

Comments on Alma 45

This chapter records Alma's commission to his son Helaman and subsequent departure out of the land of Zarahemla. From the preceding chapters it is obvious Alma is not happy about the way things are going with the Nephites and it's to the point where it is dragging him down low, cf. 29:1-2, 31:1-2, 31:30, 39:1-12.

His departure isn't all that surprising, especially when he ends up apparently heading off for the land of Melek. Melek is where the Anti-Nephi-Lehi's, the converted Lamanites, settled after moving out of Jershon, cf. 35:13. If Alma cannot deal with the mediocre Nephites, then where better to head than into the company of some remarkably zealous converts? The problem is if he did end up with the Anti-Nephi-Lehi's, then we would assume we would hear something about his reception and time spent there, owing to their likely favorable reception of Alma. Instead, there is nothing recorded, suggesting he didn't end up there, or didn't stay long.

1 BEHOLD, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceedingly great joy.

v1 At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th year of the reign of the judges the Nephites rejoice because the Lord has delivered them from their enemies yet again. They fast, and pray, and worship God by likely celebrating Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

This verse is similar in content to 30:2 in that it is the end/beginning of a year attended by fasting and prayer. The difference is in 30:2 it is after a terrible war and great slaughter among the Nephites, whereas the present account is after a great Nephite victory.

2 And it came to pass in the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Alma came unto his son Helaman and said unto him: Believest thou the words which I spake unto thee concerning those records which have been kept? 3 And Helaman said unto him: Yea, I believe. 4 And Alma said again: Believest thou in Jesus Christ, who shall come? 5 And he said: Yea, I believe all the words which thou hast spoken. 6 And Alma said unto him again: Will ye keep my commandments? 7 And he said: Yea, I will keep thy commandments with all my heart. 8

Then Alma said unto him: Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land.

9 But behold, I have somewhat to prophesy unto thee; but what I prophesy unto thee ye shall not make known; yea, what I prophesy unto thee shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled; therefore write the words which I shall say. 10 And these are the words: Behold, I perceive that this very people, the Nephites, according to the spirit of revelation which is in me, in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief. 11 Yea, and then shall they see wars and pestilences, yea, famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct-- 12 Yea, and this because they shall dwindle in unbelief and fall into the works of darkness, and lasciviousness, and all manner of iniquities; yea, I say unto you, that because they shall sin against so great light and knowledge, yea, I say unto you, that from that day, even the fourth generation shall not all pass away before this great iniquity shall come.

13 And when that great day cometh, behold, the time very soon cometh that those who are now, or the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi. 14 But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them, all, save it be a few who shall be called the disciples of the Lord; and them shall the Lamanites pursue even until they shall become extinct. And now, because of iniquity, this prophecy shall be fulfilled.

15 And now it came to pass that after Alma had said these things to Helaman, he blessed him, and also his other sons; and he also blessed the earth for the righteous' sake. 16 And he said: Thus saith the Lord God--Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. 17 And now, when Alma had said these words he blessed the church, yea, all those who should stand fast in the faith from that time henceforth.

v2-17 give us an accounting of Alma's final acts before departing. He commissions his son Helaman to be the high priest (v. 2-8), he predicts the fall and annihilation of the Nephites (v. 9-14), and he invokes classic covenant blessings and curses upon the righteous and wicked (v. 15-17).

v2-8 It is plain from 31:7 and ch. 37 that Helaman is the heir apparent as high priest. Here it is formalized by Alma with him

questioning Helaman's beliefs and convictions. There is nothing more Alma can do except elicit promises of faithfulness, so he does it.

Note Alma closes his comments to Helaman in specific with a blessing of prosperity for his faith and convictions. Alma then goes in completely the opposite direction in v. 9-14 when he curses the Nephites for their lack of faith and wickedness.

v9-14 Alma predicts the annihilation of the Nephites by war and famine as a result of falling into disbelief. Any remnants will either join in with the Nephites or be hunted and killed until there is no trace of them left.

Alma's primary intent is to make it clear destruction will fall on the Nephites when they sin and rebel against the Lord. The secondary intent might be to put Helaman at ease concerning the stewardship of high priest he has just received. With Alma apparently leaving because he is sick and tired of the ministry among the Nephites, this would leave a Helaman with the seemingly grim task of doing what his father is unwilling to do. So, perhaps Alma is just letting Helaman know things won't go really bad for the Nephites until well after his watch.

v13 "that great and dreadful day", Alma's prediction is couched in OT prophetic rhetoric. The final Nephite slide into apostasy took about 20 years and series of wars resulting in their annihilation took several years. It wasn't a single cataclysmic day as an overly literal interpretation of Alma's words here might suggest.

v15-17 Alma closes his tenure as the high priest with a some classic OT covenant rhetoric (cp. Ps. 37:22) with a blessing on the righteous (v. 15) and cursing on the wicked (v. 16). He then blesses the church and the faithful, whom he had particular stewardship over (v. 17).

18 And when Alma had done this he departed out of the land of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of. 19 Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church that he was taken up by the spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause we know nothing concerning his death and burial.

v18-19 Alma leaves Zarahemla apparently heading for the land of Melek, but nobody knows what ever happened to him (v. 18). But, as everyone knew how righteous Alma was, the rumor in the church was that he was buried by the hand of the Lord as was Moses and that is why nobody knows anything about his death and burial (v. 19).

Regarding Alma's departure, the chapter header in the 1981 edition BofM states "Alma is taken up by the spirit even as Moses" and then footnote b on v. 19 refers the reader to "Translated Beings". The folk doctrine that Moses was translated was largely popularized by Bruce McConkie, and persists through CES Institute manuals and even the Bible Dictionary in LDS Edition KJV.

All of this is despite the fact the Scriptures state repeatedly that Moses died (cf. Joshua 1:1-3, Jude 1:9, Deut. 32:49-50, Deut. 34:5-6, and especially see the IV/JST on Duet. 34:5-6 which was omitted from the LDS Edition KJV) and there is nothing Scriptural saying Moses was translated as was Elijah (e.g., in D&C 110:13 Elijah is explicitly identified as translated while there is no comment of such in the D&C 110:11 reference to Moses).

This folk doctrine of translation gets imputed upon Alma by the modern because a "saying", or in other words a "rumor", went around the ancient church wherein they "suppose", or in other words "speculate", the Lord took Alma unto Himself even as He took Moses unto Himself. So, the modern church concludes that if the Lord translated Moses, well then He must have translated Alma too. Aside from modern speculation being built on ancient speculation, the phrase "the Lord took Moses unto himself" does not require translation at all. Compare D&C 136:38 where the Lord says of Joseph Smith after his martyrdom "I took him to myself".

The Nephite folk tradition isn't that Moses and Alma was translated, but that both were buried by the hand of the Lord, not by the hands of men, and that is why neither of their burial sites are known. And, there is no implication whatsoever that being "buried by the hand of the Lord" means translation. v19 "the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself", we have no ancient Scripture to equate Mormon's quote with. The IV/JST on Deut. 34:5-6 does provide a potential harmonization:

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. For the Lord took him unto his fathers, in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor; therefore no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day.

The problem here is the IV/JST harmonizes on the "took" but then omits the "buried" which is present in the KJV and also referenced in v. 19.

20 And now it came to pass in the commencement of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, that Helaman went forth among the people to declare the word unto them. 21 For behold, because of their wars with the Lamanites and the many little dissensions and disturbances which had been among the people, it became expedient that the word of God should be declared among them, yea, and that a regulation should be made throughout the church. 22 Therefore, Helaman and his brethren went forth to establish the church again in all the land, yea, in every city throughout all the land which was possessed by the people of Nephi. And it came to pass that they did appoint priests and teachers throughout all the land, over all the churches.

v20-22 Helaman keeps up Alma's tradition of traveling high priest and preaches the word to the Nephites (v. 20). This traveling and preaching is necessitated by the hardening of the Nephites as a result of the wars and numerous isolated dissensions (v. 21). Thus did Helaman and his brothers travel throughout the churches among the Nephites organizing priests and teachers, getting the church on a solid footing again (v. 22).

v22 "Helaman and his brethren", it is safe to assume that by "brethren" Mormon means Shiblon and Corianton, and not just fellow men in the church.

23 And now it came to pass that after Helaman and his brethren had appointed priests and teachers over the churches that there arose a dissension among them, and they would not give heed to the words of Helaman and his brethren; 24 But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes, and would not give heed to their words, to walk uprightly before God.

v23-24 Despite the efforts to regulate the church, some of the recently appointed priests and teachers become prideful and vain. They refuse to listen to Helaman when he calls tells them

to walk uprightly before God. The result is dissension within the church.

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