

MORE THAN ONE WITNESS

Alma 8-12

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: The depth of the concepts in the Book of Mormon are a constant source of inspiration, if we will but contemplate them. There, more abundantly than in any other volume, the Lord opens the windows of heaven, not only to pour out blessings, but to let us look in (Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, p.35).

INTRODUCTION: A time comes when people are so committed to iniquity that they forfeit their right to occupy earthly real estate that might more profitably be used for people who present some hope of righteousness. Thus the great flood and the destruction of the Nephites and the Jaredites; thus the removal of the Ten Tribes and the nation of Judah from a land the Lord designated as *promised*. One scriptural description for this condition is that the people are “fully ripe.”

Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe. (Alma 37:31).

Amos saw in vision the condition of Israel before her captivity. He wrote:

THUS hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the LORD with me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more (Amos 8:1,2).

He saw fruit that had been picked and placed in a basket. This was ripe fruit. And having shown it to Amos in vision, the Lord declared, “I will not again pass by them any more.” Or, as Mormon wrote in his own record,

I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually; for I saw thousands of them hewn

down in open rebellion against their God, and heaped up as dung upon the face of the land (Mormon 2:15).

All this was true of Ammonihah, a city which was obliterated in a single day by a savage and unexpected Lamanite attack. But it was not the Lamanites who destroyed this city. The people of Ammonihah destroyed themselves.

1. ALMA CALLS THE PEOPLE OF AMMONIHAH TO REPENTANCE, BUT THEY REJECT HIM (Alma 8,9)

The portrait of Alma painted by the word pictures of these chapters is unlike any other in the Book of Mormon. Here the Lord shows us the heart and soul of this man as he labors with and suffers for people who must have reminded him very much of himself just a few years before.

When Alma got to Ammonihah, he found that

Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma (Alma 8:9).

He might have gone on to greener pastures. Both Gideon and Melek must have been delightful fields of labor, and this place showed little or no promise. But Alma did not abandon them to their impending destruction. “Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city . . .” (Alma 8:10).

But “they hardened their hearts . . .” (Alma 8:11) “and withstood all his words, and reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out . . .” (Alma 8:13).

And so he left them. One might suppose that he harbored in his heart a feeling of satisfaction, knowing that the Lord would exact a terrible retribution from them for their sinfulness. But he did not. Like the three Nephites who were freed from pain and sorrow, except for the sins of the world, Alma was

. . . weighed down with sorrow, wading through much tribulation and anguish of soul, because of the wickedness of the people who were in the city of Ammonihah . . . (Alma 8:14).

As he journeyed to the city of Aaron, he met an old friend, for “behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him” (Alma 8:14). This was the very angel that had first appeared to Alma and the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 8:15). His message?

I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent the Lord God will destroy them. For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people . . . (Alma 8:16,17).

No message could have been more welcome to Alma, for after he had “received his message from the angel of the Lord, he returned *speedily* to the land of Ammonihah” (Alma 8:18, *emphasis added*).

That word *speedily* tells us so much about Alma. We can almost visualize his delight and feel his joy as he returns to this awful city to give the people another chance at salvation. We learn something else about his feeling for these people in the next few verses. He was hungry (see Alma 8:19). Why? He tells Amulek, “I was an hungered, for I had fasted many days” (Alma 8:26). An angel had already told Amulek why Alma was fasting: “he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people” (Alma 10:7).

You may remember that in the previous lesson, we mentioned Alma 6:6, wherein the people of God were commanded to gather together in “fasting and mighty prayer” for the welfare of those who knew not God. Here we have seen Alma wrestling with God and laboring in the Spirit for these deplorable people, and we have seen him fasting for many days. What kind of effort are you willing to make to seek divine assistance for people groveling in sin? How much prayer? How much fasting?

Alma met Amulek as he entered the city, and tarried many days with him before he began to preach again in Ammonihah. And during those days,

“the people did wax more gross in their iniquities” (Alma 8:27,28). Alma’s meeting was no coincidence. Amulek had been journeying when he was met by an angel who commanded him to return to his house where he would meet and feed a prophet of the Lord (see Alma 10:7).

We get an insight from Amulek into what was taking place during the days they tarried before beginning their ministry in Ammonihah (Alma 10:10,11).

And again, I know that the things whereof he hath testified are true; for behold I say unto you, that as the Lord liveth, even so has he sent his angel to make these things manifest unto me; and this he has done *while this Alma hath dwelt at my house*. For behold, he hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake (*emphasis added*).

Note the description of Amulek’s family in this verse. He has women and children of his own, along with others for whom he has some responsibility, and who have been blessed by the presence of Alma in his home. This will be important to know in next week’s lesson.

Also note Amulek’s faith: “I know that thou wilt be a blessing tome and my house” (Alma 8:20), and the reward of that faith: “He blessed Amulek and his house” (Alma 8:22). This is a place for a testimony. When we let the prophet into our houses, when we give him a place within our families, we will always be blessed!

After many days at the home of Amulek, the word of the Lord came to Alma,

Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying--Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, except ye repent I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away (Alma 8:29).

And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with

the Holy Ghost (Alma 8:30).

The people of Ammonihah offer two objections to the preaching of Alma. One is the lack of witnesses: “Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man?” (Alma 9:2) and the second is a lack of understanding of the power of God: “They knew not that God could do such marvelous works” (Alma 9:5).

But their real problem was that they had forgotten:

Behold, O ye wicked and perverse generation, how have ye forgotten the tradition of your fathers; yea, how soon ye have forgotten the commandments of God (Alma 9:8).

It is this *forgetting* that has brought them to such desperate circumstances. Alma recites twenty-one things that the Lord has done for the Nephites—including the people of Ammonihah—and that they have forgotten. Alma warns them, “He will not suffer that ye shall live in your iniquities . . .” (Alma 9:19).

1. (Alma 9:19) “. . .after having had so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God . . .”
2. (Alma 9:20) “. . . after having been such a highly favored people of the Lord”
3. (Alma 9:20) “. . . after having been favored above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people . . .”
4. (Alma 9:20) “. . . after having had all things made known unto them, according to their desires, and their faith, and prayers, of that which has been, and which is, and which is to come . . .”
5. (Alma 9:21) “Having been visited by the Spirit of God . . .”
6. (Alma 9:21) “. . . having conversed with angels . . .”
7. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and having been spoken unto by the voice of the Lord . . .”
8. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and having the spirit of prophecy . . .”
9. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and the spirit of revelation . . .”
10. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and also many gifts, the gift of speaking with tongues . . .”
11. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and the gift of preaching . . .”

12. (Alma 9:21) “. . . and the gift of the Holy Ghost . . .”
13. (Alma 9:21) “. . .and the gift of translation . . .”
14. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been delivered by God out of the land of Jerusalem”
15. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been saved from famine . . .”
16. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been saved from . . . sickness . . .”
17. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been saved from . . . all manner of diseases of every kind . . .”
18. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having waxed strong in battle . . .”
19. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been brought out of bondage time after time . . .”
20. (Alma 9:22) “. . . having been kept and preserved . . .”
21. (Alma 9:22) “. . . and they have been prospered until they are rich in all manner of things . . .”

All of the above blessings apply in some way to members of the church in the restoration, except #14. But in the same way that Lehi’s flight saved him from the carnage in Jerusalem, the flight of the Church into the wilderness of Utah saved it from the carnage of the Civil War. How do you suppose the Lord feels when we, who have been so richly blessed, rebel and choose the things of the world over the things of the Spirit?

Alma warned what would happen to the people of Ammonihah if they continued in their transgressions:

And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, I say unto you that if this be the case, that if they should fall into transgression, it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them. For behold, the promises of the Lord are extended to the Lamanites, but they are not unto you if ye transgress; for has not the Lord expressly promised and firmly decreed, that if ye will rebel against him that ye shall utterly be destroyed from off the face of the earth? (Alma 9:23,24).

2. AMULEK PREACHES TO THE PEOPLE OF AMMONIHAH (Alma 10)

Amulek speaks in Alma 10 about his conversion. He makes an observation about his resistance to the truth that is worth some reflection on our part. I think there are thousands in the Church just like Amulek. He bore this witness:

And behold, I am also a man of no small reputation among all those who know me; yea, and behold, I have many kindreds and friends, and I have also acquired much riches by the hand of my industry. Nevertheless, after all this, I never have known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power; yea, even in the preservation of the lives of this people. Nevertheless, I did harden my heart, for I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know; therefore I went on rebelling against God, in the wickedness of my heart, even until the fourth day of this seventh month, which is in the tenth year of the reign of the judges (Alma 10:4-6).

A few years ago I watched the reclamation of a man who grew up a member of the church but with his heart far away. When he married, he married a young woman of like attitude, and they raised children who essentially followed their example. I am certain that over the years as bishops and home teachers and quorum leaders found his name among those for whom they had responsibility, they invited him to return to the fold. He was called many times, but for many years he would not hear. But then something happened. He repented and returned. He said something to me one day that Amulek might have said to Alma. "I never knew how miserable I was until I found out how happy I could be."

Sometimes the calls are more selective than the call to return to activity. How many times have you been called to be a good home or visiting teacher? How many times have you been called to have effective family home evenings or family prayer or family scripture study. I suspect that there is a little of Amulek in all of us.

The people were astonished at the testimony of this second witness (see

Alma 10:12), but many of them were not repentant. Among those were the lawyers of Ammonihah, whose object, Mormon tells us, “was to get gain; and they got gain according to their employ” (Alma 10:32). Their conduct shows us a portrait of a group of people more concerned with winning than with being right. Hyrum Smith spoke of corrupt lawyers in March of 1844.

President Hyrum Smith arose and made a few remarks. He compared the lawyers to polliwogs, wigglers, and toads. He said they would dry up next fall. "Those characters, I presume, were made in gizzard making time, when it was cheaper to get gizzards than souls; for if a soul cost \$5, a gizzard would cost nothing: like tree toads, they change color to suit the object they are upon. They ought to be ferreted out like rats. You could describe them as you would a hedgehog: they are in every hedge, stinking like the skunk (*History of the Church, Vol.6, Ch.10, p.240*).

The issue with these men is not *occupation* of course, but *preoccupation*. Any man who believes that his salvation is assured regardless of his conduct, and whose overriding aim is to make money would act as these men acted.

Amulek warned them of their danger.

Yea, well did Mosiah say, who was our last king, when he was about to deliver up the kingdom, having no one to confer it upon, causing that this people should be governed by their own voices--yea, well did he say that if the time should come that the voice of this people should choose iniquity, that is, if the time should come that this people should fall into transgression, they would be ripe for destruction. And now I say unto you that well doth the Lord judge of your iniquities; well doth he cry unto this people, by the voice of his angels: Repent ye, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Alma 10:19,20).

So many of these people had chosen iniquity that it was only by the barest margin that they were preserved.

Yea, and I say unto you that if it were not for the prayers of the righteous, who are now in the land, that ye would even now be visited with utter destruction; yet it would not be by flood, as were the people in the days of Noah, but it would be by famine, and by pestilence, and the sword. But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you; then ye shall be smitten by famine, and by pestilence, and by the sword; and the time is soon at hand except ye repent (Alma 10:22,23).

President Kimball made a comparison between the wicked of Ammonihah and our own day:

Our world is now much the same as it was in the days of the Nephite prophet who said: “. . . if it were not for the prayers of the righteous . . . ye would even now be visited with utter destruction. . . .” Of course there are many many upright and faithful who live all the commandments and whose lives and prayers keep the world from destruction (*Ensign*, June 1971, p. 16).

Just as the righteous preserved Ammonihah by their righteousness, so those among us who are righteous preserve the world from destruction.

3. AMULEK CONTENDS WITH ZEEZROM AND TESTIFIES OF CHRIST (Alma 11)

Zeezrom, in an effort to collect evidence that could be used against Amulek, offered him “six onties of silver” to “deny the existence of a Supreme Being,” (Alma 11:22). This is a fairly substantial amount of money. We learn that a judge received a senine of gold for a days work. The following verses tell us that an onti is worth seven senines. Thus Zeezrom offered Amulek the equivalent of forty-two days wages for a judge. I do not know what judges make in our day, but it must be enough to turn this into a fairly sizeable chunk of dough.

Mormon tells us that the Nephites “. . . altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in

every generation.”

the only justification for revamping a monetary system would be to make it more effective. This gives us a standard we can apply to this chapter.

The Nephite money system was a 1-2-4-7 system. In contrast, the United States currency is based on a 1-5-10 system. Use the values from 1 to 9 to determine which system is most efficient—that is, which system allows a buyer and seller to conduct business with the fewest bills or coins. For example, to purchase something which costs “1”, a buyer needs one piece of money in both systems. But for a purchase of “2”, the Nephite system is more convenient. In fact, for all values between 1 and 9, only a purchase of “5” requires less money in the US than in the Nephite system.

This is another of the many times when Joseph Smith promises and delivers. Having recorded that the Nephites modified their money system to increase its efficiency, he then proceeds to deliver just such a system—a system much more efficient than our own.

When Zeezrom asked “Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you?” Amulek gave this response: “Yea, if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord, which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord” (Alma 11:22).

Amulek teaches us that we are not required to answer every question our enemies can contrive to ask us. We sometimes feel like anything less than this is a retreat from the cause of truth. This is not the case.

I remember sitting in a missionary discussion, a first discussion, many years ago when the investigator asked a difficult question about the virgin birth of the Son of God. I was pretty sure I knew the correct response and was about to give it when my junior companion said, “Sister, we are trying to build a new house for your faith, but the foundation must come before the roof.”

That timely response satisfied her and probably saved me from becoming a fool. Some questions do not need to be answered. The only sure guide, as Amulek said, is the Spirit of the Lord. xxx

Many years ago Dr. Lindsay Curtis talked of the experience of inviting investigators to hear the discussions in his home. At times they would want to ask *him* the hard questions that have been inspired and so often repeated by our detractors. They asked questions about blacks and the priesthood or about women and the priesthood or about plural marriage. His response was always the same. “Oh, that’s one of the easiest questions, but I don’t have time to discuss it now. But I have a couple of young friends who would love to visit with you and answer your questions and tell you about Mormonism.” And he would arrange to have them meet with the missionaries. “We never did get to those hard questions,” he said.

Pres. Henry D. Moyle often turned hostile interviews into great publicity for the Church. When asked how he was able to manage such a thing, he replied, “When they don’t ask the right questions, I just answer the ones they should have asked.”

Amulek’s description of the resurrection is one of the best in the scriptures. You must know that no church on the face of the earth teaches the literal, physical resurrection as the Latter-day Saints do.

The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil (Alma 11:43,44).

I love these verses—especially the part about the hair!

In speaking about the resurrection at the funeral of Sister Rachel Grant, President Joseph F. Smith said that the same person, in

the same form and likeness, will come forth "even to the wounds in the flesh. Not that a person will always be marred by scars, wounds, deformities, defects or infirmities, for these will be removed in their course, in their proper time, according to the merciful providence of God."

President Smith was in full accord with Amulek and Alma. He taught that the body will be restored as stated in Alma 11:42-45 and 40:22-23. While he expresses the thought that the body will come forth as it was laid down, he also expresses the thought that it will take time to adjust the body from the condition of imperfections, This, of course, is reasonable, but at the same time the length of time to make these adjustments will not cover any appreciable extent of time.

President Smith never intended to convey the thought that it would require weeks or months of time in order for the defects to be removed. These changes will come naturally, of course, but almost instantly, We cannot look upon it in any other way. For instance, a man who has lost a leg in childhood will have his leg restored. It does not grow in the grave, but will be restored naturally, but with the power of the Almighty it will not take extended time for this to be accomplished (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.2, p.293 - p.294).

4. ALMA FURTHER EXPLAINS AMULEK'S WORDS AND WARNS AGAINST HARD-HEARTEDNESS. (Alma 12)

Amulek's response to the words of Zeezrom had a profound effect upon Zeezrom, for he "began to tremble . . ." (Alma 11:46). He "began to tremble under a consciousness of his guilt . . ." (Alma 12:1). And when Alma described the peril of the unrepentant people of Ammonihah, including Zeezrom, "Zeezrom began to tremble more exceedingly . . ." (Alma 12:7).

In Alma's accusations against Zeezrom he declared, Satan "hath exercised his power in thee" (Alma 12:5). Consider that insight. In what ways does Satan exercise or try to exercise his power in us? Note that this is a different matter than simply trying to deceive us and lead us astray. When

he is successful in exercising his power *in* us, he is then enabled to use us to accomplish his purposes in others.

And thou seest that we know that thy plan was a very subtle plan, as to the subtlety of the devil, for *to lie and to deceive this people that thou mightest set them against us*, to revile us and to cast us out-- Now this was a plan of thine adversary, and he hath exercised his power in thee (alma 12:4,5, *emphasis added*).

Zeezrom turned into the light instead of away from it. "Zeezrom began to inquire of them diligently, that he might know more concerning the kingdom of God" (Alma 12:8).

As Alma expands on the words of his companion (see Alma 12:1), he gives one of the great sermons on the atonement and plan of salvation in the scriptures. This chapter, along with 2 Nephi 2, 2 Nephi 9, and Alma 42, gives a wonderful insight into the nature of the redemption of Jesus Christ. The observation of Elder Maxwell in the Quote of the Week is certainly true of this chapter: "the Lord opens the windows of heaven, not only to pour out blessings, but to let us look in" (Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, p.35).

CONCLUSION: Mormon was a most remarkable editor. He tells us several times that he could only include the hundredth part of the information that was available to him. Of course he operated under the influence of the Spirit, writing by prophecy and revelation the things we would need in our own dark days. But I continue to rejoice in his ability to take a story like this one concerning the mission to Ammonihah, and discover and expound a multitude of lessons for us. I feel a reverent awe for the book and the editor and the men, like Alma, who made the original records. One of the great skills in scripture study is to find the answers to these two questions over and over again: Why is this account in the book.? What does it mean to me?

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