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Chapter XXIV

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Abstract: Alma Resigns the Chief Judgeship—Nephihah Chosen—Alma Ministers in Zarahemla, Gideon, Melek and Ammonihah—Condition of the Last Named City—It Rejects the Message Alma Bears—An Angel Meets Him—Amulek—The Lawyer Zeezrom—The Great Controversy—Zeezrom Converted and Cast Out—The Martyrdom of the Believers—Alma and Amulek in Prison—Their Deliverance

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALMA RESIGNS THE CHIEF JUDGESHIP—NEPHIHAIH CHOSEN
—ALMA MINISTERS IN ZARAHEMLA, GIDEON, MELEK
AND AMMONIHAIH—CONDITION OF THE LAST NAMED
CITY—IT REJECTS THE MESSAGE ALMA BEARS—AN
ANGEL MEETS HIM—AMULEK—THE LAWYER ZEEZROM—
THE GREAT CONTROVERSY—ZEEZROM CONVERTED AND
CAST OUT—THE MARTYRDOM OF THE BELIEVERS—
ALMA AND AMULEK IN PRISON—THEIR DELIVERANCE.

THE GREAT losses sustained by the Nephites in war, not of warriors alone, but of women and children, together with the vast amount of their property destroyed, had the effect of humbling them and softening their wayward hearts, so that many thousands, during the next few years, were added to the church by baptism. But the recollection of their former disasters was gradually worn away by time and prosperity. Three years later we find great inequality in the church—some poor and some rich, the more powerful abusing and oppressing their weaker brethren. This course proved a great stumbling-block to those who were not numbered with the church, as well as being the cause of much sorrow and ill-feeling amongst its members. Finding that no one man could properly attend to the duties of his many offices, Alma determined to resign his chief judgeship, and devote his entire time to his duties as the earthly head of the church. Preparatory to this resignation, he selected one of the leading elders, named Nephihaih, to be his successor as chief judge. This choice was confirmed by the people. (B. C. 83.)

Alma now gave his entire attention to the duties

of his calling as a preacher of righteousness. He commenced his labors in Zarahemla. Thence he went to the city of Gideon. After ministering there for some time, he returned for rest to his home in the capital city.

The next year (B. C. 82), Alma turned his face westward. He visited the land of Melek, where his labors were crowned with abundant blessings. Having satisfied himself with the good that he had accomplished, he traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek, to a great and corrupt city called Ammonihah. There he found a godless people, filled with the falsehoods of Nehor, and committing all manner of abominations without repentance, because they cherished the flattering lie, as the foundation of their creed, that all men would be saved. This city was in the hands of a corrupt clique of judges and lawyers, who stirred up sedition, tumult and rioting, that they might make money out of the suits that followed such disturbances. Further than this, they were secretly plotting to overthrow the government, and rob the people of their highly prized liberties. Among such a people Alma labored in vain; none would listen, none would obey, none offered him rest and food. Scorn and mockery were his reward; and he was spat upon, maltreated and cast out of the city.

Weary in body and sick at heart because of the iniquity of the people, after many fruitless efforts, fervent prayers and long fastings, Alma sought some other people more worthy of salvation's priceless gifts. He bent his way towards the city of Aaron; but as he journeyed, an angel of the Lord (that same angel that beforetime had been the agent in his conversion to God)

stood before him and blessed him. He told him to lift up his heart and rejoice, for because of his faithfulness he had great cause to do so. The angel then directed Alma to return to the sin-cursed city he had just left, and proclaim unto its citizens the awful message that except they repented the Lord would destroy them.

Speedily the prophet obeyed the angel's words. By another road he drew near the doomed city, which he entered by its south gate. As he passed in he hungered, and asked a man whom he met, Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat? With joy the man (and, strange though it appear, he was a rich man) took him to his home and fed, clothed and lodged him. Furthermore, Amulek, for such was his name, told Alma that he also had received a visit from a holy angel who had informed him of the high priest's coming, and directed him to receive him into his house. Then Alma blessed Amulek and all his household, and tarried with him and recruited his strength under the generous hospitality which Amulek's home afforded. But his rest was not to be a lengthened one; the people waxed stronger in sin; the cup of their iniquity was nearly full. Go, came the word of the Lord, Go forth, and take with thee my servant Amulek, 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, I will not turn my fierce anger away. Filled with the Holy Ghost, these servants of God went forth and valiantly delivered their terrible message.

One of those who most bitterly opposed Alma and Amulek was a lawyer named Zeezrom. We find recorded at great length, in the Book of Mormon, the details of the controversy that occurred between him

and the two servants of the Lord. As a result we have handed down to us some of the plainest teachings regarding the atonement, the resurrection, the powers of the priesthood, etc., that are had among mankind. No matter what Alma and his companion said, Zeezrom could twist it from its proper meaning; find blasphemy and heresy in the sublime truths of the gospel, and extract treason from the simplest of God's laws. He questioned and cross-questioned, he promised and threatened, he twisted and turned, he abused and vilified, but all to no purpose, he was caught in his own trap. His heaven-inspired opponents made manifest his thoughts and intentions, they exposed his lying, they overthrew his sophistries and, with a power more than human, they exhibited the blackness of his heart. As they proceeded the power of God increased upon them, their words grew yet more forcible until Zeezrom himself felt their power. As his corruptions were laid bare he began to tremble, first with rage, then with fear. Bad as he was, he was not the worst among that people, and when once he realized the power he was combatting, his heart began to acknowledge its guilt.

With this feeling he commenced to inquire of Alma, not in mockery, but in solemn earnestness with regard to the kingdom of God. The answers he received were like a two edged sword, piercing to his inmost soul, bringing to him a terrible sense of his awful position before God, and encompassing him about with the pains of hell. He realized that he had been a leader in iniquity, that his lyings and deceivings had greatly contributed to drag the people down to their existing corruption, and that he was among those most responsible for their hardness of heart.

In this frame of mind he made an effort to plead with the people; he acknowledged his guilt, testified to the virtue and integrity of Alma and Amulek and interceded in their behalf. But in vain. The degraded populace reviled him, they mocked at him, they said he was possessed of a devil, and further, they spat on him; then they cast stones at him, and ultimately, with some others, drove him out of their city; while the two prophets, with many who believed in their holy message, were thrown into prison, there to suffer all the indignities, persecutions and annoyances that apostate hate could inflict. Nor was this the worst; these reprobates took the wives and babes of those believers whom they had driven away, with such as had accepted the truth who still remained in the city, and, gathering them in one body they mercilessly burned them to death in one great martyrs' fire. Into the torturing flames they also cast the records that contained the holy scriptures, as though, in their blind fury, they imagined that they could thereby destroy the truths that were so odious to them.

In their devilish glee and savage exultation they next carried the two enchained prophets to the place of sacrifice, that they might harrow up their souls with a view of the sufferings of the perishing women and children. Amulek's brave and impetuous spirit could ill bear the fearful scene. The groans, cries and supplications of the tortured innocents carried untold agony to his soul. He begged Alma to exercise the power of God that was in them to save the martyrs. But the Holy Spirit revealed to Alma that this sacrifice was by heaven's consent, and he replied, 'The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth

mine hand, for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself in glory; and he doth suffer that the people may do this thing, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day. Then Amulek said, Perhaps they will burn us also. To which Alma responded, Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

When the fire had burned low, and the precious fuel of human bodies and sacred records was consumed, the chief judge of the city came to the two prisoners as they stood bound, and mocked them. He smote them on the cheek, and jeeringly asked them if they would preach again that his people should be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone, seeing that they had no power to save those who had been burned, neither had God exercised his power in their behalf. But neither answered him a word. Then he smote them again and remanded them to prison.

After they had been confined three days, they were visited by many judges and lawyers, priests and teachers, after the order of Nehor, who came to exult in the misery of their prisoners. They questioned and badgered them, but neither would reply. They came again the next day, and went through the same performance. They mocked at, smote and spat upon the two disciples. They tantalized them with blasphemous questions, such as the nature of their peculiar faith inspired. How shall we look when we are damned? sneeringly asked these unbelievers in damnation.



THE MARTYRDOMS AT AMMONIHAI.



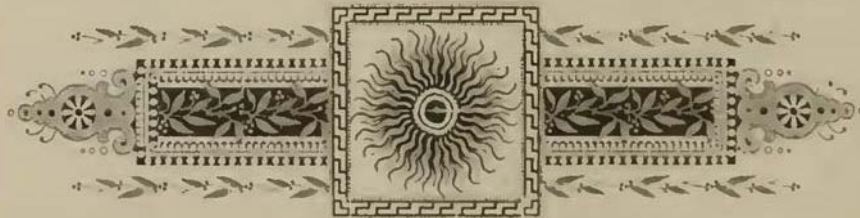
Patiently and silently all this was borne. Day after day was it repeated. Harder and harder grew the hearts of the Ammonihahites towards their prisoners. Fiercer and stronger grew their hatred. They stripped Alma and Annlek of their clothes, and, when naked, bound them with strong ropes. They withheld food and drink from them, and in various ways they tortured their bodies, and sought to aggravate and tantalize them and harrow up their minds. On the 12th day of the tenth month of the tenth year of the Judges (B. C. 82), the chief judge with his followers again went to the prison. According to his usual custom he smote the brethren, saying as he did so, If ye have the power of God, deliver yourselves from these bonds, and then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words. This impious challenge the crowd one by one repeated as they passed by the prophets, and smote them in imitation of their leader. Thus each individual assumed the responsibility of the defiance cast at the Almighty, and virtually said, Our blood be upon our own heads.

The hour of God's power had now come—the challenge had been accepted. The prophets, in the majesty of their calling, rose to their feet. They were endowed with the strength of Jehovah. Like burnt thread the cords that bound them were snapped asunder and they stood free and unshackled before the terror-stricken crowd. To rush from the prison was the first impulse of the God-defying followers of Nehor. In their fear some fell to the earth, others, impelled by the crowd behind, stumbled and fell over their prostrate bodies, until they became one confused mass, blocking each other's way; struggling, yelling, cursing,

pleading, fighting; frantically, but vainly, endeavoring to reach the outer gate.

At this moment of supreme horror an earthquake rent the prison walls. They trembled, then tottered, then fell on the struggling mass of humanity below, burying in one vast unconsecrated grave rulers and judges, lawyers and officers, priests and teachers. Not one was left alive of all the impious mob who a few moments before defied heaven and challenged Jehovah's might. But Alma and Amulek stood in the midst of the ruins unhurt. Straightway they left this scene of desolation and went into the city. When the people saw the two servants of God, great fear fell upon them, and they fled, as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions.

Alma and Amulek were then ordered to leave the city. This they did, and went to the neighboring town of Sidon. There they found those who had been cast out of Ammonihah, and in grief and sorrow they related the story of the burning of the wives and children of the fugitives, and also the history of their own miraculous deliverance.





THE DELIVERANCE OF ALMA AND AMULEK.

