

MOSIAH 18–24

John W. Welch Notes



Overview

These seven chapters trace the main events that followed in the immediate aftermath of the infamous execution of Abinadi. They involve four interwoven storylines about: (1) King Noah and his priests led by Amulon, (2) the priest Alma and his followers who fled from Noah, (3) the Lamanites who controlled the land of Nephi and sought revenge for the capture of twenty-four of their daughters, and (4) Limhi who succeeded his father Noah as king, and the courageous Gideon who was the main military officer under Limhi.

In particular, Alma and his followers formed a covenant group that suffered in servitude under Amulon, but eventually were delivered by the Lord and safely reached Zarahemla (chapters 18, 23–24). King Noah was killed by his own priests, fulfilling the prophecy of Abinadi (chapter 19). The priests, in exile, carried off twenty-four Lamanite daughters, and the Lamanites attacked and put Limhi and his people under their domination (chapters 20–21), but Limhi, Gideon, and their people were aided by the Lord and managed to escape and find their way back to Zarahemla (chapter 22).

The style of these chapters is indirect narrative, employing 57 times the rhetorical marker “and it came to pass.” But these chapters also include eight direct quotations: Alma’s words when he was performing baptisms (Mosiah 18:8–10, 12–13), official conversations between King Limhi and Gideon (20:14–22; 22:3–8), Alma’s refusal to be made king (23:7–14), and three statements of comfort and guidance given by the voice of the Lord (24:13–14, 16–17, 23).

And thus, the entire book of Mosiah can be seen as one large chiasmic structure, and one of its overall themes is how much trouble kingship can cause. In addition, in the midst of all this coming and going, many important doctrinal and personal lessons can be learned. In Mosiah 18–24, these spiritual lessons include the critical need for righteous political leadership, heeding the words of the prophets of God, making covenants, obeying the commandments, working together in unity and charity, and faithfully enduring burdens by trusting in the Lord.

Mosiah 18

Mosiah 18:6–17 — Priesthood Authority

A contrast is immediately seen at this point in the book of Mosiah between the improper uses of authority by King Noah and his priests, as opposed to the righteous use of priesthood authority by Alma.

Some have wondered exactly how Alma the Elder received his priesthood authority. We are not completely told. In one sense, he would have been ordained as a young man to be a priest of King Noah. Perhaps he was additionally given authority at some previous point by Abinadi; and, although completely speculative, that idea would explain why Alma was prepared and willing to defend Abinadi in court and to record and teach his words so precisely.

Alma plainly stated that he had “authority from the Almighty God” to baptize (Mosiah 18:13), so he may even have been ordained by an angel, as was Joseph Smith, or was visited by the angel of the Lord, as was King Benjamin. Whatever the case, Alma knew what needed to be done to organize a covenant community to help his people have “the Spirit of the Lord,” that God might grant to them “eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world” (18:13).

Did Alma hold the Melchizedek Priesthood or the Aaronic Priesthood? Alma was clearly not from the tribe of Levi, and so he did not officiate under the Levitical line of authority. Alma the Younger was clearly aware of the importance of the great high priest Melchizedek (see Alma 13:17) and of being ordained unto the high priesthood within the holy order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father (Alma 13:6–9). So, it would certainly appear that Alma had received the Melchizedek priesthood in some form, although that holy order of priests was organized at that time differently than it would be when Christ would come and would ordain priesthood holders to distinct offices, particularly as he did with his twelve apostles in the Old World or his twelve

disciples in the New. Additionally, Alma worked closely with the king. He obtained permission from King Mosiah to “establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla,” as well as “power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:18–19), along with jurisdiction to judge cases of covenant breaking by church members (Mosiah 26:12).

Whatever the administrative details may have been, Alma knew what needed to be done to organize the Church. Appropriate leadership, proper authority, and correctly performed ordinances produce a trust that encourages participants to honor their covenants. Alma the Elder demonstrated these characteristics.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Does the Book of Mosiah Talk So Much About Priesthood Authority?”](#) (Mosiah 23:17),” *KnoWhy* 101 (May 17, 2016).

Daniel C. Peterson, [“Priesthood in Mosiah,”](#) in *Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 5, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 187–210.

Mosiah 18:13 Authority to Baptize

The Nephites recognized the importance of having the authority from God in order to baptize and to act as an agent of God in creating a binding covenant relationship (Mosiah 18:10; 21:35). Mosiah 18:13 says, “And when [Alma the Elder] had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: “Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God.”

Conversely, in Mosiah 21:33–34, the people of Limhi, who had been taught by Ammon, desired to be baptized, but “Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore, they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord.” They were baptized later by Alma, who had received permission from King Mosiah to set up churches and ordain priests.

It was important then, as it is now, that baptism and other ordinances be performed by one having authority from God through a person holding the appropriate keys. Jesus would specifically give this power to his twelve disciples as his first organizational step in 3 Nephi 11:21–28.

In early Christianity, one finds similar expressions. Ephesians 4:5 says, “One [eternal] Lord, one [true] faith, one [authorized] baptism,” and Hebrews 5:4 says, “No man taketh this honor [of being able to administer in priesthood ordinances] on himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” All this makes it clear that it is important to receive the

ordinance of baptism in the correct way and as administered by one holding divine authority.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[What Does the Book of Mormon Teach about the Priesthood?](#) (Mosiah 23:17),” *KnoWhy* 289 (March 20, 2017).

Daniel C. Peterson, “[Authority in the Book of Mosiah](#),” *The FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006), 149–185.

Mosiah 18:8–13 Living the Covenant

Alma’s eight baptismal covenants were:

1. coming into the fold of God,
2. being called his people,
3. bearing one another’s burdens,
4. mourning with those who mourn,
5. comforting those who need comfort,
6. being a witness of God at all times,
7. serving God until you are dead, and
8. keeping his commandments.

When partaking of the sacrament, modern Latter-day Saints do well to reflect on this list of baptismal covenants. Keeping these covenants is not simply a matter of luck. Baptism sets a person into the fold of God. A fold is a group, a tight community that lives together in unity, enjoys being together, and sustains one another. Baptized saints, old and new, take upon themselves the name of Christ and are called “his people,” as in Mosiah 5. Once this name has been taken, it is indelibly, permanently a part of the being. The baptized are expected to bear one another’s burdens, mourn with those that mourn, and be a witness, serving God until death.

What can people do to change and to do a better job in keeping the covenant of baptism? Live as an example. Walk the walk. Keep the covenants consciously. The Lord can then offer blessings. To those who honor their baptismal commitments, the Lord promises to redeem them, number them with those of the first resurrection, give eternal life, and “pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon them” (Mosiah 18:12–13).

Mosiah 18:23 — 29 Alma’s Community, Called the Church of Christ

Alma the Elder’s people built a strong religious community that emphasized five basic practices:

1. keeping the Sabbath day holy (23:23),

2. meeting for worship and instruction as often as in their power (23:25),
3. thanking God every day (23:23),
4. freely sharing their substance according to their respective abilities and needs (23:27), and
5. having leaders who did not depend on the people for their support (23:26).

How do these five practices create and build a strong sense of community?

First, Alma commanded them to keep the Sabbath day holy. Why was this listed first? When the Lord is put first in our lives, a level of outward obedience is demonstrated, and that choice keeps the covenant in memory the rest of the week.

Second, keeping the Sabbath day holy leads to community building. Meeting for worship as often as possible and spending time ministering unto each other builds a strong sense of community. Partaking of the sacrament enables covenant renewal. Sabbath-keeping also builds family love. It excludes usual play or work. The children who are taught this path of righteousness eventually find it refreshing, and that feeling magnifies itself as they become parents.

Third, thanking God every day also adds to group cohesiveness. How does it do that? For one thing, sincere thanking is a way of praising, and praising others reinforces group values and the joy of belonging.

Fourth, every act of sacrifice or obedience also builds community. Sharing substance, as well as time and positive memorable experiences contribute to a sense of mutual belonging, as does also shared worship and sharing of testimonies of principles that are loving and fair.

As a small, cohesive covenant community, it was natural for Alma's people to embrace the principle of righteously supporting the poor. Of Limhi's administration, Mosiah 21:17 similarly says: "Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain." This point may well shed light on the story of their escape of the people of Limhi (chapter 22). They were blessed because they had become charitable and cohesive as a group. There were many widows, orphans, and single mothers. They put effort into preparing the logistics and worked in unity to leave no one behind.

Finally, having learned from Noah's example of bad leadership, Alma refused to be a king (Mosiah 23:7). He admonished his people to "trust no man to be a king over you"

and to “trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments” (Mosiah 23:13-14). How does it build community trust and confidence when the leaders keep God’s commandments? How does it destroy trust when a leader does not walk in God’s ways? Why is trust so important in our relationships, especially in marriage and family? What does trust have to do with being loved? When I was a freshman at BYU, one wise professor of mine stated, “It is better to be trusted than to be loved.” That seemed odd to me at first, but isn’t it true that by being trusted one creates a relationship within which love can thrive.

And in the same way, leaders must be trustworthy. If there is no trust, there is nothing to bind us, politically speaking. Trust and love must be consciously built. One should work expressly at building trust.

Mosiah 19

Mosiah 19:20 — King Noah Suffered Death by Fire

Abinadi had prophesied that if King Noah did not repent, Noah himself would be burned by fire. So when his priests became “angry with the king, and caused that he should suffer, even unto death by fire,” that violent end was the precise and immediate fulfillment of that prophecy (17:15–18). Ironically, but truthfully, Abinadi had prophesied that the life of King Noah would be “valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord (Mosiah 12:3).” These violent events demonstrated that Abinadi was a true prophet, and Noah, having falsely accused Abinadi, suffered the punishment he had applied incorrectly to Abinadi, as Deuteronomy 19:16–19 requires:

If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*; Then both the men, between whom the controversy *is*, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, *if* the witness *be* a false witness, *and* hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why was Abinadi Scourged with Faggots? \(Mosiah 17:13\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 96 (May 10, 2016).

Mosiah 20

Mosiah 20:1 — The Daughters of the Lamanites

Chapter 20 begins with the statement: “There was a place in Shemlon where the daughters of the Lamanites did gather themselves together to sing, and to dance.” Just as the month of February means Valentine’s Day to many Americans, the Fifteenth of Av had romantic significance to the ancient Israelites. On that day in the fifth month of the Israelite calendar (which fell originally on midsummer’s day), the maidens of Israel would gather to dance. This was, among other things, a “matrimonial holiday for youth.” This ancient holiday is described in *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* by Abraham P. Bloch. Bloch concludes that this unnamed holiday was of very early origin, dating back to Moses. Following the conclusion of their summer chores in the fields, youth would turn their attention to “bride-hunting,” and the dance of the maidens was “designed to meet that end.”

In particular, according to the Talmud, this day featured the dancing of the maidens of Jerusalem. As Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: “There were no greater festivals for Israel than the Fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out ... and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? ‘Young man, raise your eyes and see which you select for yourself ...’” (Talmud, *Taanit* 26b). Knowing the meanings associated with this festival provides interesting contexts for several events in Mosiah 20–24:

- ❧ When Lamanite daughters came particularly to “a place in Shemlon,” to sing, dance and “make themselves merry” (Mosiah 20:1), it may have been at a traditional place and time of celebration and matrimonial selection, as had been the vineyards around Jerusalem.
- ❧ The priests of Noah clearly saw this as a time to select wives. One wonders if the eligible Lamanite young men had planned to come there also to do likewise, only to find that 24 of the girls had already been carried off (20:5).

In Jewish life, this was a great day of joy, celebrating the day when the last of the Israelites, who had come out of Egypt, finally died. Shortly after their Exodus, spies had been sent into Canaan, but the Israelites were neither prepared nor worthy and so God decreed that a generation would need to die out before their children could enter the land of promise (Numbers 13–14). The last member of that Exodus generation was said to have died on the fifteenth day in the month of Av.

- ☞ Thus, on that particular day, these Lamanite daughters may also have thought they were celebrating the arrival of their Lamanite ancestors in their new land of promise, as the Israelites remembered the beginning of their conquest of Canaan. Marriage and raising strong children were important cultural contributions in the minds of these young women.

Moreover, according to Jewish tradition, it was on that day that members of the various tribes of Israel were first allowed to fully intermarry among each other. In an important legal case toward the end of the book of Numbers, it had been generously held that daughters could inherit the tribal land of their father, so long as the father had no sons (Numbers 27), and a second case soon restrictively clarified that those daughters were allowed to marry only within their tribe. That second ruling was to prevent the inherited land from becoming owned by members of other tribes (Numbers 36). It was on a fifteenth day of Av that the establishment of this important property right for such daughters was remembered. It was a cause for great rejoicing and celebration.

- ☞ Thus, the priests, who were Nephites, could have legitimized their action, especially since the Fifteenth of Av celebrated the right of intermarriage among the tribes of Israel. This could rationalize their marriage as Nephites with Lamanites.

In addition, in retaliation for the behavior in the incident involving the atrocious death of a concubine at Gibeah (Judges 19:20), the tribe of Benjamin ended up being attacked and their cities burned by the armies of the other tribes of Israel (Judges 20:48). In order to prevent the tribe of Benjamin from disappearing, the victorious Israelites captured 400 virgins from the city of Jabesh-gilead (Judges 21:12), and said to the remaining 600 Benjamites, “Go and lie in the vineyards; and see, and, behold if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin” (Judges 21:20–21). That event was also said to have happened on the Fifteenth of Av.

- ☞ Similarly, having atrociously killed Abinadi and Noah, the priests found themselves without wives, children, and posterity. The dancing of the Lamanite daughters at Shemlon echoes, even if only faintly, the dancing of the daughters of Israel at Shiloh, where the Benjamite survivors were allowed to catch the dancing young women from other Israelite tribes, so that they could again have wives and posterity, following their atrocious killing of the Levite’s concubine. The situation of the priests was not much different

And finally, it was on the Fifteenth of Av that Hoshea ben Elah, the last king of the northern kingdom, re-opened the roads to Jerusalem, removing roadblocks that had been set up by Jeroboam ben Nebat, to prevent people in the north from making the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah.

- ☞ While the priests would not have known this on the very day when they took the Lamanite daughters to wife, their language legacy would eventually become a factor in the opening of the borders between the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla (Helaman 6:6–14). This is because the Lamanite daughters are not entirely unhappy with their situation. They now have aristocratic husbands, and shortly afterwards, these women plead for the protection of their husbands, the priests, when the Lamanite men were about to kill them. The Lamanites spared them “because of their wives” (Mosiah 23:33–34).
- ☞ Eventually, the children of these women became literate, for the priests (the Amulonites) were appointed teachers (Mosiah 24:1) and became preachers (Alma 21:4) among the Lamanites, teaching them the language of the Nephites (Mosiah 24:4). These wives would have been a major factor in the successes of Amulon and his priests as they became influencers among the Lamanites, even in the very land of Shemlon (Mosiah 24:1; Alma 23:12), where the young women had gone to dance that fateful day.

Thus, although not comparable in every respect, intriguing similarities exist between the meanings of the Fifteenth of Av and the case of the twenty-four Lamanite daughters and the twenty-four priests of Noah.

Further Reading

John W. Welch, Robert F. Smith, and Gordon C. Thomasson, “Dancing Maidens and the Fifteenth of Av,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 139–141.

Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days* (New York: KTAV, 1978), 179.

Yanki Tauber, “7 Joyous Events That Happened on the 15th of Av,” online at chabad.org.

Mosiah 20:18 — Why We Should Avoid Jumping to Conclusions

As King Noah was put to death, his priests fled into the wilderness (Mosiah 19:21). They were the ones who abducted twenty-four Lamanite maidens “and carried them into the wilderness” (Mosiah 20:5). The abduction of the “daughters of the Lamanites” (20:1) caused the Lamanites such anger that their sudden disappearance “led to an immediate

rupture in the treaty” that had just been established with the recently conquered Nephites (Mosiah 19:25–29). This rupture was so severe that it “brought a military reprisal against the Nephites,” with the Lamanites launching an assault on Limhi’s people in the capital city of Nephi (Mosiah 20:6–11). The Lamanites had incorrectly assumed that the people of Limhi were connected with the taking of their daughters.

The Lamanites, in attacking the city of Nephi, had jumped to a conclusion based on an unfounded assumption that turned out to be wrong. Jumping prematurely to an erroneous conclusion is a form of selfishness. It happened to Moroni, as can be seen from his letter to Pahoran in Alma 60. People seem to naturally jump to negative conclusions. It is always better to give—without being gullible—the benefit of the doubt.

In this instance, the people of Limhi and the King of the Lamanites solved their problem by talking about it. Although the text never states that there were twenty-four priests of Noah, it makes sense that there were that many (as discussed in the previous set of notes). Either because of their location or their number, Gideon connected the priests with the twenty-four missing daughters (20:18).

The Nephites also importantly showed mercy to the seriously wounded Lamanite king, even though he had attacked them (20:13). Together they all honored their previous oath (20:22), and unarmed they returned the Lamanite king to his people (20:26). While this peace treaty gave these people a chance to reconcile, unfortunately, it only temporarily solved the problem, as the rancor remained and the Lamanites again began to rule unjustly over the people of Limhi.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why did the Lamanites Break Their Treaty with King Limhi? \(Mosiah 20:18\)](#),” *KnoWhy* 98 (May 12, 2016).

S. Kent Brown, “[Marriage and Treaty in the Book of Mormon: The Case of the Abducted Lamanite Daughters](#),” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 100.

Mosiah 21–22

Mosiah 21:6–12 — Limhi’s People Fight the Lamanites Three Times and Fail

Because the Lamanites remained angry, they hit the Nephites “on the cheek” and made them carry heavy burdens like “a dumb ass” (21:3), just as Abinadi had prophesied (Mosiah 12:2, 5). The Nephites murmured, complained, and tried to get out of bondage.

They went to war three times, and kept losing. Things became worse, with more widows and orphans each time.

There may well be a lesson here. How does one get out of any burdensome situation, including spiritual bondage? What is the wrong way? When we have a sin, what is our first reaction? The Nephites were trying to fight their way out of sin on their own. When you do that, how successful are you likely to be? Not very. It simply does not work. This is one of the world's ways of trying to lead us away from the right path. The world will tell you, "You're strong; you are capable; you can do it." But don't be fooled. It didn't work for the Nephites, and it does not work for us either.

What's more, once the Nephites had fought and failed, what did they do next? They gave up. They thought that there was no way they could escape it. This is another wrong idea the world tells you, "You cannot help it; just don't worry about it." Both of these, of course, are wrong ways to get out of spiritual bondage.

Mosiah 21:13–17 — The People of Limhi Begin to Humble Themselves and to Serve Others

The people of Limhi were somewhat disgusted with themselves. They were tired. Fighting had not worked. They finally turned to the Lord: "[T]hey did cry mightily to God" (21:14). They trusted him and served him.

How did the people of Limhi serve God? They served their fellow man. They especially took care of the increased number of widows and orphans in their midst (21:17), as Exodus 22:22 required them to do. Soon they would encounter Ammon (21:23), who had with him the words of King Benjamin, which the people of Limhi embraced with enthusiasm. I imagine that when they heard Benjamin's words, "When you are in the service of your fellow beings you are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17), they were fully prepared to enter into the covenant to "serve him and to keep his commandments" (21:32), since they had already begun to live in harmony with several of Benjamin's words about serving one another and imparting their substance to those in need. Importantly, we also learn this lesson again in our own dispensation. When the Saints were expelled from Jackson County, Missouri, and wanted to know why this had happened, the Lord revealed the answer in Doctrine and Covenants 105:3, "But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and *do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them.*"

Mosiah 22:10 — King Limhi Plans the Escape of His People

With careful planning and by following the commander Gideon’s instinct for strategy, a point of weakness was detected in the Lamanite guards watching over the city of Nephi (22:6). Flocks and herds were driven out into the wilderness (22:6), a substantial tribute of wine was delivered to the guards (22:10), and when the guards were drunk in the deep of the night, the people left through a back pass in a back wall on the back side of the city (22:6), passing on the left of the guard’s camp (22:7). They managed to take with them their women and children, flocks and herds, their gold, silver, and precious things (22:12).

Nothing is said about this being a miraculous escape—although their escape was amazing and divine forces may have helped to keep the guards intoxicated and unaware. The plan succeeded due to careful observations and planning, proper organization, detailed timing and maneuvering, and complete cooperation from everyone involved. Although this was an unusual escape, the total population was probably not very large at that point. By comparison, the whole group of Alma’s people totaled 450 people (18:35). And the Lamanites made only a small effort to pursue them. After all the trouble caused for the local Lamanites during the time of Zeniff, Noah, and Limhi, they were probably not terribly disappointed to see the Nephites gone.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did King Limhi Think Gideon’s Escape Plan Would Work? \(Mosiah 22:6\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 100 (May 16, 2016).

Mosiah 22:14 — King Mosiah Received Limhi and His People with Joy

During this time, King Mosiah, the son of Benjamin, was the king in Zarahemla, and kings in this system saw themselves as the father of their people. Mosiah had been justifiably worried about those who had left Zarahemla and gone elsewhere, so he allowed Ammon and three other men to go to the land of Nephi, looking for his *children*. This accounts for the great joy Mosiah must have felt to learn of the success of Ammon’s mission.

This might be compared of the premortal life, in which the people have left the presence of the heavenly king and have gone somewhere else. Now, as the people return to Zarahemla, we can see this as a type of repenting and returning. There was great joy, as there will always be divinely royal joy in heaven when we finally make it back.

Mosiah 23–24

Mosiah 23:1 — A Textual Seam

It is rather amazing to realize that Mosiah 23:1 picks up exactly where Mosiah 18:34 had left off. After Alma had organized the Church at the Waters of Mormon, he and his people “were apprised of the coming of the king’s army; therefore they took their tents and their families and departed into the wilderness” (18:34). After reporting all that is said in the four chapters from Mosiah 19 to Mosiah 22, the account of Alma resumes without missing a beat: “Now Alma, having been warned of the Lord that the armies of king Noah would come upon them, . . . therefore they gathered together their flocks, and took of their grain, and departed into the wilderness” (23:1). It is as if an underlying text about Alma’s group was interrupted, sliced open, filled with other storylines, and then picked up again. This precise resumption speaks volumes of the careful masterminding of the composing of the book of Mosiah. Needless to say, one cannot imagine Joseph Smith remembering, as he dictated, where the storyline had left off at the end of Mosiah 18 (Figure 1)

Mosiah 23:6–14 — Alma Refused to Be King

Having arrived in a beautiful and pure land, Alma’s people wanted him to be their king. His polite rejection of this nomination was filled with advice about the need to esteem one another as equals, rejecting the idea of kings being above normal human beings, protecting themselves against the iniquity and oppression caused by King Noah. Alma refused to be king so that his people could “stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you” (23:13), walking in the ways of God and keeping the commandments (23:14). Instead, Alma served as the High Priest.

The specific words of Alma the Elder here no doubt influenced his son, Alma the Younger, as well as King Mosiah, as the decision was made for Mosiah to abdicate the kingship, appoint Alma the Younger as the first Chief Judge and also High Priest under the new reign of judges at the end of the book of Mosiah. Especially poignant were the rationales set forth by Mosiah regarding the problems of iniquity in high places (29:17, 36) and human inequity (29:32, 38).

Mosiah 23:19–24 — Alma’s People Were Brought into Bondage

Having consecrated righteous men to be preachers and teachers, ministering to the people “with things pertaining to righteousness” (23:18), Alma’s group flourished in a land they called Helam. Helam was the name of the first person baptized at the Waters of Mormon (18:13).

Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah

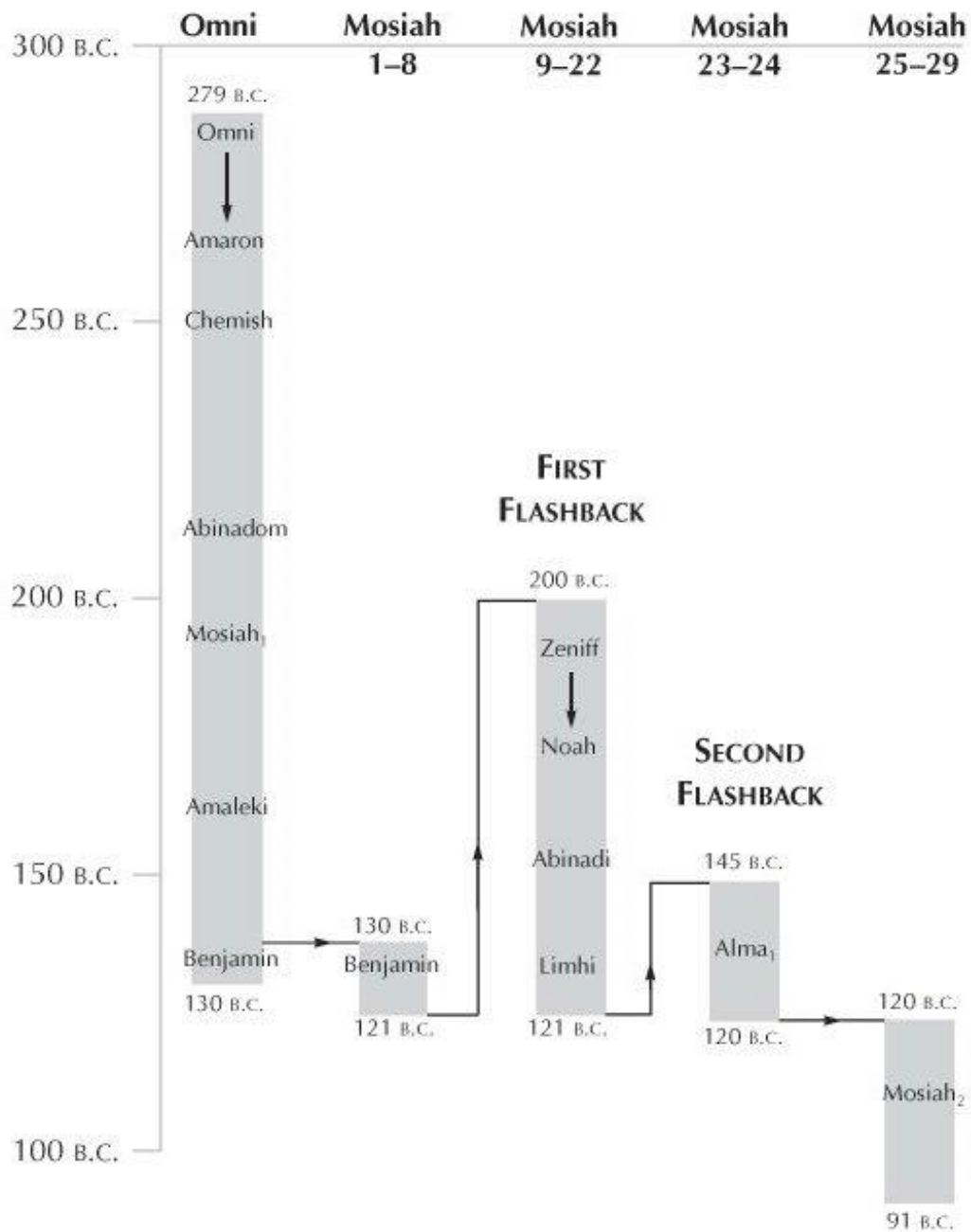


Figure 1 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "Flashbacks in the Book of Mosiah," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 29.

The “land of Helam” is mentioned here eight times, and the “city of Helam,” three times inside of twenty-one verses here. It must have been a place that had left a deep impression on Alma’s memory, just as the place of “Mormon” had left unforgettable memories, being mentioned six times in one verse alone (18:30).

Despite the great faith and industry of this people, Alma warns that the Lord desires to “chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (23:21). And then, Alma promises that “whosoever putteth his trust in him shall be lifted up at the last day” (23:22). And Alma promises to show that they were in “bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God, yea even the God of Abraham and Isaac and of Jacob” (23:23), and indeed “he did deliver them” (23:24).

Notice that very similar wordings were used a generation later by Alma the Younger in telling his son Helaman of his conversion: “whosoever shall put their trust in God . . . shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 36:3), and “I do put my trust in him” and “he will raise me up at the last day” (Alma 36:27–28). “For they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them” (Alma 36:2). Indeed, Alma the Younger knew these words of his father spoken in the land of Helam just as he remembered, at the turning point of his conversion, the words of his father speaking about the Atonement of Jesus Christ (Alma 36:17). Here is yet another case of exact words being remembered and reused by exactly the one person who should have used those words, a hundred pages later in the book.

And indeed, Alma the Elder did go on to “show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God” (23:23). And once again it was the priests of Noah under the leadership of Amulon who inflicted the greatest suffering. Elder Maxwell has said that there are three reasons why we suffer.

1. The first one is *mortality*. We live on an earth where things happen. Where rheumatism and all kinds of things happen to us. We suffer that.
2. The second one is that *we are stupid*. Apostles do not actually use that word, but if the shoe fits, wear it. We may step out in front of a car. We make mistakes, and we end up hurting others or ourselves.
3. The third reason is that *the Lord wants to school us*, and if we are not paying attention and he needs to school us, he will give us something that will whip us into shape.

One of the problems with these three divisions of suffering is that while we are actually suffering, we do not normally know which one it is. However, whatever challenges the

Lord has provided us with, or allowed for us, we can turn to the Lord, trust him, and serve him. It will all work out the right way in his time and in his place. It is a gift. And so it was for the people of Alma.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does God Sometimes Allow His Saints to Be Martyred?](#) (Alma 14:11),” *KnoWhy* 351 (August 11, 2017).

Mosiah 23:33 — Why Did the Lamanite Daughters Plead for Their Husbands?

The Lamanites came and took possession of the land of Helam, and Alma and his people did not resist (23:29). But then the priests of Noah, who were also in the area, feared that the Lamanites would kill them, and so they sent their Lamanite wives to plead for them, which they did.

In that day, women were less able than women today would be to object to their husbands. In fact, the word in Hebrew for *husband* is *baal*, which meant *lord*, as in “my lord,” (with a little “I”). The relationship between husband and wife was not as much of an equal partnership as it is meant to be today. Although the wives could probably make life pretty miserable for their husband, there would be a lot of risks in this society for doing that. They were probably normally very obedient. In any case, even if they had once been kidnapped, these women were now their husbands’ loyal wives. This particular story says a lot about how good those women were. They were willing to support their husbands, protect them, and do whatever they could for them.

Mosiah 24:1–5 — Amulon Taught the Lamanites His Language

When Alma and his people left the land of Helam, Amulon and his priests stayed there for an important reason which the record particularly mentions. Amulon and his priests were teaching the Lamanites the Nephite language—reading and writing. Although unintentional on the part of the priests, this service would prepare the Lamanites to receive the gospel. When the sons of Mosiah came to teach the Lamanites, they were able to teach in their own scriptures. In the Lord’s eyes, it was important that Amulon and his priests stayed rather than going back to Zarahemla. The Lord can use even wicked people to get some good things done once in a while.

Mosiah 24:8 — Amulon Persecutes the Saints

Amulon was the leader of the priests of Noah, and they had finally caught Alma and his people. Surprisingly the priests did not kill Alma. They put harsh regulations in place and in Mosiah 24:8, after exercising authority, they began to persecute Alma and his brethren. They did not want to kill Alma, but they were going to enjoy persecuting him. Amulon even caused his own children to persecute the children of the people of Alma.

Alma the Younger's age is not known at this time, but even if he was only four or five years old, he would still be old enough to feel ostracized or picked on. Those kinds of bad experiences, as a child, leave people with problems that they have to work on later.

Mosiah 24:10–23 — Alma and His People Turn to the Lord for Help

In verse 9, Amulon recognized Alma as the former fellow priest of King Noah. The afflictions suffered by the people of Alma were so great that “they began to cry mightily to God” (24:10). The Lamanites took steps to prevent their public prayers, but the people continued to pray in their hearts. We can always do that! The Nephites approached this problem by three principles: turn to him, trust him, and serve him.

Three times the voice of the Lord came to Alma and his people. The Lord told them to be of good comfort and covenanted to deliver them out of bondage and to ease their burdens (24:13–14). When the burdens were borne with cheerfulness and patience, the voice of the Lord came again, saying, “Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage” (24:16). And indeed, the people escaped in the night, with the help of the Lord, to a valley they called “the valley Alma,” where they gave thanks, and then a third time, the Lord warned Alma to leave quickly for Zarahemla and told him that he would “stop the Lamanites in this valley” (24:23).

Twelve days later they arrived safely in Zarahemla and were received with joy (24:25). These durations of travel give readers a fairly clear idea of how far it was from the Land of Nephi to the Land of Zarahemla—only about 200 miles.

Further Reading

On the frequent use of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt as a type or pattern of the liberations of Limhi's people from the Lamanites and of Alma's people from Amulon, see S. Kent Brown. “The Exodus Pattern of the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 75–98.

On distances in Book of Mormon geography, see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1985), 8–23.