

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM

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*The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure  
of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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ing at least once weekly (18:25). Through generous donations, everyone cared for one another “according to that which he had” (18:27–28).

Eventually the believers were discovered and king Noah accused Alma of sedition, ordering his army to crush him and his followers. Forced into exile, Alma led the people deeper into the wilderness, where they thrived for twenty years in a region they named Helam (Mosiah 18:32–35; 23:1–5, 20). Alma ardently declined well-intended efforts to make him king, and successfully dissuaded his people from adopting a monarchical government, urging them to enjoy the new “liberty wherewith ye have been made free” and to “trust no man to be a king” (Mosiah 23:13). He did not oppose monarchies as such but, rather, acknowledged their fundamental limitation: “If it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king” (23:8).

Alma and his people afterward suffered oppression at the hands of Amulon, also an ex-priest and deserter from king Noah’s court, who, along with the remnant of a LAMANITE army, discovered Alma’s people in their wilderness refuge. During their suffering the voice of the Lord promised relief and deliverance because of their covenant with him: “I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions” (Mosiah 24:14). Once again, in Moses-like fashion, Alma guided his people out of bondage, and led them during a twelve-day journey to a new land—the Land of Zarahemla—where they joined with the people of Zarahemla and exiled NEPHITES to form a new and stronger Nephite nation (Mosiah 24:24–25).

The king of Zarahemla, Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, also a descendant of transplanted God-fearing Nephites, sanctioned and even authorized expansion of Alma’s church in his kingdom; the church, however, operated separately and independently of the state. The king also assigned the reins of leadership to Alma (Mosiah 25:19; 26:8), who successfully directed the church during twenty years characterized largely by tribulations, with many confrontations between nonbelievers and church members resulting in ordeals for both him and the church (Mosiah 26:1–39). Eventually, widespread antagonism necessitated a royal injunction to lessen the tension (27:1–6). Even one of Alma’s sons was among the ranks of the enemies of the church, his agitation and criticism inviting yet worse persecution for church members (27:8–10).

During his lifetime Alma watched king Mosiah dismantle the monarchy and transform it into a system of judges elected by the people (Mosiah 29:2); he also saw his own son, Alma<sub>2</sub>—the one who earlier had brought grief to him and the church—become the first chief judge (Mosiah 29:1–44). This political transformation proved pivotal in the history of the Land of Zarahemla. Directly and indirectly Alma had a hand in bringing it about; the record of his and his people’s pain under oppressive rulers was widely known throughout the kingdom (25:5–6) and remained distinct in king Mosiah’s mind (29:18). Alma’s influence, then, can be seen as transcending the immediate spiritual boundaries of his stewardship over the church. Indeed, because of this influence the entire Nephite nation came to know unprecedented changes in almost every dimension of daily living—political, social, and economic, as well as religious. These changes—and all their connected ramifications for the social order and the populace—prepared the backdrop against which the resurrected Christ’s visit to the Americas was staged. Loved by his followers for his devotion and faith, and held in esteem by his peers for his effective leadership, Alma will probably always be best known as the founder of the church in Zarahemla. His posterity became the leading Nephite family for over 400 years, down to Ammaron in A.D. 321 (4 Ne. 1:48). Alma died at age eighty-two, less than a hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

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## ALMA<sub>2</sub>

Few individuals have had greater influence upon a civilization than Alma<sub>2</sub>, son of Alma<sub>1</sub>. He was a key figure in the rise of the Nephite church and republic, serving as the first chief judge in Zarahemla, commander-in-chief of the Nephite army, and high priest (c. 90–73 B.C.). His efforts to protect his people from war, dissension, and wickedness were exceeded only by his single-minded dedication to the Savior, whom he came to know through revelation.

This crusader for righteousness first appears in the Book of Mormon as a rebellious young man. He and four of the sons of King Mosiah<sub>2</sub>, described as “the very vilest of sinners” (Mosiah 28:4), rebelled against the teachings of their parents and



*Alma the Younger Called to Repentance*, by James C. Christensen (1980, leaded stained glass). The angel of the Lord rebukes the young and rebellious Alma: “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:9). Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Brigham Young University.

sought to overthrow the church. As they went about that work (c. 100–92 B.C.), the angel of the Lord appeared to them, spoke with a voice of thunder, calling these wayward young men to repentance, and explaining that he did so because of the prayers of the people and of Alma’s father. For three days and three nights Alma lay in a physically comatose state, during which time he spiritually confronted all his sins, “for which,” he later said, “I was tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:12–14).

In the depth of his anguish of soul, Alma re-

membered his father’s words concerning the coming of Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of the world. As Alma cried out in his heart to Christ, pleading for mercy and deliverance from “the gall of bitterness” and “the everlasting chains of death,” he stated: “I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:17–19). After their conversion, Alma and the sons of Mosiah devoted their lives to preaching repentance and the joyous gospel (Alma 36:24).

For about nine years Alma served as both the high priest over the church and the chief judge or governor over a new political system of judges among the Nephites. He was well educated, the keeper of sacred and civil records, an inspiring orator, and a skillful writer. As a young civil and religious leader, he faced a number of challenges. Several religio-political factions were emerging in Nephite society, notably the Zoramites, Mulekites, members of the church, and an anti-church group, the followers of Nehor (*see* BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES). Maintaining Nephite leadership over all these groups proved impossible. In a landmark case in his first year as chief judge, Alma held the popular Nehor guilty of enforcing priestcraft with the sword, which resulted in his execution (Alma 1:2–15). This soon led to civil war with Alma himself slaying the new rebel leader, one of Nehor’s protégés, in battle (Alma 2–3). There followed a serious epidemic of pride and inequality among many in the church (Alma 4) and the secession of the arrogant Zoramites. “Seeing no way that he might reclaim [the people] save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19), Alma resigned his position as chief judge and devoted himself completely to the work of the ministry (Alma 4:19; 31:5). His religious work, especially in the Nephite cities of Zarahemla (Alma 5, 30) and Gideon (Alma 7), the Nehorite stronghold of Ammonihah (Alma 8–16), and the Zoramite center in Antionum (Alma 31–35), revitalized the church and set the pattern of administration for the next century down to the coming of Christ.

Alma’s most enduring contributions are to be found in his sermons and his blessings upon the heads of his children. No doubt as a result of his own conversion (Mosiah 27), Alma’s words frequently center on the atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer and on the necessity for men and women to be BORN OF GOD, changed, and renewed

through Christ. To the people of Gideon, Alma delivered a profound prophetic oracle regarding the birth of Jesus and the ATONEMENT he would make, “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind . . . that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). In Zarahemla, Alma stressed the need for the new birth and for acquiring the image and attributes of the Master; in doing so, he provided a series of over forty questions that assess one’s depth of conversion and readiness to meet one’s Maker (see Alma 5).

In Ammonihah, Alma and his convert Amulek were accused of a crime, taunted, and imprisoned for several weeks without clothing or adequate food. After being forced to witness the burning of several faithful women and children, Alma and Amulek were miraculously delivered and their persecutors annihilated. The discourses of Alma and Amulek on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are among the clearest and most fundamental theological statements on these subjects in scripture (see Alma 11–12, 34, 42). In explaining humility, faith, and prayer to the poor in Antionum (Alma 32–34), Alma and Amulek set forth a pattern whereby those without faith in Christ (or those within the fold who desire to strengthen their belief) would plant the seed of the word of Christ in their hearts and eventually receive the confirming impressions of testimony that come by the power of the HOLY GHOST.

Some of the most penetrating doctrinal information in the Book of Mormon comes through words that Alma spoke to his sons. To HELAMAN<sub>1</sub>, his eldest son and successor, Alma eloquently recounted the story of his own conversion, gave him loving fatherly counsel, and entrusted him with custody of the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the plates of Ether, and the LIAHONA (Alma 36–37). To Shiblon, he gave wise practical advice (Alma 38). To his errant youngest son, Corianton, who eventually went on to serve valiantly in the church, Alma explained the seriousness of sexual sin, that wickedness never was happiness (Alma 39, 41:10), that all spirits will be judged after death and will eventually stand before God after a perfect resurrection (Alma 40), and that the word “restoration” does not mean that God will restore a sinner to some former state of happiness (Alma 41), for

divine mercy cannot rob justice when the law of God has been violated (Alma 42).

A relatively young man at the time of his conversion, Alma lived fewer than twenty years thereafter. Yet in those two decades he almost single-handedly invigorated and established the cause of truth and liberty in the Nephite church and society. Never forgetting the thunderous voice of the angel at the time of his conversion, Alma always carried with him this unchanging desire: “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! . . . that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth” (Alma 29:1–2). When he left one day and was never seen or heard again, his sons and the church supposed “that [the Lord] received Alma in the spirit, unto himself,” even as Moses (Alma 45:19), drawing an apt comparison between these two great lawgivers, judges, commanders, spiritual leaders, and prophets.

For Latter-day Saints, Alma’s life and lessons are rich and timeless. He serves as a hope to parents who have wandering children, and as a beacon to those who stray. He stands as a model public servant, a sterling illustration of the new life in Christ, a fearless preacher, missionary, and gifted theologian. Alma was a prophet who received a prophet’s reward.

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## ALMANACS

Early Mormon almanacs (1845–1866) first borrowed heavily from standard almanacs being published, but then came to focus on interests of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Since 1973 the *Church Almanac* has printed only information pertaining to the Church.

Orson Pratt, an apostle, published the first Mormon almanacs in New York City in 1845 and 1846. Basing his *Prophetic Almanac for 1845* on standard American almanacs, Elder Pratt added a few articles about doctrines of the Church. Then