

# ALMA 8–12

John W. Welch Notes



## Alma 8

### **Alma 8:1–32 — Alma Taught in Melek**

The nine chapters from Alma 8–15 all cover only one year, the tenth year of the reign of judges. The report of that year begins in Alma 8:3 and ends in Alma 15:19. That year began with Alma returning to his “own house” in Zarahemla (8:1), followed by a positive church experience in the land of Melek (8:3–6), and it ended with a brief but very successful and gratifying ministry in the land of Sidom (15:1–17) and with Alma taking Amulek “to his own house” in Zarahemla and ministering to him there (15:18). Whereas the cities of Gideon, Melek, and Sidom received Alma’s message very well, Ammonihah totally and violently rejected it. Just as the city of Gideon had provided a contrast with Zarahemla in Alma 5–7, the two receptive cities of Melek and Sidom in the tenth year stand as bookends demonstrating that Alma the Younger was in fact a successful missionary.

### **Alma 8:3–6 — The City of Melek**

Was the City of Melek predisposed to accept Alma’s message? Certain words and names in the Book of Mormon are demonstrably of Hebrew origin. For example, *Melek* in Hebrew means *king*. In written Hebrew, vowels are not typically used, thus the name *Melek* may be linguistically related to *Mulek*. This could have been a Mulekite city, and because of the close similarity between their names, it could have been a royal city or one in which a king had great influence. A few chapters earlier, Alma the Younger had to fight against the king-men (Alma 2–3). While Amlici’s base of operations is unknown, it is possible that Alma went to the city of Melek specifically because they had preferred

the traditional institution of kingship and needed reinforcement in accepting the “holy order of God” (8:4) and the new system of judges in the land of Zarahemla.

When Alma went next to the city of Ammonihah, however, he was running straight into a hotbed of Nehorism. In fact, we are told that they “were of the profession of Nehor,” whom Alma had caused to be executed in Alma 1, and that as Nehorites they “did not believe in the repentance of their sins” (15:15; see also Alma 1:4). Moreover, Ammonihah was called the “Desolation of Nehors” (16:11) after it was destroyed. The mention of the city of Melek appears here as a strong literary contrast, setting the stage spiritually for readers to hope that Alma would have the same success in Ammonihah. That, however, did not happen.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Should Readers Pay Close Attention to the Mulekites?](#) (Omni 1:19),” KnoWhy 434 (May 17, 2018).

### Alma 8:6 — Three Days’ Journey

When Alma the Younger left Melek, “He departed thence and travelled three-days’ journey on the north of the land of Melek,” and came to the city called Ammonihah. A three days’ journey would likely have been about thirty to forty miles. What might be symbolized by these three days? Why did the author, and record keeper, and abridger all include this detail? They could have said, “He went from there to the city of Ammonihah,” but someone thought it worth telling us that it was a journey of three days. Where else do we see three days? In 1 Nephi 2:6, Lehi traveled three days before building an altar to give thanks. In that case, being three days away from Jerusalem, Lehi was out of the temple district of the Temple in Jerusalem.

In the crucifixion and death of the Savior, very clearly, according to the Book of Mormon, there was darkness in the land of Bountiful for three days when Jesus was in the tomb (3 Nephi 8:3, 23; see also 1 Nephi 19:10; 2 Nephi 25:13; Helaman 14:20, 27).

There are other examples of three days and three nights. The sign of Jonah was mentioned by Jesus when the Pharisees demanded a sign. Jesus replied “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39–40). There are passages in Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29 that refer to the sign of the prophet Jonah, but without giving its length, which was three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). Mark 8:12 says, “There shall no sign be given unto this generation,” to which the prophet Joseph Smith added “save the sign of the prophet Jonah; for as

Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so likewise shall the Son of Man be buried in the bowels of the earth" (Mark 8:12 JST). This seems to add significance to the Savior's prophetic pronouncement on his interment (See Cummings, "Three Days and Three Nights," 59).

Three days and three nights, then, from the time of Jonah in the mid-eighth century BC (2 Kings 14:25), symbolized a going down. "Three days and three nights" expressed a complete descent, down into death and hell; going to the bottom of the sea and into the death monster; going as far away into the darkness as possible. The mention of Alma's three days of travel to Ammonihah may have carried the same symbolism for the Nephite record keepers. Perhaps the recorder noted this detail as he observed that "Alma went three days from Melek," which was, in other words, down, down, down, into the inferno of Ammonihah.

#### Further Reading

Cummings, David B. Cummings, "[Three Days and Three Nights: Reassessing Jesus's Entombment](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 17, no. 1 (2007): 56–63, 86.

### **Alma 8:8–9 — Remembering the Good with the Bad**

The account of Alma's initial preaching in Ammonihah is very brief. He began to preach "the word of God," but "Satan had gotten great hold" upon their hearts and they would not listen. But that was not all. In spite of Alma's "mighty prayer" and some success, things went from bad to worse, as we are told in considerable detail in the next seven chapters.

Why do we hear so little of the righteous cities, such as Gideon, and so much about the wicked ones, like Ammonihah and Antionum? Ministering in the city of Gideon must have been a very joyous, wonderful occasion for Alma. He was among friends and faithful people, yet we only have a single short chapter of his ministry there. However, when he goes to Ammonihah, we learn a great deal about these awful people. I would like to have been told more about the people of Gideon. Why do you think the Book of Mormon sometimes preserves for us so much more of the bad material than the good? Is it a matter of human nature to remember more easily the mistakes that we have made, the problems that we have had, the difficult times, the final exams that we failed? Or do we remember enough our successes, the triumphs, the happiness? Which is more common in real life?

There is no question that the Book of Mormon has given us a history of these people, as the historians would say, remembering the *warts and all*. Mormon wants to be sure that his record is complete enough to be a solemn warning, and it is important to be honest

with ourselves and to acknowledge our shortcomings. However, there is a difference between producing a history that simply leaves the warts as warts and writing a history that is *all* warts.

Sometimes we get caught up in self-pity or in reveling in all our past problems. Perhaps we believe that if we air all these weaknesses, that we can expunge them. Telling all of these stories can become a way of doing penance for some people, and in some cases there is a purpose for doing that, but doing penance is different than writing history. Repentance turns to Christ, may involve bishops, and requires confession of our sins and seeking solutions for our problems by placing them before God privately.

As we teach our children, we need to warn them about the problems that are out there. We need to be sure that they understand the realities of eternal judgment and the consequences of sin and transgression. However, let us be sure to also tell them the good side of things, as Alma also does in chapters 12 and 13. He let them know the great blessings and wonderful promises that could be theirs based on their righteousness. So, let us be sure to reinforce the good things along with the warnings.

### **Alma 8:11–13 — Alma Was Rejected in Ammonihah**

As Mormon was compiling and abridging this record, he may well have identified with Alma the Younger's struggles. In Alma's initial visit to the city of Ammonihah, he went all alone. He went without a bodyguard, without a companion, without other witnesses. While that strategy must have been extremely brave and sincerely impressive, it created problems because the people exclaimed, "Who is God that he will send only one witness against us?" (Alma 9:2). The people of Nephi generally observed the Hebrew legal requirement for two or three witnesses, "Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word (2 Nephi 11:3).

At the end of his writings, Mormon may have had a similar or related thought, when he says that he stood as "an idle witness" against his people (Mormon 3:16). He too would stand alone. I believe that as Mormon went through this material, he was inclined to keep more of it when he identified personally with what was going on in the records, and he knew poignantly of the destruction that would come to his people as a result of wickedness. There are two places in the Book of Mormon where things became really, awfully wicked. One was here in Ammonihah, and the other was in Mormon's own time. So, Mormon's own personal interests and experiences may have been a factor in his motivations and inspiration for recording so many of the awful details in these chapters.

### **Alma 8:14–18 — Alma Was Expelled from, Then Returned to Ammonihah**

After having been expelled by the inhabitants of Ammonihah, Alma was “wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul,” when an angel of the Lord appeared to him and declared that he had been sent to “command [Alma] that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city” (8:16).

Before he issued the command, however, the angel cheered Alma by telling him that he was “blessed,” and by encouraging him to “lift up his head and rejoice,” in spite of his deep and painful soul-searching. He mentioned not only that Alma had been faithful since the time of his conversion, but that he, the angel, was the same angel who had appeared to deliver the Lord’s message the first time. These words and reassurances must have meant a great deal to Alma. President Henry B. Eyring has pointed out how well Alma had taught his son, Corianton, “who was mired in the misery of sin. Alma knew that wickedness could never be happiness for his son—or for any child of Heavenly Father. He taught his son that increasing in holiness was the only path to happiness.” Because Alma learned this truth the hard way, and was able to speak authoritatively about it to his children.

#### **Further Reading**

President Henry B. Eyring, “Holiness and the Plan of Happiness,” October 2019 General Conference.

### **Alma 8:19–22 — A Blessing Following a Meal**

Upon returning to Ammonihah, Alma was met by Amulek, a citizen of the city, who had been advised by an angel to welcome “a prophet.” Amulek “received him into his house . . . and he brought forth bread and meat and set before Alma” (8:21). *After* eating the meal set before him, Alma “blessed Amulek and his house, and he gave thanks unto God” (8:22). Whereas generally, Latter-day Saints and other Christians are accustomed to offering a blessing *before* meals, “In Judaism, while a brief blessing is recited before eating, a series of longer blessings . . . follows the meal.” It is “a central feature of the liturgical service in the Jewish home” (see *KnoWhy* #115).

In 1997, Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes explained, “Four blessings come after the consumption of bread, while separate blessings are offered for other foods, depending on their nature and origin.” Deuteronomy 8:10, provided the basis for this practice: “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.” Amulek had apparently fed and filled Alma, and so Alma pronounced blessings as expected.

The practice is also found in the Mishnah and among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Jewish book of Jubilees (ca. 161–140 BC) depicts the patriarchs engaging in this practice (Jubilees 22:4–9). One story in Mishnah *Sukkah* 2:5 records, “When Rabbi Zadok ate only a *small* portion of food, he did not say the blessing afterward.” This was probably because Deuteronomy 8:10 calls for a blessing only if one has eaten and is *full*.

Alma’s blessing anticipated the time when the Lord would bestow a blessing after a messianic meal. The Savior followed a similar pattern during his first day among the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. As the sacrament was administered to the people there in 3 Nephi 18, they were “filled” (v. 9), after which Jesus “blessed” them (3 Nephi 18:10, 14).

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, [“Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God After Eating?”](#) *KnoWhy* 115 (June 6, 2016).

Crowell, Angela M., and John A. Tvedtnes, [“Notes and Communications: The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One’s Fill,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 251–254, quote on 252.

John W. Welch, [“From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6,”](#) *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–139.

## Alma 9–13

At this stage of this record, Mormon includes the actual, first-person words of Alma and Amulek. Alma’s opening statement is in Alma 9:1–33, and then Amulek’s supporting testimony is quoted in Alma 10:2–11, 17–23, and 25–27. Amulek’s words are then interspersed in his responses to the questioning of Zeezrom in Alma 11:22, 23–25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 36–37, 39–45; and finally, Alma’s words are quoted at length in Alma 12:3–13:30. This all constitutes a persuasive and informative record, explaining the lengths to which Alma and the Lord had gone with the people in Ammonihah, hoping to bring them to repentance and to avoid the destruction that would otherwise befall them.

### Alma 9:2, 6 — The Law of Witnesses

The Nephites, even those in Ammonihah, were aware of the two-witness rule. Deuteronomy 19:15 says:

One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three

witnesses, shall the matter be established. (see also Deuteronomy 17:6; Numbers 35:30; 1 Kings 21:10)

That becomes a significant principle in what happens in Ammonihah. In *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, I explain the implications of this complaint as follows:

The people of Ammonihah rejected Alma’s testimony out of arrogance and incredulity, to be sure, but their rejection also had legal grounds. Their penchant for legal detail manifests itself when they reject Alma’s testimony on the technicality that he appeared to be a sole witness or testifier. Rather than addressing the truthfulness of Alma’s claims by accusing him of being a false witness or a false prophet (as had been the failed strategy of King Noah and his priests against Abinadi), these people argued that if God were to condemn this city as an apostate city, he would need more than one witness to stand against it in such a weighty matter: “Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away? . . . Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people?” (Alma 9:2, 6). An accusation such as this one for apostasy, they correctly and forcefully argued, needed to be supported by two witnesses.

In our legal system, we do not require two witnesses. In Biblical and Jewish law, they *had to* have two witnesses. How is the principle of two witnesses exercised among Latter-day Saints today? Missionaries and ministering sisters and brothers travel two-by-two. At baptism, there must be two witnesses. Similarly, in bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost, and in the marriage sealing ordinance, and so on. Even the notion of the presidency of the bishop and two counselors is based on the principle that in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall all things be established. You cannot, or at least should not, operate as a presidency if you do not have the concurrence of your counselors.

We use this principle more often than we appreciate, and it is an important one. When you are involved as a married couple, within a missionary companionship, or as a presidency, learn to use the power of the two-or-three-witnesses principle. There is real wisdom and strength here.

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “*The Trial of Alma and Amulek*,” in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 237–271, quote on 242.

Robert L. Marrot, “*Witnesses, Law of*,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1569–1570.

**Alma 9:11–13 — The Lord Commanded the People to Repent or Be Destroyed**

In Deuteronomy 13:12–18, the Law of Moses specified what Alma needed to do if there were an apostate city in the land:

If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;

Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask *diligently*; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, *destroying it utterly*, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword.

And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God: and it shall be an heap forever; it shall not be built again.

Alma was the Nephite high priest, and had the personal responsibility for seeing that no iniquity defiled the land. Under this law of the apostate city, if there was wickedness in a city, he was required to warn the inhabitants. If they did not repent, he would consign it to being killed by the sword and having it burned and completely destroyed. The legal requirement said that he must inquire *diligently*. It could not be a superficial observation. He could not destroy a whole apostate city without a very thorough investigation, but “if in truth abomination is wrought among you” then it says you shall “smite the city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly.”

The words *utter destruction*—in Hebrew—form a phrase that is quite distinctive, and it means being wiped off the face of the land. How many times does Alma use this phrase *utter destruction* in chapter 9? Three times, in verses 12, 18, and 24. We do not know if the people in Ammonihah knew the scriptures well enough to understand what Alma was saying and what was happening here, but apparently they did, because their reaction was so extreme. Alma gave them not only practical and religious encouragement, but also legal notice and fair warning that if they did not change and repent, their destruction would be made sure and complete. Amulek would next go on, as the second witness, to tell them that they would “be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword” (10:23).

It must be said that Alma, of course, no longer commanded the army, and would not have been inclined in any event to call in the soldiers to obliterate the city. This



destruction mandate in Deuteronomy 13 was a part of the Israelites' conquest of Canaan, and there are many Jewish law scholars who maintain that it was a unique command, applying only at that time when the Israelites took over Canaan and had to establish themselves, and even then, only after they had offered a peaceful settlement and arrangement with cities that were problematic. So, Alma may not have thought that destroying the city would happen in this case literally and under Nephite command. In what seems to be an act of providential justice, a Lamanite attack happened to come and all this destruction happened in one single day—a “coincidence” that Alma and all Nephite record keepers would have found quite remarkable and compelling as a sign of divine intervention and prophetic fulfillment.

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, “*The Destruction of Ammonihah and the Law of Apostate Cities*,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 176–179.

### **Alma 9:15–18 — The Lamanites Will Receive Mercy in Their Ignorance**

In Chapter 9, Alma also emphasized that people who have a greater knowledge will be held to a higher standard (9:15–18, 24), and thus the strict warning against the people of Ammonihah was justified. On the other hand, of the Lamanites he says, in effect, “It will go better for the Lamanites than for you people, because you know better and you will be held accountable.” This is the clearest lesson that the Book of Mormon ever gives on this particular subject. In the New Testament, 2 Peter 2:21 likewise teaches, speaking of false prophets and false teachers among the early Christians, “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” We see this as a reality in the lives of people who have apostatized, especially those who had been overzealous. When they turn away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they often turn away with a vengeance, as Peter points out had happened to the “angels that sinned,” to Sodom and Gomorrah, and those “following the way of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:4, 6, 15).

## Alma 10

### **Alma 10:1 — Amulek Speaks up in Support of Alma**

Alma 10 begins with Amulek recounting to his fellow townsmen his own conversion account. He spoke bravely to a hostile audience. These are people he knows. He was a wealthy man, and he had been doing business and living with them for a good while. However, this may be the first time that Amulek told his neighbors much about his

personal religious convictions. Here Amulek makes a public and very daring statement, especially in light of the things he had recently experienced.

### **Alma 10:2–11 — Amulek Establishes Credibility**

Amulek began by saying, “I am a man of no small reputation ....” In today’s terms, he may have been saying, “I am credible. This is a hard story to believe, but here’s what happened.” It is important to establish credibility when bearing testimony.

He stated that he was descended from Aminadi, who saw the finger of the Lord writing on the temple wall. He seems to be saying, “I come from a heritage of people among whom these kinds of manifestations are taken seriously.” In addition, the knowledge of this detail in his ancestor’s experience may well have predisposed Amulek toward recognizing Alma as one bringing the word of God. Potentially, this story may also have been part of Amulek’s reputation among his peers. In a culture like his, the fact that Amulek’s ancestors had received these kinds of manifestations would have been very prestigious. Amulek may also have been saying to his audience, “You accepted that incident which happened long ago. Well, let me tell you what happened to me just the other day.”

And notice that Amulek gives a great deal of detail about his own conversion. As people write about their conversions, it is important to have detail there to help others share in the experience. Amulek spoke as someone who knew the truth but who had rebelled against God. As someone who had formerly hardened his heart, he still responded to Alma. This is how he hoped things would also happen for to the people of Ammonihah. When trying to talk to and teach someone, relating to them is crucial. Real communication requires bridges to be built.

And, by the way, Amulek also traces his lineage back to Nephi, Lehi, Manesseh, and Joseph, who was sold into Egypt (10:3). This is the only place in the Book of Mormon where we learn that Lehi belonged to the tribe of Manesseh. The mention of “Joseph who was sold into Egypt” also provides a potential connection with the annual season of Passover.

### **Alma 10:6 — A Passover Setting?**

Amulek gave the exact day, month and year for the arrival of the angel: “The fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges” (10:6). Why is such detail given? He even stated that he was going to visit a “very near kindred” (Alma 10:7).

In the Law of Moses, doing things precisely on certain days and months was crucial. When the law said that you shall do something—such as the observance of Passover, the

Feast of Tabernacles, or the Day of Atonement—it declared specifically on which day it should be. Thus, the day, month, and year were extremely important to the children of Israel, and we can assume that the Nephite calendar followed the Law of Moses.

The first month of the year for the pre-exilic Israelite calendar was in September. In the “commencement” of the new year, Rosh Hashanah occurred on the first day of the month. The Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles followed, all within the first month of the year. The other large festival, Passover, was seven months later. As Amulek relates it, on the fourth day of the seventh month, he is traveling to be with his family, or “very near kindred.”

What kind of a festival was Passover? It was when the family gathered, sacrificed the lamb, and had the Passover meal. They set a plate for the coming of the Prophet Elijah, expecting that one day he would return. One wonders, in that connection, what Amulek thought when the angel said, in effect, Go home, have Passover there, “for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord” (10:7).

Passover also commemorates the time when the destroying angel passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt and spared those who had the blood over their door. The coming of an angel was a large part of what would have been remembered and included in the Passover celebration.

After Alma had finished giving his first judgment speech against the people in Ammonihah, the people tried to arrest him and put him in jail (9:33), but with the Lord’s help he evaded their attempt. As he was on his way to the city of Aaron, the same angel who had converted Alma (8:15) told him to “return to the city of Ammonihah” and preach there again (8:16). As Alma reentered the city, he met Amulek as he was returning back to his home (8:20; 10:8). Amulek took him to his home, even though he likely knew what Alma had said to the city and had been rejected and was considered a criminal. So Amulek put his own social status on the line by talking to Alma and receiving him, who was hungry from fasting for many days and was “a holy man, who is a chosen man of God” (10:7), and of this Amulek could truly testify.

When Alma spoke those fateful words, “Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat?” (8:19), what a manifestation that must have been for Amulek! And with that, Amulek, together with his women (likely his wife, mother, and maybe sisters), his children, his father, and his whole household, were blessed and were tutored by Alma and became converted (10:11). They were blessed by having received a prophet, for “he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Matthew 10:41).

### Further Reading

Welch, John W. Welch, "*The Trial of Alma and Amulek*," in *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2008), 237–271. "Although the visitor turned out not to be Elijah coming before 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Malachi 4:5), Alma did come to announce the day of destruction in the city of Ammonihah, with the destroying angel passing over only [a] few [of those] in that land who were willing to receive Alma's message" (p. 240).

Book of Mormon Central, "Were Nephite Prophets Familiar with the Passover Tradition? (Mosiah 13:30)," *KnoWhy* 420 (March 29, 2018).

### Alma 10:7–10 — Amulek Encountered an Angel

How important were angels in the history of the Nephite world?

The same angel that had converted Alma and the four sons of Mosiah directed Alma to return to Ammonihah to deal with the Nehorites (8:15). Whether the same angel came to guide Amulek to aid Alma and to provide a second witness for him, we do not know, but it seems that it might have been. In any event, where would the Nephite world be without those messengers? If the Nehorite movement had been able to gather momentum, what would have happened in Zarahemla? And where would the Restoration of the Gospel by Joseph Smith have stood if it had not been for numerous angelic visitations?

Many of us may not have had angels visible in our lives, but angels are present more often than we realize. Elder Bednar called these types of events "tender mercies." President Eyring has asked members of the Church to write down these mercies as they occur in their lives. Watch for such events; they do happen.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why is Amulek's Household Significant?" *KnoWhy* 117 (June 8, 2016).

For a compilation of the visitations received by Joseph Smith, see Alexander L. Baugh, "Parting the Veil: Joseph Smith's Seventy-six Documented Visionary Experiences," in *Opening the Heavens*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Studies, 2005), 268–273, 280–289.

### Alma 10:7 — These Events Happened Rapidly

The events Ammonihah all happened within the tenth year of the reign of the judges. Alma and Amulek were in jail for "many days," and Alma had stayed with Amulek's family for "many days." He cannot have been with Amulek for more than three or four

months, and they cannot have been in jail for more than two or three months, because there were only about six months for those events to occur, since this episode began at the beginning of the seventh month (10:6) and finished before the end of that year (15:19). So, all this happened fairly quickly, even though it takes several chapters to cover this agonizing scene.

### **Alma 10:12 — The People of Ammonihah Were Astonished**

The people had complained because there was only one person, Alma, condemning them, which was a legitimate legal issue. How surprised and crestfallen they must have been when Amulek similarly testified. “When Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were accused.” The Lord again provided a tender mercy to aid in his purposes. He does not leave us alone. Yet, they hardened their hearts and “were more angry with Amulek” (Alma 10:24).

### **Alma 10:14–16 — Definition of “Lawyer” in Nephite Culture**

What did the word *lawyer* mean to the Nephites? They did not have lawyers as we do: they did not have bar exams, they did not have law schools, and they did not have reported cases. These people were simply officials who helped with the administration of the law. They were called *lawyers* because they were involved with the law. The same was true when Jesus condemned the lawyers; they did not have lawyers in Jerusalem. The word used is *nomikos*, which means a law person, and Luke uses that word where Mark uses the word *Pharisee*. It is a way of classifying people who are deeply involved in the study and interpretation of the law, official culture, required customs, and so on. In the Jewish system, we find no evidence that these knowledgeable functionaries represented clients in court or in negotiating and transacting business deals as our lawyers do today.

### **Alma 10:31–32 — Zeezrom**

Zeezrom, who contended with Alma and Amulek and was subsequently converted, is described as a lawyer, one that was expert in his area, “having much business to do among the people.” Alma 10:32 adds, “Now the object of these lawyers was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ.” In fact, those assigned as judges and legal administrators were paid under the new law of Mosiah by their time. Alma 11:1 says, “Now it was in the law of Mosiah that every man who was a judge of the law, or those who were appointed to be judges, should receive wages according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged.” Apparently, Zeezrom was one who earned his living according to the time he spent in such legal matters, which gave them incentive to aggressively encourage litigation.

## Alma 11

### **Alma 11:1–4 — King Mosiah Standardized Their Monetary System**

The system of weights and measures described in Alma 11:5–19 was instituted by King Mosiah (11:4) as part of the legal reforms he instituted (11:1) to serve the needs of the justice system that began with the new reign of the judges. Why was this economic reform necessary?

Previously, the king administered the justice system and appointed judges. To be a judge was a position of honor, and the elders would take their turns serving. It was the responsibility of all adult men to participate in the legal process. The virtue of judging righteously was expected to be a universal virtue in the Old Testament. The men were supposed to know the law and judge according to the proper values and conventions of the Law of Moses. But the names of their “different pieces” of gold or silver varied from town to town, and “in every generation” (11:4). They did not “reckon” (count) according to the old Jewish manner of accounting used in Jerusalem, and they did not use the old Jewish measurements, or names for their weights and measures (11:4).

For the Nephites, all this changed with the reign of the judges. They had a professional, nationwide judiciary now. The judges would have to award damages and their judgments would need to be clear. In addition, they would have to be paid themselves. The governors needed to know how much to pay them. This is likely why the creation of this new legal system and the standardized Nephite monetary system came into being, hand-in-hand. Previously the Nephites “altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the judges, they having been established by king Mosiah” (11:4).

This monetary system had no coins as such. They only had weights of standard sizes that could be then equated with certain measures of grain or other commodities (Figure 1). Mosiah’s basic silver system had six binary weights: a Leah, Shiblum, Shiblon, Senum, Amnor, and Ezrom, with the Onti being the sum of them all (Figure 2). They would have known how to use these in the marketplace, allowing them to convert from silver, or gold, into “barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain” (11:7), and from there into the various other commodities. Nephites would have had weights for each of these sizes that they could use in weighing produce on balance scales to determine whether they had the right amount of barley, oil, or any other commodity. For efficiency, an antion (equal to 1½ measure) was added, which actually maximizes the number of amounts that could be weighed with the fewest number of weights.



Figure 1 Stone weights from the Etruscan area of Gubbio, Italy. Photo by John W. Welch.

## King Mosiah's Monetary System

### Alma 11:1–19

Silver Measure	Gold Equivalent	Grain Equivalent	Math Ratio
leah		$\frac{1}{8}$ measure	1, or $2^0$
shiblum		$\frac{1}{4}$ measure	2, or $2^1$
shiblon		$\frac{1}{2}$ measure	4, or $2^2$
senum	senine	1 measure	8, or $2^3$
	antion	$1\frac{1}{2}$ measures	12
amnor	seon	2 measures	16, or $2^4$
ezrom	shum	4 measures	32, or $2^5$
onti	limnah	7 measures	

Figure 2 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "King Mosiah's Monetary System," in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 110

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 36–45, 86: "This sidelight in the book of Alma contains enough facts to support meaningful parallels between King Mosiah's weights and measures and those used in other ancient cultures. For many reasons, these monetary details found in the large plates are weighty matters indeed. The attempted bribery, the overreaching of the lawyers, the royal standardization and official codification of these measures, their mathematical relationships, and the unusual names involved in Alma 11 have long intrigued readers."

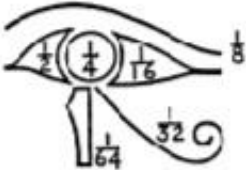






### **Alma 11:4–19 — Mosiah's System Compared with Those of Egypt and Mesopotamia**

Where did Mosiah's system of weights and measures come from? We aren't told, but we do know from Mosiah 1:2–5 that King Benjamin taught his sons "in all the language of his fathers," including "the language of the Egyptians," so that they could read the engravings on the plates of brass. No doubt, one of the first things Mosiah and his brothers would have learned was how to count in Egyptian, a basic part of any language. In the early twentieth century, a mathematical papyrus was found that shows us how precise and elegant the ancient Egyptian system of weights and measures actually was. Interestingly, the mathematical symbols for counting in the marketplace were all related to the "wedjat eye," or the right eye of Horus. Altogether, it was a symbol of protection, royal power, and complete good health, as well as a full measure of grain. When broken into its parts, moving around the eye, each part became the glyph that represented that fraction of the full measure. So, the pupil was  $\frac{1}{4}$ , the eyebrow was  $\frac{1}{8}$ , the eyelash was  $\frac{1}{32}$ , and the tear duct was (sadly) only  $\frac{1}{64}$ . This system was binary (each measure was half the size of the previous measure), and there were six of these weights or measures with the seventh being the sum of them all, just like the system inaugurated by King Mosiah (Figure 3).

Moreover, in the beginning of legal history in Mesopotamia, a king named Eshnunna (1770 B.C., just before Hammurabi) set forth a body of laws. His law code began, as its first matter of business, by establishing how much silver was worth how much barley, and then how much silver it took to purchase how much sesame, and so forth. This was an immense step forward in establishing a kingdom-wide economy with regulated ratios and established proportions. These laws in the kingdom of Eshnunna allowed people to deal confidently in the marketplace with barley, silver, oil, lard, wool, salt, bitumen, and refined and unrefined copper. And this was one more thing that King Mosiah's system also did, allowing people to convert between precious metals and "every kind of grain" (11:7).



# Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Grain Measurement

Full Measure		$\frac{63^*}{64}$
Half Measure		$\frac{32}{64}$
Quarter Measure		$\frac{16}{64}$
Eighth Measure		$\frac{8}{64}$
Sixteenth Measure		$\frac{4}{64}$
Thirty-Second Measure		$\frac{2}{64}$
Sixty-Fourth Measure		$\frac{1}{64}$

\*Compare Alma 11:10: “the value of them all”

Figure 3 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Egyptian Hieroglyphs for Grain Measurement,” in *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 113.

This was an early form of price regulation, so that people could not overcharge. They also could not create artificial scarcity on a commodity like corn in order to price gouge. It was a big step forward in creating a viable market economy, but at the same time it could also be subject to abuse, as is seen with the lawyers and judges of Ammonihah.

By combining the binary aspect of the Egyptian grain measure with the commodities conversion feature found in the earliest Mesopotamian laws, Mosiah (perhaps unwittingly, but maybe intentionally) brought together cultural contributions from both the Nephite (Egyptian) and the Mulekite (Near Eastern, Jaredite, and Mesopotamian) worlds. And recent interest in the complex and long-term use of standardized accounting practices and currencies in the ancient Maya world offers students of the Book of Mormon yet another glimpse into why the details about Mosiah system of weights and measures were reported as they were in the book of Alma.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "[Why You Should Care About the Nephite Weights and Measures System](#) (Alma 11:7)," *KnoWhy* 322 (June 5, 2017).

John W. Welch, "[The Laws of Eshnunna and Nephite Economics](#)," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 147–149.

Kirk Magleby, "[Money in Ancient America](#)," online at [bookofmormonresources.com](http://bookofmormonresources.com). This blog post draws extensively from David A. Freidel, Marilyn A. Masson, and Michelle Rich, "[Imagining a Complex Maya Political Economy: Counting Tokens and Currencies in Image, Text and the Archaeological Record](#)," *Cambridge Archeological Journal* (2016), 29–54.

### Alma 11:21–22 — Zeezrom Attempts to Bribe Amulek

Zeezrom offered a bribe to Amulek, "Behold, here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a Supreme Being." That was the equivalent of forty-two days' work; it was a substantial bribe. In Exodus 23:1–8, there exists what I refer to as Jehovah's Code of Judicial Justice. This comes at the end of the Covenant Code, which begins in Exodus 20. The prologue to the Covenant Code is the Ten Commandments, as is fairly obvious. But very few notice that Exodus 23 also has ten commandments at the end of the Covenant Code. They all deal with the justice system, and the last one is, "thou shalt not take a bribe."

Exodus 23 describes the judicial values that all men under the Law of Moses were obligated to enforce, and if you go down the checklist, every one of those judicial values

was violated here in Ammonihah, showing the complete wickedness, unrighteousness, and injustice of the residents, justifying the fate that eventually falls upon them.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “Why Would Zeezrom Attempt to Bribe Amulek?” *KnoWhy* 118, (June 9, 2016).

John W. Welch, “Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 36–45, 86: “Mormon’s break to introduce the Nephite monetary system makes sense in light of Zeezrom’s attempted bribe. To give readers a solid understanding of the gravity of the situation, and to help them better appreciate both the level of corruption in Ammonihah as well as the nature of Amulek’s temptation, Mormon provided his description of the monetary system at this place in the narrative. In short, by knowing the Nephite monetary system, readers would know how much Zeezrom’s bribe was worth—about 42 days of labor.”

### Alma 11:26–35 — Zeezrom Questions Amulek

Zeezrom’s arguments are closely related to the Nehorite doctrines. When compared to the things which Nehor taught, especially in Alma 1, you see the consistency with these arguments now raised against Alma and Amulek. They are the political platform of the Nehorite people. It is not a casual “what can we ask him?” line of inquiry. These questions are crucial for establishing the difference between the Nephite and Nehorite points-of-view. Alma and Amulek answered those questions with a long discourse in Alma chapters 12 and 13.

## Alma 12

### Alma 12:1–2 — Alma Confounds the Nehorite Doctrine

Alma’s discourse in chapters 12 and 13 is one of the most profound theological, religious, priesthood, and temple-oriented speeches found anywhere in the scriptures.

A great irony of this episode is that Alma chose to teach some of the most exalted and holy things in the Book of Mormon to some of the most wicked and depraved people found in that text. Why did Alma do that? It may have been a final effort. He may have set the glories of the Gospel and all potential blessings in front of them, in the hope of the people changing, but he knew that it was not likely to happen.

Understanding what the Nehorites believed is an aid to observing how Alma opposed that set of doctrines. While there is no text containing Nehor’s preaching, much is known of his doctrine through Alma’s report and from what Mormon retained in his

abridgement. When combined, these sources allow a list of the main Nehorite doctrines to be made:

**Nehorite Priests:** From Alma 1:3, we learn that Nehorite priests were to be supported by the people and were not allowed to labor with their own hands. There is no indication as to why, but perhaps getting their hands dirty would have made them impure and would disqualify them from performing some kinds of sacred rituals. To correct this whole doctrine and system of priestcraft, Alma speaks at length in Alma 13 about the holy priesthood order after the Son of God.

**Nehorite Redemption and Restoration:** The Nehorites taught that all mankind would be saved and redeemed (Alma 1:4). It is not clear where they got that idea, but from Alma's instruction to Corianton in Alma 41, it appears that they had conflated redemption with restoration. They believed that God had created all people, and they also agreed that mankind was originally in a newly created state in the Garden of Eden. They acknowledged that there had been some kind of a fall. However, they believed that God would redeem his people by buying them all back. The word redemption means to buy back. For example, as in redeeming land. If a person were poor under ancient law, and had to sell their land to pay their debts, one of their near kinsmen could buy the land from the buyer, in order to keep it in the family. That was known as the right of redemption. The words redemption and redeem are still used even in our own property and mortgage law.

However, when ancient Israelites redeemed something, they typically returned it to the person who had originally lost it. Thus, the Nehorites presumably got their idea of full and automatic restoration from the concept that there would be a redemption. They had overlooked the teaching that in order to qualify to receive a full redemption, they had to do something. Specifically, they had to repent and obey the commandments. They could have argued that under their redemption model, the poor person whose land was redeemed did not have to do anything. His land was freely redeemed. But the poor person then owed his near-kinsman a great deal. If the poor person was rude to their near-kinsman, did not show him respect, and did nothing for him, their near kinsman would not be pleased. To give a full and correct understanding of the fall and the redemption, Alma speaks in detail about those topics in the second half of Alma 12.

**Nehorite Rejoicing:** The followers of Nehor taught that people should not "fear and tremble" (Alma 1:4). It is interesting that when Zeezrom began arguing with Amulek, and Amulek silenced him, it says, "He [Zeezrom] began to tremble" (Alma 12:1, 7, see also Alma 11:46). These very people claimed that there was no need to tremble, and in the record, Alma points out gladly, that Zeezrom was trembling. It pierced him to his

heart; he knew better. Even though the Nehorites taught that they need not tremble, their own consciences belied their teaching. While they taught that all people should lift up their heads and rejoice, in Alma 13:22 Alma indicated the real nature of joy and rejoicing. He taught how and why to rejoice. They would truly rejoice when they entered into the rest of the Lord. Their idea of rejoicing—eating, drinking and being merry—was not real joy. Alma preferred the more eternal approach.

**Nehorite Rejection of the Final Judgment:** Some of the Nehorites appeared to believe in an afterlife, but they denied the idea of resurrection and repudiated the doctrine of a final judgment, because they believed that there was no sin. They argued that God had created all people equal and therefore would equally restore everyone through his redemption. Alma will address this topic in Alma 12–13 and also in his teaching to Corianton in Alma 41. The Nehorite view was that we are all equal, and thus they could not see how God could make any distinctions among them. But by arguing that because there was no sin there would be no punishment, they actually rejected the entire principle of prophecy.

### **Alma 12:9–11 — How Can We Know the Mysteries of God?**

In Alma 12:9 it says, “It is given unto many to know the mysteries.” How can they be mysteries if they are known to many? They are things which are kept sacred, and there is a limit to who learns of them, namely the covenant people. The people who are obedient, who with their faith and diligence according to their heed, allow it to be revealed to them, and they are shown more incrementally.

In addition, people may be given many opportunities, but not all absorb them to the same degree. Alma was teaching people who did not accept those mysteries. He was essentially saying to them, “We as Nephites do not have anything that is exclusively private. I am willing to give the mysteries of God to all of you. It is given to many, and you can absorb this at whatever speed or depth you are able.” It was a very kind position for him to take under the circumstances.

But, as he explained, God will “impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him” (12:9), and that statement is, in all of scripture, the best formula for how to understand and appreciate what are called here “the mysteries.”

*Heed and diligence.* What do those words mean? *To heed* means hearing and paying close attention. The words are “according to the *heed*.” In other words, one can heed a little bit or a lot. One can heed certain things, while wrongly overlooking to heed other things.

The people of Ammonihah were not heedful at all. They were very dismissive, very proud, not teachable, and not willing to listen.

In 1 Nephi 16:28, Nephi said that the Liahona “worked according to the *faith* and *diligence* and *heed* which thou didst give unto them.” In that scripture, faith, diligence, and heed applied only to the use of the Liahona, whereas Alma now took that sacred operation which the prophets used to make that instrument work and applied it to people’s spiritual lives.

Our leaders continually tell us to heed the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon. One should not just read it through, but also really read it and understand. Sometimes that takes somebody to teach us and others to discuss it with. It is assumed that obedience will be part of that learning process. The words *heed*, *hearken*, and *obey* are linguistically very closely related. We should evaluate how well we are heeding today in comparison with how well we heeded in previous years.

We also need to be diligent to obtain the mysteries of God, and in order to be diligent we must work. Alma addressed the *mysteries of God* being unfolded. King Benjamin unfolded mysteries. By that, he meant “sacred revelations.” Often these mysteries, or sacred revelations, have a great deal to do with the temple; they are not mysterious in the modern sense of the word. If the word *sacred revelation* is used whenever the word *mystery* appears—and that is what King Benjamin revealed, namely “the words that the angel spoke to me”—the text becomes much clearer. There is nothing really “mysterious” about it. It is sacred revelation. The temple is a place where many of the sacred revelations, especially the foreordained plan of God, how we will progress, and why we are here, are all made manifest.

In Amos 3, it is written, “God will do nothing save he reveal his mysteries unto his servants the prophets.” The word *mystery* in that context refers to the prophetic experience of being brought up into the Council, amidst the hosts of Heaven, where the will of God and the judgments of God are manifest. The word *plan* appears seven times in chapter 12. This chapter has the highest density of references to the plan of salvation in any chapter in the Book of Mormon. It is the plan that is revealed to the prophet, so people know what the program is. The *plan* is really the greatest *mystery*, because it is the decree of the Council of Heaven, which is what the word *mystery* means in this context.

It is interesting that the word *mystery* is used in the very first verse of the Book of Mormon. Nephi mentions that he had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God (1 Nephi 1:1), and he gives that as the reason for making his sacred record. Some people believe that they will never find out what the *mysteries* are until they arrive in Heaven, but the prophets reveal mysteries frequently.

### Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Does Alma Mention ‘the Plan’ Ten Times in His Words to Corianton?](#) (Alma 42:13),” *KnoWhy* 150 (July 25, 2016).

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Teach His Opponents about the Temple?](#)” *KnoWhy* 119 (June 10, 2016).

### Alma 12:12–15 — How Will We Be Judged?

In Alma 12:14, Alma presented one of the most important mysteries, realing how we will be judged:

For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence. (12:14)

Just as students wonder what their final exam is going to be like, people are concerned about what the final judgement will be based on. As part of their basic doctrine, the Nephites believed that all men would be resurrected and would have to stand before God to be judged according to how they had lived. Alma went into more detail on the elements of that final judgment in this text than is available elsewhere. He taught that people would be judged on three elements, *deeds*, *words*, and *thoughts*.

The idea of being judged based on our deeds, or individual actions, is comfortable enough for most people, but how about our words? Are people prepared to be judged on their words? Jesus spoke of that same principle, “By whatsoever measure you mete.” In other words, the judgments that people have themselves spoken will set the rules or the orders of judgment upon which they will be judged. This judgment of words is scary, for measuring one’s words is rather harder than controlling one’s deeds.

However, what about “our thoughts will also condemn us”? How many people are ready to be judged according to their *thoughts*? In this, there is nowhere to hide! That is the same principle that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, a teaching also found in biblical and ancient Jewish thought. Judgment is not only based on what one does, but what one thinketh “in the heart” (see Genesis 27:41; Psalms 14:1; Luke 2:25).

How can one repent of bad thoughts? How can one get those out of the mind? We must feel godly sorrow for our mental sins. Like Zeezrom, we must, to some extent, suffer spiritual migraines over our intellectual mistakes (see Alma 15:3, 5). In many ways, their effects on ourselves and on others are the hardest to undo, but through Jesus Christ’s

Atonement, the human intellect can be transformed into an instrument for loving God. The Atonement, through repentance, is the only way that these things can be cleansed and changed. A change of heart can also lead to a change of mind. Alma 12:14 is a beautiful text. What Alma taught is priceless. These are the words by which we will be judged. These words will guide us unto eternal life.

### Further Reading

John W. Welch, "And with All Thy Mind," *BYU Speeches*, September 30, 2003.

### **Alma 12:22–32 — Alma Taught the Creation Story Using Temple Themes**

In chapter 12 and on into chapter 13, Alma taught the people of Ammonihah about the Creation story and the Fall of Adam and Eve, and how they and all mankind can avert a second death by obeying God's commandments (12:22). Since all people must die and come to judgment (12:24), messengers and angels were sent and God revealed the plan of mercy through the Son (12:29–30). Mankind was then given a second set of commandments (12:32), accompanied by an oath that whoever broke those commandments would die an ultimate spiritual death (12:35–36). After stating these fundamentals, Alma continues his teaching on into chapter 13. Actually, the break between chapters 12 and 13 is one of the least felicitous chapter breaks in the Book of Mormon. The text at the end of chapter 12 flows right into what follows in chapter 13, as Alma continued speaking about several very sacred and important doctrines. Alma was the High Priest, and accordingly addressed several temple themes in these two chapters. But in chapter 12, he sets the stage for the need for holy order of the priesthood, which he discusses in chapter 13.

Why did he relate the Creation story? One reason may be that when people are disobedient and have lived a long time without the influence of the Gospel, as had the people in Ammonihah, the most basic and compelling teachings are found in the the story of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. For example, later, Ammon asked King Lamoni if he would believe everything he said. Lamoni replied that he would believe, and so Ammon also began with Adam and Eve. The Creation account was foundational in most ancient religions.

The doctrine of Christ's Atonement makes little sense without the doctrine of the Fall. People need to know why the world is in its present condition for them to appreciate what the Atonement of Christ offers. Alma told this story of Adam and Eve hoping that the people in Ammonihah would recognize their predicament without his having to accuse them more. He was not dwelling on *their* transgressions. He was saying that there is a problem for everyone. Of course, Nehorite doctrine did not accept that principle;



they thought that everyone would be saved and there was no such thing as sin. Thus, Alma set this doctrine out in detail and clarified it.

It is well to remember that Alma was the High Priest with responsibility for temple matters. In current times, the temple endowment begins in the Creation room. It goes through the Creation account, then through the garden room, through the world room, and then to the terrestrial room. After the Creation, the Orders of the Priesthood are given. This is common knowledge described openly. These parts of the mysteries are told to all. In Alma chapters 12–13, he spoke of the creation, the fall, then the orders of the Priesthood, including the Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God. It is possible that Alma, as the high priest, was speaking in veiled terms to these people about what the Nephite temple ordinances were all about, and saying, “I am giving you as much as I can about all of the truth that we have.”

In Alma 12:20, Antionah, a chief ruler, asked:

What is this that thou hast said, that men should rise from the dead and be changed from this mortal to an immortal state that the soul can never die. What does the scripture mean which saith that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the east of the garden of Eden, lest our first parents should enter and partake of the fruit of the tree of life and live forever? And thus we see that there was no possible chance that they should live forever.

This was a great question, and it is interesting that this chief ruler among them had that much knowledge. Those people, of course, had not yet experienced the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of Christ. Those who did not believe that it was going to happen, nor understood how it was going to happen, were left hanging. All they knew was that they had been kicked out of the Garden and banned from partaking of the tree of eternal life, a sad situation.

The use of covenants pervades scriptural texts. In Alma 12:35, we read, “And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.” With these words, God Himself was making an oath. A covenant is a two-way oath, in which God swears certain things, and we reciprocate. Generally, there is a positive and a negative consequence for our diligence in keeping the oath.

*Entering into my rest* was their way of saying *entering into the presence of God*. At the end of a long journey, we can be in God’s presence and rest with him. The word *rest* occurs several times here (four in Alma 12:34–37, and five times throughout Alma 13).

This text tells us more than any other text in the Book of Mormon about how their understanding of the Plan of Salvation was taught by the Nephites, often in the form of

ordinance and rituals, which helped the covenant people retain and expand that knowledge. Alma taught the people of Ammonihah what has been taught through the ages and is still taught today, the Plan of Salvation, the purpose for earth-life, and the means to progress beyond it.

### **Further Reading**

John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 297–387, esp. 363–367.

LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, "Alma 12, The Universal Pattern of Apostasy," in *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2011), 538–540.