Type: Magazine Article

Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter IX

Author(s): Jesse N. Washburn
Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 51, No. 9 (September 1948)
Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Page(s): 566–567, 603–605

Abstract: This series is a novel based on the fictional character Mulek, an inhabitant of the city of Zarahemla during the war between Amalickiah and Moroni. The ninth part consists of chapter IX.

MULEK of Zarahemla

By J. N. WASHBURN

SYNOPSIS

MULEK loved Zarahemla, the city of his forefathers, where two factions were striving for power, one ruled by Amalickiah, a man of tremendous powers and winning manners, who had caused a rupture in the country, and one by Moroni, young chief captain of the armies of the Nephites, who went everywhere, encouraging, instructing, pleading with the people to unite in the country's defense. Accustomed to receiving the adulation of the people, Mulek was consumed with jealousy at his fall from favor. In order to call attention to himself he had mocked the priests of the church and allied himself with Amalickiah. Then, to win their praise he decided to support Moroni's projects. Mulek was eager to win the favor of the girl, Zorah, niece of Amram, a boatmaker. He devised ways of meeting her, but Zorah was too intent on the political unrest to be interested in him, and was lavish in her praise of Moroni, which added to Mulek's envy. He determined in some way to win Zorah's approval. When, therefore, one of his friends approached him with the idea that he become king—even as his forefathers had been kings—he entertained the thought. A general election was granted by Pahoran, chief judge, to determine which kind of government was the more desirable. In the voting the king-men lost, at the very moment when Amalickiah led the Lamanites against the land. When the king-men were asked to support the government, they refused. Beside himself with worry, Pahoran sent word to Moroni, in the land of Bountiful, to come posthaste to the defense of Zarahemla. With great loss of life and devastation, the king-men were vanquished. Mulek, fighting to the last, was finally disarmed and dragged off to prison. While in prison he learned of the death of his mother, which aroused him to a sense of reality again. He amazed himself in the distress he felt at the advance of the Lamanites. Finally he called for a lawyer and asked whether he might not be freed to fight on the side of the Nephites. His request, not unnaturally, was denied. The prophet Shiblon called on Mulek, leaving him a copy of the Book of Mormon to read.

"You need no longer pity me, for after a manner of speaking you are my prisoners, and I a free man."

CHAPTER IX

MULEK lowered the record to his knees and raised his head, his brow wrinkled in study and perplexity.

For a long time he had done little besides read the scripture left him by Shiblon. He read at first from no stronger motive than curiosity and the need for something to occupy his mind. He skipped about from place to place, examining a paragraph here, reading a passage there.

He was delighted with the allegory of the olive tree. He read again and again the psalms of Nephi. He found it difficult to stay away from the words of Isaiah. He enjoyed the sermons of Alma, Jacob, Mosiah. For a long time, however, he read as a literary man. What he perused was the work of man, not the word of God. He was a man with an active mind seeking relief from the sameness of his existence.

Gradually, however, he began to associate himself with what he read, to feel a spiritual response, an uplift of heart. Much of what he read confused and puzzled him. At such times the bewilderment he felt, he told himself, was that of an eagle poised in the air, motionless. It was not rest, not ease, but intentness that at some time must have an end. It was not long before he came to feel as if the words he read had been written to him, for him, alone.

He was troubled. He examined himself. He had lived every hour to its last moment of pleasure. He had sought the good things of the world as they had come along. Was it possible they were not enough? What of today when those joys were denied? What of a possible tomorrow when they might likewise not be available? Was there nothing permanent, nothing that carried over? His friends had deserted him. His wealth was powerless to give him any substantial satisfaction. His accomplishments impressed no one, himself least of all.

FOR DAYS he pondered the problem: if he were set free tomorrow, what would he do? He did not know. But suppose there were more, much more, to a different kind of life, a sort of pleasure he had never known or cultivated? What preparation had he for its enjoyment? What kind of preparation was needed?

When he had exhausted the resources of his own experience, he returned to the record, which he read eagerly, for the little he understood had unquestioned value. The

felicity of the language, the profoundness of the thoughts roused in him responses that he liked even while they gave him real disquiet. He often felt the urge to reach out as if an emptiness moved him. Mulek had become more than ever before a stranger to himself.

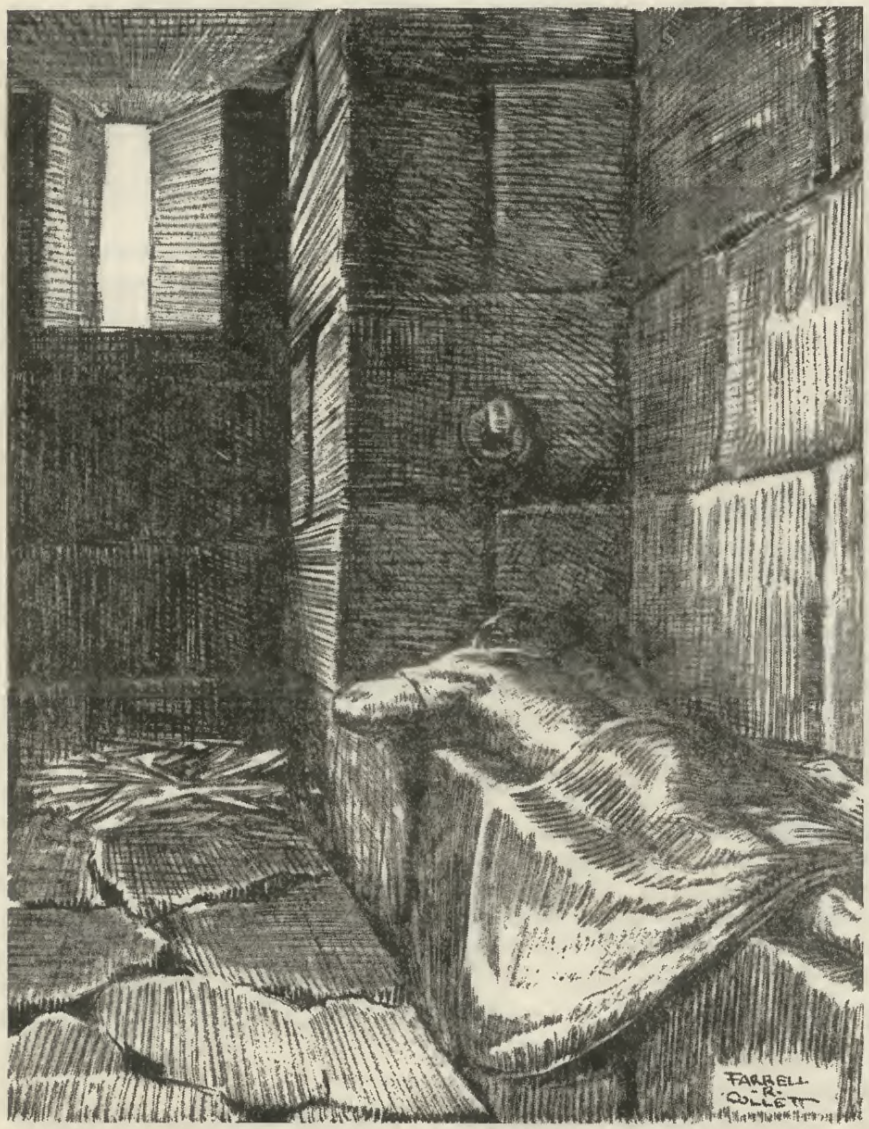
By turns, as his strength returned, he would find himself planning a vigorous defense against the time of his trial. These bursts of fine enthusiasm would give way to gloom, to foreboding; these, to indifference, to physical freedom.

At times he rebelled against the unfairness that kept him confined. True, he was an offender; he deserved punishment, but was every offender being punished? Were there not wicked men, and in plenty, even now walking the streets without hindrance? Then loneliness would overwhelm him, and he would throw himself upon his rude bed and weep like a child.

Again, he would indulge in daydreams, building airy castles over which he would preside as the giver of good gifts. He would distribute his means among the poor and have his name blessed for his benefactions.

By the hour, he would stand before his little window, looking out upon the city. He would look with pride upon the splendid houses he could see, upon the people passing, his people, the robust matron with her daily purchase, the young maid in her finery. A ragged and barefoot child would touch him to the heart. A blind beggar moving slowly by would bring the tears to his eyes.

"Then loneliness would overwhelm him, and he would throw himself upon his rude bed and weep like a child."



His favorite view was to stand looking out over the housetops to the temple. The building seemed to draw him. Frequently he raised his arms to rest not so much his tired body as his spirit, at once questing and confined. One day it came to him in a flash that, locked in his small room, he had seen more and farther than he had ever seen before.

And always he returned to his record, and to him in time came the conviction that more than anything else he desired to be saved, from just what he could not say; from fear, from doubt, and from the vast emptiness that lay like a pain on his heart, from what more he did not know.

Certain passages that he read always puzzled and at the same time fascinated him. One, particularly, held him by the hour:

"And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.

"And they have brought forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth.

"And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave command that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.

"And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

"And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin."

Mulek wished that he could have some explanation of this passage and longed for another visit from Shiblon.

(*Continued on page* 603)

Mulek of Zarahemla

(*Continued from page 567*)

MULEK remained in his prison house. The moon came and went; the sun fed the hungry earth day after endless day. Battles were fought and battles won. Men began to realize at last that the nation was indeed fighting beyond question for its very existence. This realization, together with the knowledge of the incredible cost of the struggle, changed the general outlook on life. Instead of looking for enjoyment in possessions, men sought it in themselves and in other people. They learned to enjoy life with less and less or not to enjoy it at all.

All this was true in even greater degree in the case of Mulek than with others, locked as he was within four walls, and with interminable hours to be spent. He came to enjoy his book of scripture, to need it more than he needed food and drink. He literally lived with it. Yet it troubled him. There were so many things that he did not understand. It was, consequently, with a great deal of joy that one day he heard the voice of Shiblon in the passage leading to his cell. He was weary with the endless work of his ministry, but his eyes were bright and eager, and he greeted Mulek almost tenderly.

"How art thou, friend?"

"This long time I have waited for you," the prisoner made answer. "God has been good to bring you to me at this time."

Shiblon, without waste of time, asked in particular concerning the welfare of his friend, and then in response to the latter's questions reported the doings of the outside world.

"Now, I perceive that something troubles thee," the prophet observed. "Is it aught that I can resolve?"

Mulek told of his endless searching of the word of God and of his joy in its message.

"But," he declared, "there is much that is not clear to me, much particularly concerning the coming of one who is called the Christ. I do not well understand this."

"I shall try to explain this matter about which thou hast inquired. When Adam and Eve, our first parents, were placed in the Garden of Eden, they were given two commandments. In order to keep the

(*Continued on page 604*)

MULEK OF ZARAHEMLA

(*Continued from page* 603)

greater and become parents of a race, they had to break the lesser. By breaking the lesser commandment they brought death upon their offspring, and all men since them, as well as upon themselves. They brought upon all men mortality without which they could not have enjoyed the blessings of earth life.

"IN ORDER, therefore, that those who had become mortal might become again immortal, might regain heaven after having gained earth, after having known the blessings and beauties of life in the flesh, it became necessary for the Son of God to die as to the flesh. In this manner the demands of justice, of mortality, and of immortality were satisfied."

"Then, surely, this Son of God brings a great gift to men?"

"Nay, my friend," Shiblon replied, "here is a truth that I will impart unto thee. This salvation of which the scripture speaks is twofold. It is one part salvation from death, as I have just explained. But some would doubtless be better to remain dead and not to live again at all. For who would choose to live in torment, in regret, in remorse? We have no choice in the matter of immortality, however. It is a gift of God passed upon all. But to what purpose? This immortality doth not in itself bring happiness. To some it will bring nothing but despair."

"How, then, shall any have happiness?"

"By keeping the commandments of God."

Mulek arose, his face drawn with serious thought.

"How shall any be happy?" He spread his arms wide in an eloquent gesture. "The world is full of wickedness, of anger, of pride and hatred, of jealousy, of lasciviousness, greed, murder. There is none who is without sin. How shall any be saved?"

"By accepting Christ who is to come. He forgives the sins of those who repent and sin no more." Mulek remained thoughtful for a long time.

"Had I a hundred lives," he said then, "I should not spend one of them again in senseless and selfish pleasures but would strive with all my heart to serve God all my days and put the enemies of mankind under my feet."

"Thus doth salvation come."

"What is there to hinder me from partaking of this salvation?"

"Nothing but thine own self."

Mulek smiled a tender, wistful smile and sighed with unimaginable content.

Then Shiblon departed.

Not many days afterward Mulek startled his guard by asking for permission to visit the temple grounds. The guard, in some uncertainty, went to the governor of the prison. That official too was troubled and knew not what to say. He in turn inquired of Corianton, the younger brother of Helaman and Shiblon, and himself a sinner in earlier years. He, out of his wide experience and his sympathy for men, gave an answer, "Grant any repentant soul access to the holy place."

The governor of the prison was satisfied with this, but he still had a practical problem. Mulek solved this himself.

"Grant that two men, my guards, fully armed, may walk with me to the temple grounds. Have no fear that I shall try to escape, however. It is not into the world I go but rather out of it. There is no escape for me but in Christ. I gladly give you my word." The governor agreed to this proposal.

The three men walked the street, attracting no undue attention. If anyone recognized Mulek through his beard, there was no sign of it.

When they reached the portals of the temple yard, the prisoner said, "Await me here. I shall return in good time."

He entered one of the great buildings. His first impression was one of peace and perfect quiet. There were also coolness and freshness, particularly coolness. What a breeze there was after the stifling prison house! He breathed deeply again and again, taking in such floods of precious air that he became slightly dizzy.

As his eyes became accustomed to the shadowy interior, he was astonished at the size of the structure, the height of it. He knew it intimately without, every stone and

joint, having played about it since boyhood, but he had never realized that the interior was so vast. How men had lifted those giant stones upon each other he could not tell. How high and big they were!

A feeling of awe came over him, and of pride in the knowledge that men, men of his own people had done this thing! Then his enthusiasm was put to shame when he remembered that he had contributed nothing to it or to any other good endeavor. He had built nothing.

He moved about from corridor to corridor, reveling in the coolness, the quietness. He wished he might never have to leave.

After a few moments he found himself standing before a pulpit, and a sense of lightness, of unreality came over him. How long he remained there he did not know.

Guilt rested upon him like torment, the guilt of a life of evil, a selfish life of slothfulness and false ambition. The realization of it stole about him, and through him, like water seeping up and out again through the sand. The sense of shame seemed to penetrate the very tissues of his body, through the fabric of his soul. The pressure became so intense that it threatened to suffocate him. He felt a wave of gloom and despair settling down upon him.

Then, just as he felt himself about to be overcome, the oppression left him like the substance of a horrible dream, and lightness and peace came again to him, like dawn upon a sick world. The blackness disappeared.

Mulek looked about, almost with a sense of exaltation. His forehead was cold as marble. He was trembling, but he was happy. He turned and walked directly to the door.

When he and his guards reached the prison again, Mulek spoke.

"I thank you, my friends, for this kindness. You need no longer pity me, for after a manner of speaking you are the prisoners; I, the free man. Give me leave now to return to my chamber."

After he had gone, one of the guards, staring after him, made a waving motion with a finger, a circular motion, at the side of his head and winked at the other.

"Poor fellow," he said sympathetically, "his long confinement has unsettled his senses."

(*To be concluded*)

Be sure to read the opening chapter of

THE FORT ON THE FIRING LINE

October ERA