desperation never before exceeded in their annals.

The Lamanites on the other hand had no such holy impulses to nerve their arms for the combat. They were the aggressors, they were hasting to shed the blood of their brethren. Insane and infernal hatred alone, inspired them for the war-

fare. Besides, they were ill prepared to meet the Nephites with such a tactician and disciplinarian as Moroni for their commander-in-chief. The descendants of Laman were simply armed with swords and cimeters, bows and arrows, slings and stones. Their bodies were naked with the exception of a skin wrapped about their loins. The Zoramites and other dissenters from the Nephites were better clothed; in dress following the fashions of the people from whence they sprang.

The Lamanites, finding that Moroni was too well prepared for their attack on the land of Jershon, retired through Antionum into the wilderness, where they changed direction and marched towards the headwaters of the River Sidon, with the intention of taking possession of the Land of Manti, which was situated along the upper waters of that stream. But Moroni was too watchful to allow his enemies to slip away without knowing what had become of them. He had his spies watch the movements of Zarahemnah's forces, and, in the meanwhile, sent to Alma, the chief High Priest, to enquire the mind and will of the Lord with regard to his future course. The word of the Lord was given to Alma, and he informed Moroni's messengers of the movements of the Lamanites. The young general, with becoming prudence, then divided his army, one corps he left to protect Jershon, and with the remainder he advanced by rapid marches towards Manti, by the most direct route. On his arrival he at once mustered all the men who could bear arms, into his armies, to help in the defense of their rights and their liberties against the advancing foe. So rapid had been his movements and so prompt had been the response to his calls that when the Lamanites reached the neighborhood of the Sidon he was prepared for their coming.

The battle that was fought when the opposing armies met was one of the most stubborn and bloody in Nephite history. Never from the beginning had the Lamanites been known to fight with such exceeding great strength and courage. Time after time their hosts rushed upon the well ordered ranks of the Nephites, and notwithstanding the latter's armor they clove in their heads and cut off their arms. But the cost of these charges to their own numbers was terrible. The battle began at a hill called Riplah, and afterwards extended to both banks of the Sidon. At one time a lull took place in the carnage, and Moroni, who had no pleasure in the shedding of blood, made an offer of such terms of surrender as he considered the circumstances warranted. But Zarahemnah and other apostate captains of the Lamanite hosts rejected the offers and urged their troops to renewed resistance; so the battle was recommenced with unabated ferocity. At last the faith and valor of the Nephites prevailed; many of the Lamanites surrendered and agreed to a covenant of peace; even Zarahemnah himself, wounded and scalped by one of Moroni's body guard, to prevent the total annihilation of his armies, at last consented to the proposed terms and entered into the required covenant of peace. So great were the losses on both sides, especially of the Lamanites, that the dead were not numbered.

Thus ended the war, but not the Zoramite heresy, for we read in the history of later wars between the two nations of certain Lamanite captains being of the Zoramites. Foiled in their attempts to destroy their former brethren and to overthrow the Church of God, they still adhered to their false faith, and on every possible occasion made manifest their undying hatred to those whose only offense was, that they would not join them in their crimes, nor consent to the destruction of the liberties of the people.