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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 ninth part covers Nephi, the son of Helaman.

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).

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NEPHI, THE SON OF HELEMAN THE YOUNGER.

In Nephi we have one of the greatest prophets that ever trod the earth, or to whom the God of our salvation revealed His glorious will. He lived during the greater portion of the first century before Christ, and disappeared from the knowledge of mankind but a short time before the advent of the Messiah as a babe in Bethlehem. He is first referred to in the Book of Mormon (B.C. 44) as the elder of Heleman's two sons, Lehi being the younger. These two brothers appear to have been inseparable during their life; they are almost always mentioned as associated in the great and oft-times perilous labors of the ministry undertaken for the salvation of either Nephites or Lamanites. We have no information with regard to the time of Nephi's birth, but when his father died, in the year B.C. 39, he succeeded him as chief judge, the

duties of which office he filled with wisdom and justice for about nine years, when, owing to the wickedness of the people, he resigned that office, and Cezoran was chosen by the people in his stead (B.C. 30).

The years that Nephi judged his people are some of the darkest in Nephite history. Owing to their great pride and iniquity, the Lord left them to themselves, and they became weak like unto the Lamanites, man for man. When war was declared, the latter, being much the more numerous, carried everything before them. In vain the Nephites struggled for their homes and their liberties. They were forced back by the hordes of the Lamanites from city to city, from land to land. Manti, Gideon, Cumeni, Moroni, and even Zarahemla fell. Nor did the war end when the blood-thirsty Lamanites held high carnival in the midst of its towers and palaces. Onward swept the invading host; backward, yet

backward, fled the defenders of the Commonwealth, and backward they continued until every town and city, every tower and fort from Melek to Moroni, from Manti to Bountiful, were filled with the savage, half-disciplined, dark-skinned warriors of Laman. Not a place could be found in the whole southern continent where the soldiers of the Nephites successfully held their ground. Zarahemla with its hallowed associations, its glorious temples, where the daily sacrifice was unceasingly offered, its proud palaces, its luxurious homes, its courts of justice, where the chief judge sat in the magnificence of almost kingly authority to administer the law—this their queen city, the seat of their government, the head centre of their civilization, the home of their highest priesthood, was in the hands of their merciless, vandal-like foes. Nor had the danger stopped: with hurried hands they built a line of defence across the Isthmus of Panama from sea to sea, for the unnumbered hosts of their conquerors were still pushing northward. This line of fortifications was effectual, it stopped the roll of the barbaric tide northward, and the Lamanite commanders rested with the conquest of a continent. From Panama to Terra del Fuego they held undisputed sway.

These richly deserved misfortunes brought the Nephites partly to their senses—they began to repent. Taking advantage of this change in the state of their feelings, Nephi, Lehi, and their general, Moronihah, preached energetically, and uttered many prophecies concerning what would most assuredly come upon them if they did not amend their ways. After a time Moronihah felt that they had sufficiently humbled themselves for the Lord to measurably be with them, and he once more ventured to lead his warriors against the Lamanites. Step by step they regained their former possessions, until all the most northern settlements had been re-occupied. Further than this Moronihah dared not venture, the conduct of the people was not sufficiently reformed, they had not repented in fullness of heart and purpose. So he waited in the hope of a better and brighter day,

when the people would have thoroughly turned from all their besetting sins, and when he, in the strength of the God of Israel, could lead them on to victory. Thus Zarahemla still remained in the hands of the foe.

When Nephi retired from the judgment seat, it was with the intention of devoting his entire time to the preaching of the Gospel. He associated his brother Lehi with him, and commencing at the most northerly settlement on the southern continent—Bountiful—he journeyed and preached throughout all the land southward in the possession of the Nephites. From thence the two brothers passed onwards to Zarahemla, where they found many Nephite dissenters, to whom they proclaimed the word of God in great power. Numbers of these confessed their sins, were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to their brethren to repair, if possible, the wrongs they had done, and make such restitution as lay in their power. Numbers of the Lamanites also received the truth gladly, insomuch that eight thousand of them were baptized in Zarahemla and the regions round about.

From Zarahemla, Nephi and Lehi proceeded south to the land of Nephi, where they were captured by an army of the Lamanites, and thrust into the very same prison in which the sons of King Mosiah were beforetime confined. Here they were treated with great inhumanity by their savage captors; food was denied them, and it was decided to kill them. When the officers commissioned with the carrying out of this cruel decision arrived at the prison, they found the two prophets encircled about as if by a pillar of fire. This sight filled them with awe; they durst not attempt to execute their orders; they held back from laying hands on the prisoners, lest they should be burned; but they also observed that the two brothers stood unhurt and unfrightened in the midst of the ascending flames. Emboldened by the trepidation of the Lamanite officials, Nephi and Lehi stood forth and explained to them that it was by the power of God that this marvelous thing had happened;

that it had been manifested that they might learn that no one could harm them, and that they were the servants of the Most High, and His almighty arm shielded them. Nor was this all: a sudden earthquake shook the ground, the prison walls tottered to their foundations, a pall of thick darkness covered all whom curiosity or other motives had gathered to the prison. The unburning flame, the tottering walls, the quivering earth, the impenetrable cloud of blackness, all conspired to fill their hearts with solemn fear and awful dread. They realized the almighty power of God; they were filled with the sense of their own abject insignificance. A voice, the voice of one whom they knew not, sounded in their affrighted ears, once, and again, yea, a third time, and each time that the voice came it was followed by the trembling of the earth and the shaking of the prison walls. All nature quivered at the presence of the Majesty on High, whilst the heavy, palpable, impenetrable darkness still enshrouded them. From above the voice descended, it was outside the cloud, its tones came not to their quaking hearts with the roar of the pealing thunder, nor was it like the tumultuous flow of angry, raging waters, but it was "a still voice of perfect mildness," almost a whisper, that pierced to their inmost souls. That voice was the voice of the mighty God of Jacob, and He called upon all those who heard Him to repent, and to do His servants no ill, and with the third repetition of this command were added marvelous words of salvation that cannot be uttered by men. And because of the thick pall of darkness that enveloped them, and the fearful dread that filled their hearts, none durst move; fear, astonishment, apprehension of what was to come, had riveted each to the spot on which he stood.

Now among the crowd was a Nephite dissenter, an apostate from the true Church, named Aminadab. This man happening to turn his face in the direction where the two disciples stood, beheld that their faces shone with a glorious light, and that they were conversing with some one who appeared to be above them, for their

eyes were turned heavenward. Aminadab drew the attention of those who surrounded him to this glorious appearance, and the spell that bound them was sufficiently removed to enable them to turn towards the prisoners and to become witnesses of the fact also. "What do all these things mean?" they anxiously inquired. "They do converse with the angels of God," answered Aminadab. "What shall we do that this cloud of darkness may be removed," was their next question. "You must repent and cry unto the Voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ," he replied. They did cry unto God with all the energy that their terrifying surroundings inspired, and so continued to supplicate until the cloud was dispersed, when, to their great surprise, they discovered that they also were entombed in a pillar of living fire. Yet this fire did not hurt them, it did not singe their garments, it did not consume the prison walls, but their terror was swept away, and they were filled with a joy that was unspeakable, for the Holy Spirit of God filled their souls, and they broke forth in marvelous words of praise and rejoicing. Again a pleasant searching whisper reached their gladdened ears. It said unto them, "Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my well-beloved, who was from the foundation of the world." Now there were about 300 souls who heard and saw these things, and they cast up their eyes unto heaven, which was opened to their vision, and holy angels came down and ministered unto them.

The tidings of this glorious appearing were quickly spread near and far in the lands where the Lamanites dwelt, and so powerful was the testimony and so great were the evidences, that the major portion of the people believed, repented and obeyed the Gospel. Then, like all true Saints, they manifested the sincerity of their repentance by works of restitution; they laid down their weapons of war, they cast aside their false traditions, their hatred gave place to love, and they restored to the Nephites Zarahemla and the other lands they had taken from them (B.C. 30). So great was the reformation in their character,

so radical was the change in their habits, that they soon exceeded the Nephites in faith and works of righteousness. It is a lamentable fact that at this time many of the latter had become hardened, impenitent and grossly wicked. But there were those who still remained faithful in the truth, whose hearts greatly rejoiced at the conversion of their former foes. This joy was, the next year, greatly increased by the arrival of many missionaries from among the hitherto darkened and benighted people. The tables were turned; the two races had changed places; Laman was

teaching Nephi the ways of holiness and the law of the Lord. And God was abundantly with them, His matchless power attended them; they opened their mouths, and He filled them with inspired words of truth. The Holy Spirit sealed their utterances, and many of the Nephites believed. Nor were Nephi and Lehi idle, they were sounding the Gospel trumpet, long and loud, in lordly Zarahemla and its tributary districts, and then, with many of the Lamanite priesthood, they proceeded to the land northward.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

JOSEPH SMITH'S PROPHETIC CALLING.

Was Joseph Smith an authorized prophet of God? This is a question of momentous importance. Like every matter involving the weal or woe of mankind, the answer should not be given in haste. The evidence should be carefully scanned and weighed before a decision is reached. He who jumps at conclusions regarding men and things, whether for or against, without a scrutinizing examination, is liable to err in judgment. Such a person is likely also to be guilty of injustice. In addition to the vital interests involved, that kindly liberality that should characterize the behavior of man to his fellow, requires that a plea in behalf of the divinity of the mission of Joseph Smith should be candidly and impartially considered.

The popular voice is against the validity of the claim of Joseph Smith to being a true prophet. Public sentiment on such a subject has no force. If it have any bearing upon it at all it must be favorable, because of precedents. If popular repudiation is evidence against the genuineness of Joseph Smith's claim, it would be equally sensible to recognize its potency as directed against the rejected Redeemer of the world, whose ignominious death and sufferings were effected by the tide of the popular will. The same may be as readily applied to nearly the whole of the

holy prophets since the world began, against whom the waves of popular feeling, as a rule, surged like the waters of an angry sea. Then we will consider the evidence of the sentiment of the multitude, as directed against the claim of the prophet Joseph, effectually demolished.

The prevailing idea regarding prophets is that, in the language of the generality of so-called Christian teachers, "they are not needed now. They were merely required to establish the Church of Christ in its incipency." Of course some excuse must be advanced for the non-existence of divinely commissioned and inspired men in the various churches. It would not do to say such men are needed, because the question as to why they do not have them would immediately arise. However, we think it is not only an easy matter to show, scripturally, that such men are not only needed, but that the existence of the true Church of Christ without them is an absolute impossibility.

We direct the reader to the 4th chap. of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. The 8th verse says: "When he (Christ) ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." Now read from the 11th to the 13th verse, inclusive: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and