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Where Did Alma Get His Authority?

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Abstract: This article explains that, since there were no members of the tribe of Levi among the Nephites, the Nephites officiated by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood rather than the Aaronic. It concludes that Alma received the priesthood before Noah became king and remained righteous enough to retain this authority, although he immersed himself while baptizing Helam as part of the repentance process.

"WHERE DID
ALMA
GET HIS AUTHORITY?"

QUESTION: *"Where did Alma get his authority: All we can find is that he received it from God, but there is no detail, and we are left to*

ANSWER: We should take into consideration in the study of the Book of Mormon the fact that it is an abridgment taken from the records or history that had been kept by the prophets among the Nephites. Therefore, many of the details are lacking. This is equally true of the history of Israel as it has come down through the years to us in the Bible. We are left to accept the fact that Lehi, when he left Jerusalem, held divine authority and that this divine power was handed down from generation to generation until the time of the visitation of the Savior. Moreover, while the detail is lacking, the evidence is very clear that the Melchizedek Priesthood was possessed by the Nephites. There were none of the tribe of Levi among them, therefore it was by virtue of the Melchizedek Priesthood that they officiated. There are many passages in the Book of Mormon in which reference is given to the Holy Priesthood which they held, not the Aaronic Priesthood. We should also remember that the record that we have received is, an abridgment, and therefore many of the details are of necessity missing. Moreover, we are informed that many important things have been withheld from us because of the hardness of our hearts and our unwillingness, as members of the Church, to abide in the covenants or seek for divine knowledge.

In the case of Alma and his priesthood, we are left to surmise that he legally and divinely received it

YOUR QUES- TION

ANSWERED BY
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wonder if it was before he was baptized. We are confused about the whole matter and would appreciate any information you can give us."

before the days of King Noah. We read that Zeniff, the father of Noah, was a righteous man. Alma evidently received the priesthood in the days of Zeniff, and at no time did he fully accept the teachings nor with full purpose follow the counsels and procedure of Noah and his wicked priests. It was Alma who was deeply touched at the scathing denunciation of the Prophet Abinadi. Moreover it was Alma who recorded them, for he believed thoroughly in what Abinadi had declared, and he turned from whatever transgression he had committed and set forth with a repentant spirit to gather together all those who were willing to accept the teachings of the martyred prophet. In order to save their

lives, Alma and those who followed him were forced to flee into the wilderness. In relation to this, Elder George Reynolds in his valuable work, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol. II, has written:

"Alma wrote down all the words he had heard the prophet speak. When Abinadi was condemned to death, Alma became his defender, and, thereafter championed his cause. He went to King Noah and plead for Abinadi's life, that it be spared. We may assume that Alma, from this time forth, kept, or caused to be kept, the records of the Nephites in the Land of Lehi-Nephi; also that he, in like manner, kept the record of the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah."

Just at what time Alma received the priesthood is not clearly stated, but we may presume that it occurred before Noah came to the throne. Moreover, we must also conclude that Alma at no time truly entered into the wickedness of this wicked king. To Alma the plea made by the martyred Abinadi pierced his heart, and, believing, he wrote down the words of the martyred prophet and went forth among the people gathering all who were willing to believe. Because of the edict of the king, Alma and his followers were forced to flee to a private and remote spot which they named the "Waters of Mormon." In this secluded place Alma baptized all who truly repented of their sins. The first person baptized was a man named Helam. As Alma baptized Helam he also immersed himself, no doubt feeling the need of repentance, for the spirit of humility was upon him. As he baptized Helam 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.

"And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit." (Mosiah 18:13-14.)

The question is: Where did Alma get his authority? Evidently he obtained it when he received the priesthood, which through his repentance he had not lost. There can be no serious question in relation to his authority, for it is written:

"And it came to pass that Alma; having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (*Ibid.*, 18:18.)

