



Type: Magazine Article

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## The Book of Mormon: Lesson 8 - Alma the Younger

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Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (March 1930), pp. 132–136

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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**Abstract:** No abstract available.

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# Guide Lessons for May

## LESSON 1

### Theology and Testimony

(First Week in May)

BOOK OF MORMON

LESSON 8: ALMA THE YOUNGER

This lesson covers the material found in the Book of Mormon between page 251 and page 282. It is a section of the life of one of the most remarkable men that ever lived in the flesh—Alma the Younger, the Saint Paul of the Book of Mormon.

The Matter of this lesson falls naturally into two parts, both of which are extraordinary in their character. Briefly stated these two divisions run as follows:

#### *The Narrative.*

Leaving Zarahemla after his reorganization of the Church there, Alma betook himself to the Gideonites, who lived on "the east side of the river Sidon" (wherever that was). He preached to these people with such success that he "established the order of the Church" there. Thence he crossed the river and visited the Melekites, with even greater effect, for we are informed that "they were baptized throughout all the land." Leaving the people of Melek and traveling "three days' journey" northward on the same side of Sidon, he arrived at Ammonihah. Here the people resisted his teaching, expelled him from their borders, and, when he returned another way at the command of an angel, imprisoned both him and Amulek, a native convert. Some were converted, however, and

left the place but subsequently the entire population of this disreputable land was wiped out by Lamanites and its buildings razed. Ever afterwards it was called the Desolation of Nehors. Alma, with his converts, returned to Zarahemla.

#### *Alma's Teachings*

The doctrines taught at these three places may be grouped as follows:

First, the ideas revolving about the name of Christ. It must be kept in mind that Alma lived in the last century of the Old Era, before the advent of Jesus. This is why these ideas are remarkable. Alma taught that Jesus would be born in Palestine, that his mother would bear the name of Mary, that he would be called the Son of God, being "conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost," that he would "take upon himself the pains and sicknesses of his people," that he would "loose the bonds of death" and redeem mankind, and that he would visit the Nephites.

Second, the ideas that cluster about life here below. These are, in general, faith, repentance, and good works. Not only in the three places mentioned but everywhere he went, he preached against "all lying, and deceivings, and envying, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, adultery, and all manner of lasciv-

iousness," and urged a life full of good deeds.

Third, the resurrection. This was to be very literal. The spirit and the body were to be reunited in "perfect form," as at present, and we should have "a bright recollection of all our guilt." Moreover, the next life would be dependent on what we thought and did and said in this life, for those who were "filthy" here would be "filthy" there. As through Adam death come to all men, so through Christ eternal life would come to all, and exaltation to those who sought it in faith and righteousness.

#### *Outline.*

- I. Narrative of events.
  1. In Gideon
    - a. Where Gideon was.
    - b. Alma's work there.
    - c. Results
  2. In Mulek
    - a. Where Mulek was.
    - b. Alma's work there
    - c. Results.
  3. In Ammonihah.
    - a. Where the place was.
    - b. Atheistic conditions there
    - c. Alma and Amulek.
    - d. What happened to these two there.
    - e. Results.
      - (1). To those who repented
      - (2). To Zeezrom
      - (3). To the place and people generally.
- II. Teachings.
  1. Concerning Christ.
    - a. His earthly ministry.
    - b. His birth and character.
    - c. His work for mankind.
    - d. After his resurrection.
  2. Concerning this life.
    - a. Principles and ordinances
    - b. Conduct.
  3. The resurrection.
    - a. Its literalness.
    - b. By whom brought about.
    - c. Conditions of eternal life
      - (1). General salvation
      - (2). Personal salvation.

#### *Observations.*

1. Paul and Alma: Careful readers of the Book of Mormon have observed the similarity between the Apostle Paul and Alma, in the details of their lives, their intellect, and their vast energy.

Paul's life fell in the first century after Christ, that of Alma in the first century before Christ. Both, apparently, were well educated after the manner of their times, although Paul was most likely the greater scholar. In both lives the crisis was a vision—a vision of an angel to the Nephite and of the risen Lord to the Jew; and in both, this meant a turning in their lives, a change to to the Christian ideal into powerful champions of the faith. The American, like the European, suffered shame, violence, and imprisonment for his advocacy of the Cause. Only, in the case of the former his devotion was crowned with translation of the body, and in the latter with martyrdom.

Intellectually Paul and Alma were the outstanding men in Christian and Nephite thought respectively. Of Paul we need say nothing more here, for the world over he is recognized as the most powerful influence, after Jesus himself, in the shaping of the new faith. Our concern here is chiefly with Alma.

Alma had a grasp of the truths of revealed religion that is not excelled by that of Paul, and certainly his expression of them is superior to Paul's in clearness. His thought is not as involved in refinements

and subtleties as that of the Apostle to the Gentiles. But that, maybe, is due to the fact that there were no heathen philosophies at work among the Nephites, with their abstractions and man-made reasonings. And then too the Nephites stuck more closely to the fundamentals of the faith than the Jew—which involves us in fewer theological entanglements.

There is a close resemblance too in the intense missionary zeal of the two men. In a previous lesson we called attention to the strange fact that converts to religious truth, nearly always feel impelled, as by some external force, to see that others are brought "into the light". In no historical character is this spirit more dominant than in the two men we are now considering. Their consuming devotion to the task of disseminating their faith is what is often turned fanaticism by an outsider. In Alma and Paul however it seems to be due partly to an effort to make up for lost time, when they were engaged in opposing what they afterwards advocated, but partly to their native energy.

2. Alma's Times: In the present lesson, we get several glimpses into the social and political conditions during this period.

As we already have seen, the Nephites were living under a kind of democracy instead of a monarchy. At the time which we have reached in this lesson they had been living thus for ten years. Their government was of the simplest kind, being a judgeship. There was a chief judge, with what we may term district and local judges, all elected by the people. Misdemeanors on the part of these various officials were provided against by making the lower judges answerable to the chief

justice and the chief judge amenable to a court of lesser judges. But a principal defect in the system, it seems, was that these officers were paid, not a stipulated salary, but an amount in proportion to the time they put in. And so it happened sometimes, as at Ammonihah, that a corrupt judge would increase his income by "stirring up the people to riotings and all manner of disturbances." Thus it was that Amulek could truthfully say to the people of his native city, "The foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges."

For the Nephites had lawyers as well as judges. One of these was Zeezrom. And if we may judge the rest of the legal lights among the Nephites by this man, they were a shrewd lot, with their eye open to the main chance. Zeezrom was not only a sharp inquisitor, as his questioning of Alma and Amulek shows, but he was not above both bribery and deception. At least he tried these on this occasion. It happened however that he was caught himself in the trap he had laid for the prophets.

It is in this lesson also that we obtain most of our information about the monetary system of the Nephites. The historian tells us the relative, but not the absolute, values of the coins they used. Gold and silver seem to have been the only metals used for coins. Until the times of the Judges the standard of "reckoning and measure" changed "according to the minds and the circumstances of the people in every generation," till the time of Mosiah, when these were permanently established. Elder George Reynolds

was of the opinion that the names of these coins "were identical with or derived from, those of familiar persons or places." And that may easily be the case, for with the Nephites proper names, especially of persons, appear to have been the starting point of many things. Their cities and "lands" derived their names, for the most part, from the names of the first settler of consequence there.

Also we gather from the material in this lesson and other lessons that the Nephites had jails, arresting officials, criminals, freedom of speech and action up to a given point. And then too they had, especially at such places as Ammonihah, evil-minded men who played upon the masses and used them to attain their own purposes in politics and private life. All of which goes to show that human nature is at bottom much the same in one place as another, in one age of the world as another.

3. Zeezrom and Amulek: That Nephite society abounded in minor interesting characters is evident from the rather accidental appearance of Zeezrom and Amulek in the narrative. For we must never forget that the purpose of all the writers of the Book of Mormon was not to give a complete, even though brief, history of its peoples but rather to outline God's dealings with the Nephites and Jaredites.

Zeezrom was a lawyer—and a sharp one. If it were not for his questioning Alma and Amulek on the occasion of their visit to Ammonihah, we might never have known that the Nephites had lawyers. At the core Zeezrom was a good man, notwithstanding his attempt at deception and bribery on this occasion.

He may have thought at first that he was doing his people a service in exposing the preachers, Alma and Amulek. But when his purpose was detected, he saw the light, and altered his conduct accordingly. His extreme mental anguish later, when he imagined that his actions had led to the probable death of the two men, also shows that his natural disposition was good.

Amulek was one of Ammonihah's rich men. We are not told how he became such except that it was by his "industry." It is interesting to know that he was a lineal descendant of Nephi—of which he appears to have been proud. Also he was "a man of no small reputation" in his community, as he himself tells his fellow townsmen. This reputation may have been due to his wealth or to his family, or to both. At all events, he seems to have been a man of some character, to judge by his manner of address.

He charges himself with having neglected to avail himself of the opportunity to become familiar with the Lord's "mysteries and marvelous power." But if so, it does not take him long to make up for these lost opportunities, for under the teaching of Alma, he learns very rapidly. And the fine courage he displays in his preaching matches Alma's own. He is a good example of the minor prophet among the Nephites.

#### *Questions.*

1. Give the story part of this lesson.
2. Tell what it says about.
  - a. Christ.
  - b. What we are to do here and now.
  - c. The resurrection.
3. Who was Zeezrom? Amulek?

4. Where were these places with respect to the river Sidon; Gideon, Melech, Ammonihah?
5. Why is Alma called the Paul of the Book of Mormon.
6. What does the phrase "my women" mean to you in Alma Chapter 10, verse 11?
7. What are the political and social conditions of this period?
8. What happened to Ammonihah?

### *References*

- Book of Mormon, pages 251-282.  
 Reynold's "Dictionary of the Book of Mormon," under Alma, Ammonihah, Zeezrom, Amulek.  
 Evans's "Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon," pages 168-177.

## LESSON 2

### Work and Business

#### TEACHERS' TOPICS

(Second Week in May)

#### *Courtesy*

1. Courtesy is the heir-loom of civilization.

As far back as the days of knight-hood there were prevailing courtesies which have come down to us. The knights raised their visors in acknowledgment of friends even as our gentlemen of today raise their hats in courteous recognition of friends and acquaintances.

2. Courtesy is consideration for others, that is:
  1. Careful thoughtfulness of others.
  2. The will to do for others the things you would have others do for you.
  3. The will to say to others the pleasant, courteous thing you would have others say to you.
  4. Forgetfulness of self.
3. What some noted people have thought of courtesy.

Confucius, the Chinese sage, considered courtesy a requisite of virtue. Virtue in itself was not enough without politeness. He "saw courtesies as coming from the heart," main-

taining that "when they are practiced with all the heart a moral elevation ensues."

W. E. Gladstone said to his countrymen, "Let us respect the ancient manners, and recollect that if the true soul of chivalry has died among us, with it all that is good in society has died."

Lord Chesterfield in one of the famous "Letters to His Son" said, "Moral virtues are the foundation of society in general, and of friendship in particular; but attentions, manners, and graces both adorn and strengthen them."

Samuel Smiles writes, "A man's manner, to a certain extent, indicates his character. It is the external exponent of his inner nature." "Manners are not idle, but the fruit of noble nature and of loyal mind."  
 —*Tennyson*.

"A beautiful behavior is better than a beautiful form; it gives a higher pleasure than statues and pictures; it is the finest of the fine arts."—*Emerson*.