



24. Alma, Introduction; Early Challenges to the Reign of the Judges.

Alma 1–3

Mormon abridging the records of prophets such as Alma

Superscription: “*The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.*”

“Prayer of Thanksgiving” (Hymn 93)

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
He chastens, and hastens his will to make known;
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to his name; He forgets not his own.

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
Ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;
Thou, Lord, wast at our side; All glory be thine!

We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant,
And pray that thou still our defender wilt be.
Let thy congregation escape tribulation;
Thy name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

Book of Alma

Historical and Literary Questions

- Alma—the largest book in the Book of Mormon
- Covers a period c. 91-52 B.C.
 - 40 tumultuous years that serve as a microcosm of the entire Book of Mormon in its teachings and in the political upheaval and wars it chronicles (see Arnold *BMRC*, 40)
- Mormon abridged the Book of Alma from the following:
 - Record of Alma² (Alma 1-44)
 - This included not only historical material from his judgeship and ministry, but quotations from sermons by him and his missionary companions
 - Record of Helaman² (Alma 45-62)
 - Record of Shiblon (Alma 63)
- Types of material
 - Historical Narrative (Mormon's abridgement of the above records)
 - Direct quotations of sermons and other primary material (discourse)
 - Editorial commentary (more “and thus we see” passages!)

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Intent and Themes

- “Primary thrust” of the Book of Alma (Arnold, *BMRC*, 40)
 - Anticipation of the coming of Christ and the preparation of the Nephites for that coming
 - Written for a latter-day audience, this serves as a model for our preparation for the Second Coming
- Themes
 - The person and work of Jesus Christ—who he is, his teachings, his atonement, his resurrection
 - Especially the effects of preaching Christ and how people are converted or (re)converted
 - The efforts and failure of individuals and groups opposed to Christ
 - Nehor, Amlici, Nehor, Zoramites, Amalickiah and Ammoron, etc.
 - Divinely sanctioned creed of human liberty
 - Preservation of this liberty through “righteous warfare”
 - When is war just? How should it be fought?

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Structure

- Content
 - Beginning of the Reign of Judges (1:1–4:5)
 - Alma the Younger and the Nephite Reformation (4:6–16:21)
 - The Lamanite Mission of the Sons of Mosiah² (17:1–27:30)
 - Lamanite–Nephite War (28:1–14)
 - Further Missions of Alma and Amulek (Alma 29:1–35:14)
 - Challenge of the anti-Christ Korihor (30)
 - Challenge of the Zoramites; sermons on faith and redemption (31-35)
 - Alma’s Final Counsel to His Sons (35:15–42:31)
 - Nephite Wars, Civil and with the Lamanites (43:1–63:17)
- The **Korihor and Zoramite episodes** sit roughly in the middle of the Book of Alma
- They illustrate *how individual and group rebellion and apostasy are responsible for the wars and destructions that follow*

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Beginning of the Reign of Judges (1:1-3:27)

- The Rule of Law among the Nephites (1:1)
 - “Now it came to pass that in ***the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi***, from this time forward, king Mosiah having gone the way of all the earth, having warred a good warfare, walking uprightly before God, leaving none to reign in his stead; nevertheless **he had established laws, and they were acknowledged by the people**; therefore they were obliged to abide by the laws which he had made.” (Alma 1:1)
- **Religious and philosophical challenges** (1:2-1:33)
 - Nehor and the aftermath of his teachings
- **Political challenges** (2:1-3:27)
 - Amlici and ensuing war

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Nehor, an Antichrist (1:2-15)

- The “Doctrines” of Nehor
 - Priests and teachers should be “popular”
 - chosen by the people = development from elected judges?
 - Religious leaders should be paid
 - Theologically he was a **universalist**
 - all will be saved regardless of their faith or deeds
 - **Extreme salvation by grace alone**
 - Contrast with **Sherem, salvation by works** (in his case, the law of Moses)
- The End of Nehor (1:7-15)
 - Murdered the patriot Gideon, who was a teacher in the church
 - Found guilty of priestcraft, trying to enforce it by the sword, and murdering Gideon
 - His “ignominious death” (1:15)

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The Aftermath of Nehor

- Priestcraft continues to spread (1:16-24)
 - “Nevertheless, [the execution of Nehor] did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and **they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.**” (1:16)
 - Persecution of the believers by those outside the church
- Prosperity within the church (1:25-33)
 - “And now, **because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need . . . And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all . . .**” (Alma 1:29–30)

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Political Challenges (2:1-3:27)

- Amlici fails to gain power legitimately (2:1-7)
- Rebellion of the Amlicites (2:8-19)
 - The wicked seek power to enforce their will on others
 - *At time the righteous must take up arms to defend their laws and liberty*
- Defeat of the Amlicites and the Lamanites (2:20-3:4)
- Amlicites assume the curse of the Lamanites (3:5-19)
- Another battle with the Lamanites (3:20-27)