

## Comments on Alma 31

In this chapter Mormon carefully arranges the text to contrast the Zoramites and Alma. Mormon sets the context by explaining why Alma and the others had to resume their traveling ministry (v. 1-7) and describing the Zoramites (v. 8-11). Mormon then contrasts the prayer (v. 12-18) and actions (v. 19-23) of the Zoramites with the prayer (v. 24-35) and actions (v. 36-38) of Alma.

1 NOW it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people. 2 For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

3 Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south, which wilderness was full of the Lamanites. 4 Now the Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, and that it would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites.

5 And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just--yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them--therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. 6 Therefore he took Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner; and Himni he did leave in the church in Zarahemla; but the former three he took with him, and also Amulek and Zeezrom, who were at Melek; and he also took two of his sons. 7 Now the eldest of his sons he took not with him, and his name was Helaman; but the names of those whom he took with him were Shiblon and Corianton; and these are the names of those who went with him among the Zoramites, to preach unto them the word.

v1-7 Alma is very unhappy to hear that a group of Nephites have separated themselves from the Nephites (v. 2) because they had adopted different religious views that were decadent (v. 1). This group had moved out to the borders of the Nephite territory into an area that had Lamanites living in it (v. 3) so Alma was afraid they were going to join up with them (v. 4).

As preaching repentance had a more powerful effect on people than anything else, Alma resolves to go and preach to them (v. 5). Alma takes the sons of Mosiah with him, as well as Amulek and Zeezrom (v. 6), and two of his own younger sons (v. 7).

v1 "the Zoramites", it would appear at least some of the descendants of Zoram traced their genealogy separately from the Nephites as indicated by 54:23. Thus, we might assume from this that these people were called "Zoramites" not just because they were followers of the contemporary Zoram, but because they were descendants of the original Zoram.

The potential problem here is that Amalikhiah and Ammoron, the two we know are descendants of the ancient Zoram from 54:23, are among the Nephites prior to Amalikhiah's revolt. These Zoramites cast the righteous out from among them and then join with the Lamanites against the Nephites in war in ch. 43.

"dumb idols", i.e., the gold, silver, and fine goods mentioned in v. 24.

8 Now the Zoramites were dissenters from the Nephites; therefore they had had the word of God preached unto them. 9 But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God, and his statutes, according to the law of Moses. 10 Neither would they observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation. 11 Yea, in fine, they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances; therefore, for this cause, Alma and his brethren went into the land to preach the word unto them.

v8-11 Mormon informs us the Zoramites have deliberately abandoned (v. 8) both the Law of Moses (v. 9) and the church (v. 10) after having been taught about it when they were among the Nephites. This rejection of the gospel in favor of decadence is what causes Alma to preach to them (v. 10).

12 Now, when they had come into the land, behold, to their astonishment they found that the Zoramites had built synagogues, and that they did gather themselves together on one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord; and they did worship after a manner which Alma and his brethren had never beheld; 13 For they had a place built up in the center of their synagogue, a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person. 14 Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying:

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever. 16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of

their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ. 17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God. 18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

v12-18 Upon coming among the Zoramites Alma is stunned by their form of worship (v. 12, 20). They had built up a tower which was high overhead, and one person at a time (v. 13) would go up on it (v. 14) and offer the same prayer (v. 20). The prayer is an incredibly arrogant one talking about how holy they are and thanking God for choosing them to be His elect while everyone else would be destroyed because of their vain beliefs in Christ (v. 15-18).

v13-14 These verses are apparently describing a ziggurat-like stepped pyramids, as opposed to any indoor structure. That the person would climb up on top and stretch out their hands towards heaven also suggests the tower was exposed to open air as opposed to indoors.

v15-18 The prayer they offer up is structured as a repeated synthetical parallelism, as follows:

A - 15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy,

B - and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

C - 16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren;

D - and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children;

E - and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

B - 17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever;

C - and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee;

D - and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren,

E - which doth bind them down to a belief of Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

A - 18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

Their doctrinal views sound something like Gnosticism in that they believe God is an unchanging Spirit and individual Holiness or spirituality is achieved through an intellectual ascent. It is interesting to note their allegedly blessed condition has nothing to do with works or behavior, but rather God's election of them because of their knowledge of the truth. Religion to them is an intellectual pursuit and not a way to live your life, which explains their behavior in v. 23-24. Note Alma's characterization of them in 38:13, "they pray to be heard of men, and to be praised for their wisdom".

19 Now it came to pass that after Alma and his brethren and his sons had heard these prayers, they were astonished beyond all measure. 20 For behold, every man did go forth and offer up these same prayers. 21 Now the place was called by them Rameumptom, which, being interpreted, is the holy stand. 22 Now, from this stand they did offer up, every man, the selfsame prayer unto God, thanking their God that they were chosen of him, and that he did not lead them away after the tradition of their brethren, and that their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about. 23 Now, after the people had all offered up thanks after this manner, they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand, to offer up thanks after their manner.

v19-23 Alma and the others are shocked at the pride of these people (v. 19) because they all go up on the stand (v. 21) and say the same prayer (v. 20, 22) and then never have anything to do with God again until next week when they do the same thing all over again (v. 23).

v21 "Rameumptom...the holy stand", Commentary on the Book of Mormon, 1958, vol. 3, page 81, by Reynolds and Sjodahl, states:

Rameumptom was the name given by the Zoramites to the elevated place in their synagogues whence they offered up their vain-glorious and hypocritical prayers. Alma states that the word means a holy stand. It resembles, in its roots, Hebrew and also Egyptian in a remarkable manner. Ramoth, high (as Ramoth Gilead), elevated, a place where one can see and be seen; or, in a figurative sense, sublime or exalted. Mptom has probably its roots in the Hebrew word translated threshold, as we are told that the Philistines' god, Dagon, has a threshold in Ashdod (See I Samuel 5:4-5). Words with this root are quite common in the Bible. Thus we see how Rameumptom means a high place to stand upon, a holy stand.

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism entry under the entry for "Book of Mormon Language" has:

"Rameumptom" (Alma 31:21), meaning "holy stand," contains consonantal patterns suggesting the stems /rmm/ramah/, "to be high," and /tmm/tam/tom/, "to be complete, perfect, holy." The /p/ between the /m/ and /t/ is a linguistically natural outgrowth of a bilabial /m/ in coluster with a stop /t/, such as the /p/ in /assumption/ from /assume + tion/, and the /b/ in Spanish /hombre/ from Latin /homere/.

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods. 25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride. 26 And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying: O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men? 27 Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world. 28 Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say--we thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish. 29 Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ. 30 O Lord God, how long wilt thou suffer that such wickedness and infidelity shall be among this people? O Lord, wilt thou give me strength, that I may bear with mine infirmities. For I am infirm, and such wickedness among this people doth pain my soul. 31 O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have

strength, that I may suffer with patience these afflictions which shall come upon me, because of the iniquity of this people. 32 O Lord, wilt thou comfort my soul, and give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers who are with me--yea, Ammon, and Aaron, and Omner, and also Amulek and Zeezrom and also my two sons--yea, even all these wilt thou comfort, O Lord. Yea, wilt thou comfort their souls in Christ. 33 wilt thou grant unto them that they may have strength, that they may bear their afflictions which shall come upon them because of the iniquities of this people. 34 O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing them again unto thee in Christ. 35 Behold, O Lord, their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren; therefore, give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these, our brethren, again unto thee.

v24-35 Alma is greatly saddened by their gross idolatry, in that they love riches (v. 24) and themselves (v. 25). Alma sorely laments (v. 26) their pride (v. 27), materialism (v. 28), and false doctrine (v. 29). He asks the Lord how long He will tolerate such things among His people. He then emphatically pleads with the Lord to give him and the others with him strength in the ministry because they are sure to suffer afflictions because of the wickedness of these people (v. 30-33). And he closes with an appeal to the Lord that they have success in getting these people to repent (v. 34-35).

Contrast Alma's emotional prayer with the prayer by rote the Zoramites offer. Alma is emphatically pleading with the Lord for Him to support himself and his brothers in their weakness and help them bring these people to repentance. He prays their will have the Spirit with them to support them in their trials, and does so in the name of Christ. This is exactly the opposite of the Zoramite prayer.

v26 Compare Habakkuk 1:2-4 for a similar lament.

v28 Compare Isa. 3:16-23.

v30 "for I am infirm", Alma isn't all that old at this point, perhaps in his mid 40's. Alma did receive a wound in combat according to 3:22, but he went on to considerable missionary labors after that. He may be speaking of how great his remorse is over this wickedness and his reaction to it is so great it is making him literally physically weak.

v34-35 While the Lord will not overpower people's free agency to make the repent in order to grant Alma's wish, He can lead Alma and his brothers to those who are repentant and give them as much assistance as possible in getting them to repent.

Now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words, that he clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. 37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on. 38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

v36-38 After praying for them, Alma places his hands upon those with him and they are all filled with the Spirit (v. 36). They then separate and go about their labors taking no thought for material things (v. 37) as the Lord provided for them both physically and spiritually according to Alma prayer in faith (v. 38).

v36 "clapped his hands", see comments on Mosiah 18:11.

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