

## **General Comments on Alma 32-35**

The missionary labors of Alma and Amulek among the Zoramites in these chapters stand in sharp contrast to Ammon and Aaron among the Lamanites in the preceding chapters (cf. ch. 17-27). The Lamanites were a hardened people, but were that way because of honest ignorance and the persistent traditions of their fathers. The missionary efforts among the Lamanites was initially difficult, but ultimately very successful. The missionaries taught basic gospel truths and were readily accepted. The converts received powerful spiritual witnesses and were zealous afterwards, even to the point they would sacrifice their lives rather than shed blood in defending themselves. They willingly separate themselves from the non-believing Lamanites and join with the Nephites. Then a war between the Nephites and Lamanites follows because the apostate Nephites stir up the Lamanites (cf. ch. 28).

Here, the target audience is a group of deliberately apostate arrogant Nephites. The missionaries use elegant and sophisticated speech when addressing them, and they have little impact on them. The missionaries experience general rejection. Those who do believe the missionaries are those who are largely forced to be humble as a result of the external circumstances of poverty and social rejection. Even then, they do not willingly separate from the non-believers. Only when they are expelled by the unrepentant Zoramites do they join the Nephites. After that, the remaining Zoramites join with the remaining hardened Lamanites and a war between the Nephites and Lamanites follows because the collective apostate Nephites stir up the Lamanites (cf. ch. 43).

The underlying message is one of pride and the difficulty of overcoming pride even when circumstances dictate humility. The missionary efforts to the Lamanites was the sons of Mosiah and a couple of others spread out among many thousands of Lamanites. Here, we have the sons of Mosiah, Alma, two of Alma's sons, and Amulek among a much smaller population of Zoramites bearing down on them with greater force and they see less success, no miraculous conversions, and less than zealous converts.

On a side note, it isn't mentioned in the present text, but we learn later on part of the reason the Zoramites aren't receptive to the preaching of Alma is because of the conduct of his son Corianton, cf. 39:11. It is safe to assume those who

were against Alma (cf. 35:3) would have used this as a means of slandering and faulting him, thereby finding a convenient excuse to ignore his preaching. It seems unlikely that Corianton's bad behavior had any significant impact on the overall outcome.

Something else not mentioned in the present text is at least some of the missionaries in the party were put in bonds and subjected to stoning, cf. 38:3-4.

Another side issue is the size of the population. It must have been large enough for a class system to become established (cf. 31:5), yet small enough to be able to gather together all the people and discreetly poll the individual's feelings (cf. 35:4). I would guess hundreds of people rather than thousands. Also, there appears to be only one Rameumptom and if each worshiper goes up one at a time once a week to recite the prayer, then that necessarily limits it to hundreds. But, some of the population was excluded from the Rameumptom and while they appear to be a minority, it is not clear how large of a minority they were. Perhaps the population was in the low thousands.

The text of chapters 32-34 is highly structured. See D. Lynn Johnson's Visual Scriptures arrangement.

### **Comments on Alma 32**

The main focus of this chapter is Alma responding to the question "What shall we do?" (cf. v. 5) regarding the poor being blocked from worshiping in synagogues. His reply is the worship of God is not limited to synagogues (v. 9-11), and it is good they are blocked from the synagogues because this is encouraging them to be humble (v. 12-16) rather than hardened sign-seekers (v. 17-20), and he wants them to experiment upon the principle of faith to discover what is true (v. 21-39) and obtain eternal life and the love of God (v. 40-43).

1 AND it came to pass that they did go forth, and began to preach the word of God unto the people, entering into their synagogues, and into their houses; yea, and even they did preach the word in their streets. 2 And it came to pass that after much labor among them, they began to have success among the poor class of people; for behold, they were cast out of the synagogues because of the coarseness of their apparel-- 3 Therefore they were not permitted to enter into their synagogues to worship God, being esteemed as filthiness; therefore they

were poor; yea, they were esteemed by their brethren as dross; therefore they were poor as to things of the world; and also they were poor in heart.

v2-3 An introductory synopsis of ch. 32-34.

v3 "poor in heart", the "heart" represents one's courage or enthusiasm, the seat of one's feelings. If you are poor in heart, then you're unhappy or depressed, or both.

4 Now, as Alma was teaching and speaking unto the people upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude unto him, who were those of whom we have been speaking, of whom were poor in heart, because of their poverty as to the things of the world. 5 And they came unto Alma; and the one who was the foremost among them said unto him: Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do?

v4-5 While Alma is preaching publicly, he isn't have any success, when he is approached by a group of people who are humbled because of their poverty.

v4 "the people upon the hill Onidah", this phrase raises two issues: who were these people, and what is "onidah"? Alma is preaching to a "multitude" when he is approached by those who were of the poor class. As soon as the poor people approach him, he gives up entirely on the other multitude. We would assume they were not interested in what Alma had to say, otherwise he wouldn't have dropped them in favor of the poor people so quickly. And, in v. 7 it says the poor people were "truly penitent", suggesting the other multitude was not. How then did Alma have a multitude as an audience?

Regarding "Onidah", we hear of another hill Onidah in 47:5. These two might be the same, but it seems unlikely as this hill is on the edge of Nephite territory in Antionum near a wilderness inhabited by Lamanites (cf. 31:3) where the hill Onidah in 47:5 is located relatively nearby the Lamanite king's palace which would likely be deep inside established Lamanite territory. This suggests "onidah" is a word that means something pertinent and is not just arbitrary or after someone's name. In 47:5 it says "they fled to Onidah, the place of arms". This suggests "onidah" means something like "place of arms".

The name might be related to the Hebrew "nadan" (cf. Strong's 5084) which means "sheath", as in the sheath of a sword (uniquely appearing in 1 Chron 21:27, the more common term translated to the English "sheath" is the Hebrew "tahar", although it does not appear to differentiate at all between the knife/sword and it's sheath except by context, see Strong's 8593). And, since the Zoramites were living on the edge of Nephite civilization and near to a "wilderness...full of the Lamanites" (cf. 31:3) then it stands to reason they would have an armory. [Given it has been hundreds of years since they left Israel, I have a hard time accepting connections between transliterated Book of Mormon words and their biblical Hebrew homophones.]

If we follow this seemingly plausible line of speculation we might conclude "Onidah" means "armory" and would therefore have military persons about it. This might explain who the first multitude was whom Alma was talking to, and why they were something of a captive audience with little interest in his message. If there was a standing army, or this was where weapons were manufactured then Alma would have a group of people who weren't really able to leave, but who also weren't particularly interested in what he had to say. So, when presented with the group of poor people, he immediately gave up on these others who were a captive audience with no real interest. It is also possible the hill was a local gathering spot for public speaking, forming something of a natural amphitheater on the hillside. Or, perhaps the hill was an orchard of some type where fruit trees were grown, providing a natural setting for Alma's seed of faith symbolism in ch. 33. And, then, the captive audience would have been those tending the orchard or gathering or bundling the produce.

v5 "we have no place to worship our God", their assumption that worship had to be formalized in a particular setting is what Alma addresses in ch. 33 with his quotation of Zenos. While Alma argues you can worship wherever you like, there are modes of worship that are not appropriate wherever you like (e.g., Temple worship, both ancient and modern). Thus, there was some underlying element of truth to the Zoramite Rameumpton.

As the priests, teachers, and leaders of the people were using religion as a means of promoting themselves (cf. 35:3), they were teaching that all worship had to be regulated within their synagogue at their Rameumptom so as to exert their

influence over the people. Constructing a "holy stand" makes it all the easier as then there is a physical location they can exercise control over.

6 And now when Alma heard this, he turned him about, his face immediately towards him, and he beheld with great joy; for he beheld that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word. 7 Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those whom he beheld, who were truly penitent, and said unto them: 8 I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye. 9 Behold thy brother hath said, what shall we do?--for we are cast out of our synagogues, that we cannot worship our God. 10 Behold I say unto you, do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only? 11 And moreover, I would ask, do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week? 12 I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. 13 And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved. 14 And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? 15 Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed--yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty. 16 Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe.

v6-16 Alma recognizes this group of people are humble and have been prepared to hear the word he is preaching. Where they have been rejected by their own priests, Alma blesses them for their humility, and calls them to fully repent.

v6 Being approached by these people is the answer to Alma's prayer in 31:35.

v10-11 Alma makes it clear that worship of God is not limited to formalized liturgy. He comments on this more in his quotation of Zenos in the next chapter.

17 Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. 18 Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. 19 And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? 20 Now of this thing ye must judge. Behold, I say unto you, that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other; and it shall be unto every man according to his work. 21 And now as I said concerning faith--faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. 22 And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word. 23 And now, he imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned. 24 And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye are afflicted and cast out-- now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to that which is true-- 25 For I do not mean that ye all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves; for I verily believe that there are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might. 26 Now, as I said concerning faith--that it was not a perfect knowledge--even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. 27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

v17 "there are many who do say...show unto us a sign", Alma may be alluding to Korihor (cf. 34:43-48), who died among them (cf. 30:59).

v19 This verse explains why the Lord only reveals things piecemeal, line upon line, cp. D&C 82:3.

v23 The statements here appear to be a poke at the priestcraft among the Zoramites. The priests here have set themselves up as the exclusive rulers of the people, cf. 35:3-5. Alma contradicts this system of unrighteous dominion by stating flatly that all are eligible for personal revelation.

On the subject of angels imparting words to people, compare 2 Ne. 32:2-3 for Nephi's discussion of receiving the "tongue of angels".

v24-27 The text of these verses is obtuse. Given license to paraphrase for clarification I would reword and rearrange as follows:

24 And now, my beloved brethren, as ye have desired to know of me what ye shall do because ye are afflicted and cast out-

(now I do not desire that ye should suppose that I mean to judge you only according to [the fact that you are afflicted and cast out,] 25 For I do not mean that ye all of you have been compelled to humble yourselves; for I truly believe that there are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might). 27

- but behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. 26 Now, as I said concerning faith that it was not a perfect knowledge even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. 28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed....

In verse 24, Alma starts out a response to their question of "What shall we do?" from v. 9. But, in the second half of the verse through v. 25 he comments on their apparent humility to say that some of them might be humble regardless of their poverty and being socially outcast. In v. 26 he then reminds them of the faith he mentioned earlier in v. 21 and gives them what it is he wants them to do in v. 27, namely the experiment on faith. Unfortunately, the text is a bit confusing.

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves-It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for

it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. 29 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge. 30 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow. 31 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness. 32 Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.

v28-43 Alma uses an agricultural example among these poor people. Owing to their poverty, they are likely practicing subsistence agriculture to avoid starvation, while living among a population of specialized and wealthier elites. They might also be professional farmers who sell their produce to the wealthy elite who reject them.

The seed represents the doctrine (the "word" in v. 34) and behavior associated with that doctrine (the "nourish it" in v. 37 and the labors listed in v. 43). The person exercises their faith to plant the seed and care for it with their faith (cf. v. 36), and if it bears fruit they may eat it and obtain eternal life.

33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good. 34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand. 35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good;

v33-35 As a result of performing the test, you learn something about the results. The implication is the people have to make an effort, and not let their difficult circumstances cause depression and inaction on their part. If they are hopeless and refuse to even try, then there is no opportunity to exercise faith and obtain knowledge first hand.



and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect? 36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good. 37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit. 38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out. 39 Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof. 40 And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life. 41 But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. 42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. 43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

v35-43 Learning the first principal is true doesn't mean you have learned everything. One must keep working at the effort to gain more knowledge. Rejecting the idea or refusing to make any effort is a personal failure, not a flaw in what is being refused. It comes down to personal responsibility and effort.

Alma is trying to get a group of impoverished depressed people to reject the local way of doing things, which is going to be difficult. Trying something new and different puts you at odds with those around you, particularly when you are the lowest rung of the social ladder. He encourages them to be patient in the effort, the same way they are patient in raising produce. You have to put the effort in to see the outcome.

v41 Alma is likely drawing on Lehi's Tree of Life imagery, cf. 1 Ne. 8.

v42 "feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst", cp. Isa. 55:1-2. These people are impoverished, so having plenty of food is an appealing image.

Copyright © 2020 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.