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Lesson VIII. Alma—A Study in True Nobility

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Men would tell these deeds of darkness to their children, and would say:

"See how vain the strength of kingdoms, or the power of man to save;

When the Lord comes out in vengeance, let the wicked cease to rave."

Still in language sharp and powerful, Abinadi's words were hurled On the Nephite King and people till his message had been told, Then the face of Abinadi shone in glorious lustre bright, Like as Moses on Sinai, hallowed by the heavenly light.

Now they scourged his skin with fagots; soon the scorching flames ascend,

While he told them of their future, that their own fate in the end Would be also pains and burnings; still the flames around him roll, And the last words of Abinadi were "O God, receive my soul!"

May the youth of modern Israel ever cherish scenes like these,

That such tales of pure devotion may not vanish with the breeze, That the names of noble Martyrs may in honor still be sung

By the good and wise in Zion, in the ages yet to come

Glasgow, June 22, 1882 .

—A. N. MacFarlane.

OUTLINE.

The glory that attaches to the term Martyr.

Abinadi called to cry repentance to his people

His message.

He is brought before King Noah.

The terms upon which he may be released.

His dramatic stand for the truth.

His martyrdom.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

1. Review of the history of the Nephites from the time they left Jerusalem until they arrived at Lehi-Nephi. Follow them to Zarahemla.

2. Explain why some of them returned to Lehi-Nephi.

3 Summarize their history under King Zeniff.

4. Discuss the conditions of the Nephites under King Noah (For this review it may be well to assign special topics to individual members of the class)

5. Why was Abinadi's mission a particularly difficult one?

6. Compare it with the mission of other prophets you are familiar with.

7. Compare Abinadi before Noah with Paul before Agrippa. See Acts 26.

8. Why does the Lord permit His prophets to be put to death?

LESSON VIII.

Alma—A Study in True Nobility.

(For Tuesday, December 14, or Sunday, December 19.)

It is always an inspiration to encounter a man of integrity, of character, zealous in his devotion to the work of the Lord. It is doubly so just now when political slander, religious indifference, and financial manipulation fairly seem to shake the confidence of man in his fellows. To find men who in the face of temptation, hardship, and calamity can hold on steadfastly to what they know to be true is a real joy. For this reason it is a de-

light to ponder the life stories of some of the men who stand out as the great characters in Book of Mormon history.

Such a character was Nephi, the great founder of the Nephite Church here in America—He was a sort of combination of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young to his people. His life, too well known to need repetition here, was dedicated to the service of the Lord with a faith seldom surpassed.

That faith is beautifully summed up in two characteristic utterances: one, already set down in an earlier lesson but deserving a place here in spite of that fact, declaring confidence in the sustaining hand of the Lord; the other expressing a heroic submission to the will of the Father that approaches the spirit of Calvary. Nephi gave expression to the first sentiment when asked by his father to return to Jerusalem for the plates; the second grew out of his being bound for four days on the voyage to America until both his ankles and his wrists "had swollen exceedingly."

"For I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them." I Nephi 3:7.

"Nevertheless, I did look unto my God, and I did praise him all the day long; and I did not murmur against the Lord, because of mine afflictions." I Nephi 18:16.

Such another character was Abinadi, the martyr, whose devotion to truth we have discussed in lesson seven.

Still a third name to be linked with these that have done so much to make the Book of Mormon a great book is that of Alma. It is fitting that we associate the name of Alma with that of Nephi and of Abinadi for according to Mosiah 17:2 "For there was one among them whose name was Alma, *he also being a descendant of Nephi,*" and of course it was the preaching of Abinadi that won Alma to the cause of truth and saved him from the life he might have led as one of the priests of Noah. With that double heritage the blood of Nephi and the conversion of Abinadi—Alma was

destined to be one of God's noblemen.

Though Alma was one of the priests of Noah there was that Nephitic royalty within him that opened his heart to the truth when a prophet of the Lord declared it and so Alma was "one who believed" when Abinadi sounded his call to repentance. In fact, it was Alma who pleaded with King Noah not to be angry with the prophet. His plea, of course, was unheeded and Alma himself was ordered banished with a secret order to the servants of the king that they should put this sympathizer to death.

Alma fled from the presence of Noah but he carried with him the truth coupled with a determination to teach that truth to his fellows. And so he went about secretly converting his friends to the truths uttered by Abinadi. The story of Alma is a most fascinating narrative, recounting his flight to the waters of Mormon, thence to Helam, his bondage under the Lamanites and the priests of Noah, his final release and escape to Zarahemla, and his subsequent ministry in teaching the people of Zarahemla, in baptizing them, and in organizing them into Churches, that they might the more directly participate in the carrying forward of the work of the Lord. The account is delightfully told in Mosiah chapters 17 to 29.

But rather than trace through in detail the life of Alma, let us consider briefly his achievements and his devotion. In the first place he gave up a life of splendor and luxury as a priest of Noah to go out into a wilderness "infested by wild beasts" to lead his little band of followers he knew not whither. Just as in that wilderness he found

the fountain of pure water, the waters of Mormon, so in his life he found the fountain of life eternal, the everlasting Gospel.

Scarcely had he reached Mormon when he proclaimed the doctrine of baptism as the great covenant between man and God. Turn to Mosiah 18:13:

"And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said, Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead, as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world."

Not only is it a source of joy to know that we have the record of the purpose of this ordinance as thus declared on this continent 150 years before the ministry of the Savior but we are told conclusively that the method of administering the ordinance was that of immersion. Mosiah 18:14: "And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit."

Nor did Alma simply lead his followers through the ordinance of baptism. That accomplished, he organized them into the Church of God, instituting a system foreshadowing that of the Master and of our own Prophet Joseph Smith. His scheme of organization, his teachings, his care for the needy, and the ideals by which he succeeded in having his followers live, all indicate that in very deed his was the Church of God. That Alma had the authority to organize a church

and that he was recognized as one of God's choice servants is evidenced in Alma 5:3: "I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father Alma, to be a High Priest over the Church of God, *he having power and authority from God to do these things.*"

A further evidence of the greatness of Alma's character is found in the fact that he sought no glory for himself. He was so loved by his followers that they desired him to be their king. He might easily have enjoyed all the pomp and ceremony that attend the wearing of the crown but he was a man of God, anxious not to rule but to serve his people. Like Washington, therefore, he declined the honor of kingship, preferring to administer to his people as their high priest.

And just as he showed this mastery of self in prosperity so he proved himself in the hour of adversity. His little colony had not been in Helam long before it was taken into bondage by the Lamanites and the priests of Noah. Surely Mosiah 23:21 rings true:

"Nevertheless, the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith." But his mercy is extended in rich abundance to those who stand the test: "Nevertheless, whosoever putteth his trust in him, the same shall be lifted up at the last day" Mosiah 23:22.

Not only did the Lamanites hold them in the bondage of slavery and heap all sorts of burdens upon them, they even forbade them to pray. Alma submitted with wonderful heroism, but he taught his people to pray in their hearts, assuring them that such prayers could and would be heard. As an answer to these silent petitions this wonderful message was delivered them:

"And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying, Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people, and deliver them out of bondage

"And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do, that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions." Mosiah 24:13, 14.

That the promise was made good is shown in the following verse:

"And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren, were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord." Mosiah 24:15.

If this were not evidence enough that Alma enjoyed communion with the Father and was approved by Him, two other passages would make the matter positive. We need not here rehearse how Alma and his people were delivered out of the power of the Lamanites, how they joined with the people of Zarahemla, how Alma spent the remaining days of his life preaching, baptizing, and organizing churches throughout the land—it is enough to conclude with the benediction pronounced upon his long career of service.

"And now it came to pass that Alma died, being eighty and two years old, having lived to fulfill the **commandments of God.**"

What a tribute! And what a benediction went with it, pronounced

as it was by the voice of the Lord itself:

"Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee, that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me, and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep." Mosiah 26:20

"No man has come to true greatness who has not felt in some degree that his life belongs to his race—and that what God gives him he gives him for mankind." Phillip Brooks.

And Alma came to true greatness.

OUTLINE.

The glory of greatness.
The illustrations of Nephi and Abinadi.
Alma born and taught to be great.
His conversion.
His testimony.
He leads his people to the waters of Mormon, thence to Helam and finally to Zarahemla
His achievements.
Self-mastery.
Organization of the Church of God.
The Baptism of his followers.
His fortitude in calamity.
His winning the favor of the Lord.

QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

1. Summarize the life of Alma.
2. Compare him with his teacher, Abinadi. With Nephi.
3. Compare the organization of the Church instituted by Alma with that of our own.
4. Discuss the proper mode of baptism as administered by Alma.
5. What are Alma's claims to greatness?
6. How is the redeeming grace of our Father demonstrated in the history of Alma and his people?
7. What message comes out of the life of Alma to men and women of today?
8. Which of the Presidents of our Church did Alma most nearly resemble?