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The Alma Family (A Book of Mormon Sketch)

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Abstract: This series presents a life sketch of the Alma family, many of whom became prophets. The life of Alma the Younger is compared to the Apostle Paul—both were called upon to repent and became great missionaries for the Lord. The prophecies of Alma are among the most numerous, important, and interesting in the Book of Mormon, and his inspired advice to his sons contains many doctrinal matters. Helaman the son of Helaman, grandson of Alma, carried on the work of righteousness in spite of the Gadianton robbers. His son Nephi was a great prophet who paved the way for the visit of Christ in America. Nephi's brother Lehi and Lehi's son Nephi were also great leaders. The first part covers Alma the Elder.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows."—MARK xiii, 8.

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THE ALMA FAMILY.

(A Book of Mormon Sketch).

BY ELDER GEO. REYNOLDS.

ALMA, THE ELDER.

Alma, the elder, the founder of the illustrious family whose history we are about to consider, was an Israelite of the tribe of Manasseh, a direct descendant of Nephi, the son of Lehi. He was born in the land of Lehi-Nephi, or regions contiguous, 173 years before the advent of the Redeemer, when Zeniff was king in that portion of the South American Continent. He is first introduced to the reader of the Book of Mormon, shortly before the martyrdom of the prophet Abinadi, as a young man associated with the apostate and iniquitous priesthood of King Noah, the son of Zeniff. Unlike his soul-seared associates, his heart was pricked at the warnings and teachings of Abinadi, for he knew that his denunciations of the prevailing wickedness were true. Inspired with this knowledge, he very courageously went to the tyrant Noah, and plead for the prophet's life. This action is a key to the

character of Alma; his zeal and courage in behalf of the truth and the right are amongst the most conspicuous characteristics of his after life. His appeal in behalf of the devoted servant of the Lord was ineffectual; the infuriated and besotted king would not hearken to Alma's appeal for justice and mercy, but to the contrary, he ordered the young advocate to be cast out from the midst of the people, and when Alma fled from his anger, he sent his servants to slay him. Alma, however, successfully hid from his pursuers, and, during his concealment, wrote the words he had heard Abinadi speak, which teachings now form one of the most important of the doctrinal portions of the Book of Mormon.

The power, the importance, the efficiency of Abinadi's teachings had sunk deep in the heart of Alma; he not only realized their truth, but he comprehended their saving value. The first lesson they impressed upon his mind was the necessity of his

immediate, unequivocal and thorough repentance, combined with unfaltering faith in the Savior that was to come to redeem mankind. In much tribulation he sought the Lord with all his powers of heart and mind, and the Great Father vouchsafed to him an abundant soul-satisfying answer. From this time Alma began to preach privately to the people the words of Gospel truth. To do this he received power from on High. We have no account of the time of his ordination, whether when a lad he had received the holy priesthood under the hands of some one of God's servants, before the days that Noah led his people into iniquity and corrupted the priesthood, or whether at this time he was ministered to by messengers from Heaven. Perhaps both; but the time and place is but a secondary consideration, the important fact remains, that he was commissioned by God to officiate in His name, which commission he ever after magnified to the salvation of his fellow-men.

Alma's preaching of God's holy word was not without fruit. Many received the truth with joy. These gathered to a convenient spot on the borders of the wilderness, but not far off their city. This place was called Mormon. It was admirably suited for a hiding-place, having been formerly infested by ravenous wild beasts, and as such was dreaded and avoided by the people. Near by was a thicket or forest of small trees, in which the Gospel believers could hide should they be pursued by the king's servants; here also was a fountain of pure water, most excellently adapted for the purposes of baptism. Here, in the midst of the luxuriance of tropical vegetation, and by the side of the inviting stream, did Alma proclaim the principles of everlasting life; here the people entered into covenant to serve the Great Father of all; here were the repentant believers baptized unto Christ, for the remission of sins, and here was the Church of the First Born organized, the holy priesthood ordained, and the work of God founded in power.

Alma, and another servant of the Lord, named Helam, were the first who were baptized. Together they

entered the water, and when there, Alma lifted his voice in prayer and besought the Lord for His Holy Spirit. This blessing having been bestowed, he proceeded with the sacred ordinance. Addressing his companion, 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." Alma having said these words, both he and Helam were buried in the water, from whence they came forth rejoicing, being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Others, even to the number of two hundred and four souls, followed Helam into the waters of baptism, but in all these cases Alma did not again bury himself beneath the liquid wave, but only the repentant believers. From this time we may date the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ in that land, and henceforth its members assembled for worship and testimony once a week.

Notwithstanding the care and circumspection with which the members of the Church acted, Noah soon discovered that there was some secret movement amongst his subjects, and by the help of his spies he discovered what was transpiring at Mormon. Making the tyrant's usual excuse, that the Christians were in rebellion against him, he sent his armies to capture and destroy them. But a greater than he stretched forth His arm to preserve His people. The Lord warned Alma of the king's intentions, and agreeably to the divine direction he assembled his people, some 450 souls, gathered his flocks and herds, loaded up his grain, provisions and other supplies, folded his tents, and departed into the untrodden wilderness.

Being strengthened by the Lord, notwithstanding that they were impeded by their flocks and families, the pilgrims traveled with sufficient rapidity to escape the pursuing forces

of king Noah, who were reluctantly compelled to return to the land of Nephi without having accomplished the object of the expedition. At the end of eight days Alma's company ceased their flight, and settled in a very beautiful and pleasant land where there was an abundant supply of pure water. We have no direct information with regard to the course taken by this colony, but it is evident from the details of their later history, that the new settlement lay somewhere between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla, though possibly somewhat aside from the most direct route. We think it far from improbable that it was situated at the head waters of some one of the numerous tributaries to the Amazon that take their rise on the eastern slopes of the Andes.

The colonists, whose industry is especially referred to by the inspired historian, immediately set to work to till the soil and build a city. The city, with the surrounding territory, they named the city and land of Helam. Now that they were established as a separate people, independent of both Lamanite and Nephite princes, they desired a form of temporal government and Alma for their king. This honor he declined. He rehearsed to them the history of their fathers; he pictured to them the infamies of king Noah's reign; he showed them how a wicked ruler could lead his subjects into all manner of evil, and how such things led to bondage; and, on the other hand, how much better it was to have the Lord as their King and Ruler, and to be guided by His servants under His inspiration. This counsel the people wisely accepted. Alma, though not bearing the title of king, acted as their leader, as their high priest and prophet, and as the mouthpiece of God to them whenever His holy word was graciously given them. In this happy state the people of Helam continued for some years, the Lord greatly prospering them and crowning their labors with abundant increase.

How long these blissful days lasted is not defined in the sacred record of the Book of Mormon; but as the Lord chastens those whom He loves, so, after a time, He permitted the

Lamanites to discover their secluded and happy home, and to bring them into bondage.

It so happened that a Lamanite army corps (that had been pursuing a body of fugitive Nephites under Limhi, the son of Noah, who had broken away from their bondage in the land of Nephi,) lost themselves in the wilderness. Whilst traveling hither and thither, not knowing which way to go, they came across a body of men who had once been the priests of king Noah, but who had fled from the face of their fellows to escape the just indignation their continued iniquities had aroused. These priests, at the instigation of Amulon, their leader, joined the Lamanite troops, and unitedly endeavored to get back to the land of Nephi. Whilst thus engaged, they wandered near the city of Helam.

When the people of Alma first perceived the approach of this body of men, they were engaged tilling the soil around their city, into which they immediately fled in great fear. In this perilous hour the faith and courage of Alma is again conspicuous. He gathered his people around him, called upon them to cast aside their unsaintly fears, and to remember the God who had ever delivered those who trusted in Him. The words of their leader had the desired effect; the people silenced their fears and called mightily upon the Lord to soften the hearts of the Lamanites, that they might spare their lives and those of their wives and little ones. Then with the assurance in their hearts that God would hearken unto their prayers (which was indeed so), Alma and his brethren went forth out of their city, and delivered themselves up to their former oppressors.

The Lamanites were in a dilemma, therefore they were profuse in promises. They were willing to grant the people of Helam their lives and liberty, if they would show them the way to the land of Nephi. Having obtained this information and reached home in safety, they broke their promises, and made Amulon the king over a wide district of country, including the land of Helam.

Alma and Amulon had known each

other in the days when they both belonged to king Noah's priesthood, and with the venom so often conspicuous in apostates, the latter soon commenced to persecute those who were faithful to the Lord. He placed task-masters over them, he imposed inhuman tasks upon them, and otherwise afflicted them grievously. In their affliction the people of Alma cried unremittingly to Heaven for deliverance, but even their prayers were an annoyance to their task-masters, and they were forbidden to lift up their voices in supplication to the Lord; but the tyrants could not prevent them from pouring out their hearts in secret to Him who knoweth the inmost thoughts of all men. He answered in His own way; He did not bring them immediate deliverance, but He strengthened their backs to bear the heavy burdens placed upon them, and strong in the faith of their ultimate release from this bondage, they toiled on with cheerfulness and patience.

In His due time the Lord delivered them. Having revealed His intentions to Alma, that the people might make ready, He caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanite guard and task-masters. The hour to strike for liberty had arrived, but it was obtained at a heavy cost, even at that of their homes and possessions. Under the guidance of Alma they departed into the wilderness. At eventide they rested in a beautiful valley which they called Alma, but they did not tarry there. The next day they pushed further into the wilderness, and continued their journey until they arrived at the land of Zarahemla, which they reached in twelve days travel from the valley of Alma. Their arrival amongst their Nephite kindred was the occasion of great joy both to them and to the people of king Mosiah, which joy was intensified by the fact that Limhi and his subjects had also arrived in safety at the home of their forefathers a short time previously, thus uniting all the Nephite people (except the few apostates with Amulon,) in one land and under one king.

Alma and his people must have dwelt in the land of Helam quite a

number of years, as he is called a young man at the time of Abinadi's martyrdom, and at the time he led his people into the land of Zarahemla, he was more than fifty years old, possibly several years older.*

On the arrival of Alma in the land of Zarahemla, king Mosiah gave him charge of the spiritual concerns of the Nephites. He became the high priest to the whole nation. In this capacity he gathered the people together, and in words of power and plainness he reminded them of their duties to Heaven. Nor had he unwilling hearts; numbers hearkened to his words, renewed their covenants with God, went down into the waters of baptism, and recommenced a life of godliness and faith. From city to city Alma bent his way, preaching, counseling, reproofing, comforting, instructing as the Holy Spirit led. Through these labors seven churches, or rather seven branches of the Church, were established in the land of Zarahemla, whilst great prosperity attended the faithful.

As years rolled by, the hearts of those who loved the Lord were pained by the unbelief and wickedness of the rising generation. Many of these not only rejected the truth themselves, but persecuted and reviled those who were righteous. This unholy crusade received great strength and assumed great effrontery owing to the fact that the four sons of king Mosiah, and the son of the high priest Alma, were their ringleaders. Vain were the exhortations of these holy men to their wayward sons; they rebelled against their fathers' admonitions, and set their authority at defiance. Great was Alma's grief. The Lord of Hosts was his only resource. In much sorrow, but with much faith, he earnestly and unceasingly prayed for his loved but rebellious son. The Lord heard his faithful servant's petitions, sent His angel to stay the young man's mad career

* Alma was born B.C. 173. Ammon and his company did not leave the land of Zarahemla, to endeavor to find the people of Zeniff, until B.C. 122, or 51 years after, and some time elapsed between this and Alma's deliverance and arrival at Zarahemla, probably two or three years.

and bring him to a knowledge of the truth. There, overpowered by the presence and message of the angel, he was struck dumb and paralyzed. When the news of this visitation reached his father, he was greatly rejoiced, for he knew it was the power of God. He gathered his people to witness the miracle, and assembled the priests that they might join him in prayer and fasting for his son's perfect restoration. Their prayers were heard; not only were the natural powers of the body restored, but he became a changed man, and from

henceforth was a valiant soldier of the cross—a help, a comfort, and a joy to his father, who was now beginning to feel the effects of advancing years.

Before his death, Alma, who had ordained his son a high priest, gave the latter charge concerning all the affairs of the Church, and then, full of years and honor, he departed this life. His death took place when he was eighty-two years old, it being 509 years from the time Lehi and his family left Jerusalem.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

SCHEME FOR THE COLONIZATION OF PALESTINE.

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All thinking Latter-day Saints, alive to the important character of passing events, look with a strong interest to circumstances that denote the near fulfillment of the prophecies of Joseph Smith. He predicted the gathering of the Jews to their own land, and the re-establishment of Jerusalem, by them, in the present generation. In consequence the following, from the *Christian Globe*, will be read with pleasure:

"One incident in connection with Captain Warren's discovery is interesting, and merits a passing notice. It was specially mentioned in an address on the subject by the Bishop of Sydney. During his excavations in the vicinity of Jerusalem, along the line of wall at a depth of nearly a hundred feet, he saw how the lower courses of stone were sunk into the bed rock, and there he discovered water flowing in a well-defined stream. The Jews, when they heard of and saw it, were delighted, for they still cherish the tradition that when water is found flowing for the third time at the foundations of the Holy City (which had been the case twice before Captain Warren's discovery) the Messiah was at hand. Whatever may be the origin or worth of the tradition, to say the least of it, this discovery is singularly coincident with it. Our object, however, is to call attention to a scheme which is being seriously proposed for

the colonization of Palestine, the details of which have been communicated to the *Jewish Chronicle* by a gentleman who received them from Mr. Lawrence Oliphant. The project appears to have been under consideration for some time past, and there is every reasonable prospect of its being carried out. In fact, it is said to have received the (unofficial) sanction of Lords Beaconsfield and Salisbury, and other influential personages in high quarters. If this be so, it will certainly be one of the most remarkable changes that could be imagined in relation to the future of the Holy Land, and will constitute a powerful link in the chain of evidence that supports the truth of prophetic inspiration. Mr. Oliphant stated that he had submitted a scheme to the Turkish Government for the colonization of the fertile and unoccupied tract of land lying to the east of the Jordan, now sparsely inhabited by tribes of nomad Arabs; this tract he had visited and examined, consisting of the Land of Gideon and of the northern portion of the plains of Moab, which formed the former heritage of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. "The country," he says, "is far superior in productive capacity to the territory on the west of the Jordan, the mountains of Gilead rising to a height of upwards of 4,000 feet above the level of the sea, and being heavily timbered, well