

BM#27 "All Things Denote There Is a God" - Alma 30-31

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I. Introduction

These two chapters focus upon two groups of apostates. The first is a man named Korihor. The second is a group of people called the Zoramites. Each serve as representatives of the effects that apostasy can have upon the life of an individual or upon people as a whole. At one time in their lives, each had understood the teachings of the gospel, and received a witness of its truthfulness. Based upon their witness of the truth, they had entered into the waters of baptism and made sacred covenants with the Father, in the Name of his Son, Jesus Christ. Through their failure or neglect to continue to strengthen their testimonies, they became susceptible to the influence and temptations of Satan and his servants. The desire for praise and recognition by others, and a focus upon the pleasures of the world were but two factors that contributed to their apostasy.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"...the Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. It confounds false doctrines and lays down contention. (See 2 Nephi 3:12.) It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and doctrines of the devil in our day. The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time." (*A Witness and A Warning*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998, 3).

As we address these chapters, we will be alerted to ways that help increase our ability to recognize false teachings and then address them when they occur. We will also want to strengthen our individual testimonies so that now and in the future, we will be able to be faithful to the covenants we have made.

Outline of Alma 30-31:

"Alma 30:1-18: Korihor, an anti-Christ, leads away the hearts of many in Zarahemla by preaching that 'there should be no Christ' and that 'whatsoever a man did was no crime.'

"Alma 30:19-60: Korihor attempts to preach in the lands of Jershon and Gideon. The people refuse to listen, and they take him before their leaders. Korihor is then taken before Alma, who bears testimony of Christ's coming and the existence of God. Korihor demands a sign and is struck dumb.

"Alma 31: Alma leads a mission to reclaim the apostate Zoramites, who have adopted false beliefs and a prideful form of worship." (*Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 120).

II. Alma 30

Following the establishment of the people of Ammon in the land of Jershon, and after the battle in which the Lamanites were defeated and driven out of the land, "there began to be continual peace throughout all the land" (Alma 30:2).

Alma 30:3

3 Yea, and the people did observe to keep the commandments of the Lord; and they were strict in observing the ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses; for they were taught to keep the law of Moses until it should be fulfilled.

It is the righteousness of the people and their obedience to the commandments that brought a spirit of peace to the land. It is also true that unrighteousness and disobedience to the commandments bring contention and unrest to the individuals and their nation.

Alma 30:6

6 But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year, there came a man into the land of Zarahemla, and he was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"Here we find an interesting definition of an anti-Christ: one who defies and denies the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. This definition would, of course, pertain primarily to those who lived before the meridian of time. In our day we would speak of an anti-Christ as one who denies the birth of Jesus; who downplays the significance of his teachings; who claims that Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection have no significance for mankind. Many in this dispensation have been seduced into the damnable heresy that Jesus was merely a good man, a brilliant speaker, and a loving and tender example of mercy and forgiveness--these things alone. The restored gospel--especially as made known through the Book of Mormon--testifies that Jesus Christ was and is divine, that he is God." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol.3. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 201).

Alma 30:7

7 Now there was no law against a man's belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.

Hugh Nibley states,

"It was under the protection of this Bill of Rights that the infamous Korihor was able to carry on with perfect impunity. Only a miracle stopped him...What were all those leading authorities so helpless against? Against abridging the right of free speech and freedom of religion as "laid down by the commandments of God' (see Alma 30:7). These are the words of the Book of Mormon. (*Brother Brigham Challenges The Saints*, Vol. 13. Edited by Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., and

Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994, 421).

An individual could be punished for murder, robbery, stealing, and adultery. (see Alma 30:10.)

Alma 30:11-12

11 For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ...

According to the law of religious freedom practiced by the Nephites, Korihor could not be punished for the doctrine he was preaching to the people. These are his words:

Alma 30:13-18

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in

their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms--telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.

Thomas R. Villette states,

"The False Teachings of Korihor:

"1. No Christ (vs.12)

"2. No man can know of anything which is to come (vs.13)

"3. Prophecies are foolish traditions of your fathers (vs.14)

"4. You cannot know of things which you do not see (vs.15)

"5. Remission of sins is simply a product of a frenzied or deranged mind (vs.16)

"6. There is no Atonement (vs.17)

"7. Everyone fares in this life according to his management (vs.17)

"8. Man prospers by his genius (vs.17)

"9. Every man conquers according to his strength (vs.17)

"10. Whatsoever a man does is no crime (vs.17)" (*The Book of Mormon Study Guide: Start to Finish*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2015, 462).

Why do the arguments put forth by Korihor have appeal today? and What are their flaws?

"Chauncey Riddle states,

"(1) Korihor's argument for naturalistic empiricism (the belief that it is possible to know all truth through our senses--by experience and observation):...it is plain that empiricism has value. It is good for us to observe our surroundings carefully and to appreciate our sensations...Sense experience is indeed a valuable part of this life; the error comes in supposing that it is the *only* way of knowing what we know.

"(2 The second is a humanist position that 'the solution to our problems lies in sharp thinking and realistic approaches to life,' and success is defined 'in terms of wealth, social status, political power, and the glutting of the senses,' and, as the servants of Christ know, if selfish attainments are one's goal, the world is so constructed that one can indeed ignore the Savior and attain. But [if] Korihor...think[s] that [he is] masterfully doing it on [his] own, [he does] not [realize]...that those who succeed at the expense of faith and love are on a down escalator and are being carefully guided, encouraged, aided, and comforted by their unseen mentor Satan.

"(3) A third argument is relativism: '...and whatsoever a man did was no crime.'...the only important thing in life is to do what you want to do--if you can get away with it...The great power of all relativistic approaches is that they allow the individual to judge his own actions. ...In stark contrast to the virtually infinite number of personal choices available in the broad way of relativism is the way of the Savior. The...strait and narrow way is to do as he did: not to seek our own will, but to do the will of Him who sent us...[the way for every person is] take the name of Christ, always remember him, keep all of the commandments that he gives unto us. There is no other way to righteousness, for whatsoever is not of faith in Christ is sin." ("Korihor," in *The Book of Mormon: It Begins with a Family*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983, 135-139).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet add,

"Korihor claims the protection of law in a free nation to teach the doctrines of disbelief, disrespect, and disobedience. He attempts to convince people that they are in bondage, for if he can successfully do so they will naturally turn to him as a liberator or redeemer. His then is a liberation movement. He is going to free them from the burden of commandments and gospel commitments. Whereas the gospel declares that the knowledge of revealed truths brings freedom. Korihor contends that freedom really means being without the constraints of righteousness. It is from their allegiance to Christ and commitment to righteousness that Korihor sought to liberate the people." (*Sustaining and Defending the Faith*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985, 88-89).

Henry B. Eyring states,

"Korihor was arguing, as men and women have falsely argued from the beginning of time, that to take counsel from the servants of God is to surrender God-given rights of independence. But the argument is false because it misrepresents reality. When we reject the counsel which comes from God, we do not choose to be independent of outside influences. We [only] choose another influence." ("Finding Safety in Counsel," in *Ensign*, 1997, 25).

We have stated the false beliefs that Korihor is attempting to teach the people, and have specifically addressed three of his arguments and their flaws. We have noted Korihor is attempting to bring about "a liberation movement"...by attempting to liberate the people "from their allegiance to Christ and [their] commitment to righteousness" (McConkie and Millet. *Sustaining and Defending the Faith*, 89). We have also clarified that his ultimate desire [in the name of surrendering personal independence] "is to reject the counsel that comes from God" (Eyring, "Finding Safety in Counsel," in *Ensign*, 1997, 25).

Having taught his message initially to the Nephites, he goes to the land of Jershon.

Alma 30:20-21

20 But behold they were more wise than many of the Nephites; for they took him, and bound him, and carried him before Ammon, who was a high priest over that people.

21 And it came to pass that he caused that he should be carried out of the land. And he came over into the land of Gideon, and began to preach unto them also; and here he did not have much success, for he was taken and bound and carried before the high priest [Giddonah], and also the chief judge over the land.

Korihor offers the following defence before Giddonah, the high priest (see Alma 30:23.), and the chief judge in the land of Gideon.

Alma 30:23-28

23 ...And Korihor said unto him [them-vs29]: Because I do not teach the foolish traditions of your fathers,

and because I do not teach this people to bind themselves down under the foolish ordinances and performances which are laid down by ancient priests, to usurp power and authority over them, to keep them in ignorance, that they may not lift up their heads, but be brought down according to thy words.

24 Ye say that this people is a free people. Behold, I say they are in bondage. Ye say that those ancient prophecies are true. Behold, I say that ye do not know that they are true.

25 Ye say that this people is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent. Behold, I say that a child is not guilty because of its parents.

26 And ye also say that Christ shall come. But behold, I say that ye do not know that there shall be a Christ. And ye say that he shall be slain for the sins of the world--

27 And thus ye lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers, and according to your own desires; and ye keep them down, even as it were in bondage, that ye may glut yourselves with the labors of their hands, that they durst not look up with boldness, and that they durst not enjoy their rights and privileges.

28 Yea, they durst not make use of that which is their own lest they should offend their priests, who do yoke them according to their desires, and have brought them to believe, by their traditions and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries, that they should, if they did not do accord to their words, offend some unknown being, who they say is God--a being who never has been seen or known, who never was nor ever will be.

Additional false beliefs of Korihor:

11. Denied the revealed words of God as found in the scriptures stating that no one knew were true (vs.23).
12. Denied Adam and Eve's transgression resulting in their posterity being in a fallen state, and thus in need of a Redeemer to meet the demands of the justice (vs.25).
13. Denied the necessity of the coming of Christ and Him being slain for the sins of the world which then freed

them from the bonds of lasting death (vs.26).

14. Accuses priests of keeping the people in bondage, and glutting themselves from the labor of their hands (vs.27).
15. States people are afraid of the priests who prevent them from enjoying their rights and privileges (vs.27).
16. People are fearful of offending some unknown being, who is God—whom has never been seen or known, and who never was nor ever will be (vs.28)

The high priest and the chief judge "saw the hardness of his heart, yea, when they saw that he would revile even against God, they would not make any reply to his words; but they caused that he should be bound; and they delivered him up into the hands of the officers, and sent him to the land of Zarahemla, that he might be brought before Alma and the chief judge who was the governor over all the land" (Alma 30:29).

Korihor again reviled against the priests "accusing them of leading away the people after the silly traditions of their fathers, for the sake of glutting on the labors of the people" (Alma 30:31).

Alma stated, that he had never received any payment for his "many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people...save it were in the judgment seat; and then we receive only according to the law for our time" (Alma 30:32-33). Alma then asks Korihor the following questions:

Alma: **"believest thou that we deceive this people, that causes such joy in their hearts? (vs.34)**

Korihor: **Yea (vs.36)**

Alma: **Will ye deny again that there is a God, and also deny the Christ? For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come. (vs.39)**

What evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your word only. (vs.40)

But, behold, I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true; and will ye deny them? Believest thou that these things are true? (vs.41)

Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices that he may destroy the children of God. (vs.42)

Korihor: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words. (vs.43)

Alma: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God?

Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.

(vs.44)

And yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? (vs.45)

Korihor: Yea, I will deny, except ye shall show me a sign (vs.45)

Alma: Behold, I am grieved because of the hardness of your heart, yea, that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed. (vs.46)

But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction, by thy lying and by thy flattering words; therefore if thou shalt deny

again, behold God shall smite thee, that thou shalt become dumb, that thou shalt never open thy mouth any more, that thou shalt not deceive this people any more. (vs.47)

Korihor: I do not deny the existence of a God, but I do not believe that there is a God; and I say also, that ye do not know that there is a God; and except ye show me a sign, I will not believe. (vs.48)

Alma: This I will give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance. (vs.49)

Alma 30:50

50 Now when Alma had said these words, Korihor was struck dumb, that he could not have utterance, according to the words of Alma.

Alma 30:51

51 And now when the chief judge saw this, he put forth his hand and wrote unto Korihor [also not hear?], saying: Art thou convinced of the power of God? In whom did ye desire that Alma should show forth his sign? Would ye that he should afflict others, to show unto thee a sign? Behold, he has showed unto you a sign; and now will ye dispute more?

Korihor: [He] put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak; and I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God. (vs.52)

But behold, the devil hath deceived me; for he appeared unto me in the form of an angel, and said unto me: Go and reclaim this people, for they have all gone astray after an unknown god. And he said unto me: There is no God; yea, and he taught me that which I should say. And I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that

they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth, even until I have brought this great curse upon me. (vs.53)

Now when he had said this, he besought that Alma should pray unto God, that the curse might be taken from him. (vs.52-54)

Alma: If this curse should be taken from thee thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people; therefore. it shall be unto thee even as the Lord will. (vs.55)

Alma 30:56, 59-60

56 And it came to pass that the curse was not taken off of Korihor; but he was cast out, and went about from house to house begging for his food.

59 And it came to pass that as he went forth among the people, yea, among a people who had separated themselves from the Nephites and called themselves Zoramites, being led by a man whose name was Zoram-- and as went forth amongst them, behold, he was run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead.

60 And thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.

Gerald N. Lund states,

"If Mormon had included nothing but those [Korihor's] teachings, they would have been of great value to us. But he did more than that. He also included Alma's answers to Korihor..."

"The first thing to note is that Alma does not get into a philosophical debate with Korihor. He does not talk about metaphysics or axiology or epistemology. He does not allow himself to get pulled onto the ground that Korihor tries to define as the area of debate. There is a great lesson in that. Alma teaches that we should combat false philosophies with revelation and doctrine, not with academic debate. This is not to imply that Alma dodges the issues; in fact, he confronts Korihor's criticism directly by proving that it is contradictory...Alma concludes that since what Korihor

knows to be true and what he says to be true clearly oppose one another, Korihor deliberately twists the truth." ("An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon--The Face May Be Strange, but the Voice is Familiar," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony Of The Word*, Vol.6. Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992, 121-122).

Dealing with Modern-Day Korihors:

1. Alma speaks only to what he personally knows is true, ie. He knows that the priests do not glut themselves "on the labors of the people" (Alma 30:31).

"2. Bear personal testimony.

"3. Seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

"4. Teach the truth from the prophets and the scriptures." (*Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 122).

It is important to remember that not all will be converted by our testimony. It is our responsibility and opportunity, however, to share the truth we have received with them. One never knows what will be the result when seeds are planted.

III. Alma 31

Alma 31:1-2

1 Now it came to pass that after the end of Korihor, Alma having received tidings that the Zoramites were perverting the ways of the Lord, and that Zoram, who was their leader, was leading the hearts of the people to bow down to dumb idols, his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

2 For this was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites.

George Reynolds states,

Zoramites. An apostate sect of the Nephites who took their name from one *Zoram*, their leader. They occupied the land of *Antionum* where they flourished B.C.75.

"In the various apostasies, partial or total, that from time to time disgraced the Nephites there is one characteristic that seems universal to them, however much they differed on minor points. It was the denial of the coming of the Savior in the flesh and of the necessity of his atonement for the sins of the world. This was the evil one's strong point in his efforts to mislead the ancient Nephites. Thus it was with the Zoramites. They bowed down to idols, denied the coming of Christ, declared the doctrine of the atonement to be a foolish tradition and misinterpreted the teachings of the holy scriptures with regard to the being of God...Moreover, they claimed to be a chosen and holy people, separated from their fellowmen and elected of God to eternal salvation, while all around were predestined to be cast down to hell. This creed naturally resulted in its adherents and advocates being puffed up in vanity and consumed with pride. They became haughty, uncharitable and tyrannical and oppressors of their poorer neighbors." (*A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City, 1892; Deseret Book Co., 1954, 275-276).

Alma determined to visit the Zoramites for fear that they "would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites, [which]...would be the means of great loss on the part of the Nephites" (Alma 31:4). He also felt that "the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just---therefore, Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God" (Alma 31:5).

On his mission to the Zoramites, Alma took Ammon, Aaron, Omner, Amulek, Zeezrom, Shiblon and Corianton with him. (see Alma 31:6-7.)

Alma 31:8-9

8 Now the Zoramites were dissenters from the Nephites; therefore they had had the word of God preached unto them.

9 But they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God...

Chart 1: Zoramite Beliefs and Practices - Alma 31

"1. Worshipped idols (vs.1) No explicit description of this later in the narrative; their idolatry could have been their placing wealth, or even themselves, before God.
"2. Did not observe the law of Moses (vs.9)
"3. Did not pray daily or regularly (vs.23)
"4. Built synagogues for once-a-week, only worship (vs.12)
"5. Denied Christ (vs.16)
"6. Otherwise "perverted the way of the Lord" (vs.11)
"7. Were worldly, materialistic, and proud (vs.24, 27)

Reference: Dr. Eric D. Huntsman. "Alma 30-31, Zoramite Apostasy," in Rel. 122: *Introduction to the Book of Mormon (Alma 30--Moroni 10)*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Winter 2009, 7, numbers and verses added).

Based upon the preceding chart outline of the beliefs of the Zoramites, we can understand the words of Alma, "they had fallen into great errors, for they would not observe to keep the commandments of God..." (Alma 31:9). Whenever an individual or a group of people, fail to keep the commandments of God, they are on a "slippery slide" to apostasy and general unhappiness.

The Zoramites had built a synagogue where they assembled "themselves together one day of the week, which day they did call the day of the Lord" (Alma 31:12). They had built in the center, "a place for standing, which was high above the head; and the top thereof would only admit one person... whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice." (Alma 13-14). These are the words they spoke:

Alma 31:15-18

15 Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, and we believe that thou art holy, and that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever.

16 Holy God, we believe that thou hast separated us from our brethren; and we do not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers; but we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children; and also thou hast made it known unto us that there shall be no Christ.

17 But thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever; and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou has elected us, that we may not be led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief in Christ, which doth lead their hearts to wander far from thee, our God.

18 And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.

Bryan Richards states,

"This spiritual famine is founded upon the Zoramite perversions of the Lord's plan. They are not as drastic as those of Korihor, for they do not deny the existence of God. They just ignore Him spiritually and ignore His commandments. The Zoramites had perverted the Law of Moses, ignored the commandments of God, begun to believe in dumb idols (although we are not told how this idolatry was expressed). They had also ignored the spiritual nature of the Nephite religion by ignoring the performances of the church with its emphasis on prayer and supplication (v.10). The Zoramites had perverted prayer into rote, useless fanfare. Finally, they had perverted the doctrine of election to a greater extent than Calvin. All of these perversions served a purpose--to keep the minds of the people on anything but religion, at the same time criticizing the Nephites for following the 'foolish traditions' of their fathers."

(www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-31) .

Hugh Nibley states,

"So here we have a competition between two religions as well as a fusion...They boasted a superior religion, and the Zoramite priesthood claimed to be eminently rational and spiritual, accusing the Nephites of 'childish' beliefs and

practices--Alma lays great stress upon their boasting, in the manner of all barbarians. In short, 'they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances' (Alma 31:11), but not all. Did they still think of themselves as Israelites? They certainly thought of the Nephites as apostates. In particular, they rejected the redemption of the Messiah as naïve and unnecessary (Alma 31:16-18, 29), for they considered themselves very advanced, very superior as they strutted amidst the almost comical exaggerated splendor of their Mesoamerican dress and architecture (Alma 31:25-27)." (*The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, Vol.8. Edited by John W. Welch. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., and Provo, Utah: Foundation of Ancient Records and Mormon Studies, 1989, 544).

Bryan Richards states,

"The purpose of prayer is to communicate with God. The prayer of the Zoramites served another purpose entirely. Inspired by Satan, it served to reinforce religious complacency and stifle spirituality. Nowhere in the scriptures is there a better example of how not to pray! This prayer is self-righteous--a public parade rather than a penitent petition. It is vain, repetitious, meaningless, and empty. It denies the Christ, the atonement and religion of the Nephites." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-31).

The prayer of the Zoramites reminds us of a parable Jesus Christ shared during his mortal ministry.

Luke 18:9-14

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

12 I fast twice in a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

I am reminded of the people of Zarahemla [Mulekites] who also came to ancient America from Jerusalem at the death of King Zedekiah. Omni, one of the writers in the Book of Mormon, states regarding this people:

Omni 1:17

17 ...and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator;...

If the Zoramites had failed to read their scriptures, as they "did not believe in the tradition of our brethren, which was handed down by the childishness of their fathers" (Alma 31:16), we then have some understanding regarding the perversions that had crept into their religious beliefs. When we are left to our own devices, without the guidance and direction provided by the scriptures, we lose our bearing and wander off from the truth. The scriptures help us stay on the course back to our Heavenly home.

Alma 31:24-25

24 Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods.

25 Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride.

Alma, the younger, offered a prayer unto God on behalf of his brethren, the Zoramites.

Chart 2: Alma's Prayer [Alma 31:30-35]

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| "1. Give me strength that I may bear with mine infirmities (Alma 31:30) . |
| "2. Wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ (Alma 31:31) . |
| "3. Give unto me success, and also my fellow laborers |

(Alma 31:32) .
"4. Wilt thou comfort [my fellow laborers] souls in Christ (Alma 31:32) .
"5. Help us bring the Zoramites unto thee (Alma 31:34-35) .
"6. [The Zoramites'] souls are precious (Alma 31:35) .
"7. Give unto us...power and wisdom (Alma 31:35) .

Reference: *Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 123).

The contrast between the prayer of the Zoramites and the prayer of Alma is great. The prayer of the Zoramites is founded on pride and how much better they are than others. It is self-centered and selfish with little or no concern for anyone other than themselves. They are drowning in their own self-absorption, and don't even know it. In contrast, the prayer of Alma is humble and other-centered. He seeks not his own aggrandizement, but only to be a servant in the hands of the Lord. His request for success is not for him alone, but also for those who serve with him. Despite how far the Zoramites have wandered off the path, he knows their souls are precious in the eyes of God. He seeks from God, the power and wisdom as to how he and his fellow laborers may be successful in restoring them to the truth.

Following Alma's prayer on behalf of the Zoramites, he "clapped his hands upon all who were with him" (Alma 31:36).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"Presumably this means that Alma laid his hands upon their heads and either set them apart to their assignments or else bestowed a special blessing upon them before they were to face a difficult challenge. In any case, thereafter "they were filled with the Holy Spirit." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol.3. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 221).

Alma 31:37-38

37 And after that they did separate themselves one from another, taking no thought for themselves what

they should eat, or what they should drink, or what they should put on.

38 And the Lord provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst; yea, and he also gave them strength, that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ. Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith.

Neal A. Maxwell states,

"Whether the afflictions [we experience] are self-induced, as most of them are, or whether they are of the divine-tutorial type, it matters not. Either way, the Lord can help us so that our afflictions, said Alma, can be 'swallowed up in the joy of Christ' (Alma 31:38). Thus, afflictions are endured and are overcome by joy. The sour notes are lost and a symphony of salvation sounds. Our afflictions, brothers and sisters, may not be extinguished. Instead, they can be dwarfed and swallowed up in the joy of Christ. This is how we overcome most of the time—not the elimination of affliction, but the placing of these in that larger context." ("If Thou Endure It Well," at BYU Fireside, December 4, 1984).

Later, Alma reflected with his son, Shiblon, regarding his missionary service to the Zoramites.

Alma 38:3-5

3 I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.

4 For I know that thou wast in bonds; yea, and I also know that thou was stoned for the word's sake; and thou didst bear all these things with patience because the Lord was with thee; and now thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee.

5 And now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Alma did not say to his son, Shiblon, when he gave him a blessing prior to his missionary service to the Zoramites, "you shall not have any afflictions." Instead, he blessed him that in his afflictions, if he would continue to put his trust in the Lord and be steadfast and diligent in keeping the commandments, he would be blessed and the Lord would deliver him. That is not only the promise of the Lord to Shiblon, but to each of us.

Bryan Richards states,

"If we are to like the scriptures to ourselves, we must read the story of the Zoramites with an introspective eye. Rather than look down our noses at their hypocrisy and self-righteousness, we should ask ourselves if we are not guilty of self-righteous attitudes in a lesser degree For example, some members [of the church] testify of the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth (D&C 1:30) with a tone which is reminiscent of the Zoramites. The privilege of being associated with the only organization which has the power to exalt its members should not be translated into a religious superiority complex." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-31).

Joseph Smith states,

"All the righteous world is boasting of its righteousness—it is the doctrine of the devil to retard...our progress by filling us with self righteousness...if you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another." ("9 June 1842 (Thursday). Grove," in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph*. Compiled and edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon Cook. Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991, [Third Printing, 1994], 123).

I recall as a child being told that "people who live in glass houses, should not throw stones." If we would first look within our own lives and correct our faults, we would then be more patient and kind to those around us who are also on the path, but, like us, have not yet arrived.

IV. Conclusions

In these two chapters, we have viewed the condition of those we once knew the gospel was true, but through their

failure, or neglect to strengthen their testimonies, they drifted off into apostasy. The lesson is that if we are not diligent, it can also occur to us. Our testimony may be likened to a well-kept garden. It will bless us daily if we continue to care for it. If we do not, it can quickly be overrun by the weeds of doubt and sin.

The clarion call of this lesson is a reminder to take care of our testimony. We do so as we keep the commandments, read the scriptures, have daily prayers, and provide service to others. King Benjamin exhorted each of us:

Mosiah 4:30

30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

Korihor perished. He did not listen to the words of Alma, the younger. He listened to the words of Satan, "because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind...and I taught them, even until I had much success" (Alma 30:53). A desire for the praise of the world, and the unchecked passions of the flesh have led many to listen to another drummer.

In Alma, Chapter 30, we meet Korihor. Under the freedom of religion, he preaches "unto the people that there should be no Christ" (Alma 30:12). After preaching in the land of Jershon and Gideon, he is brought before Alma and the chief judge. He is confronted by Alma, the younger, and he demands a sign that he "may be convinced that there is a God" (Alma 31:43). As a result, the sign is given and he is made dumb "that thou shalt never open thy mouth any more, that thou shalt not deceive this people any more" (Alma 31:47). In Chapter 30, we also learn the tools we need in order to deal with modern day Korihors.

In Alma, Chapter 31, we are introduced to the apostate Zoramites. We learn of their beliefs and practices. We are taught the purpose of prayer and the contrast between the prayers of the Zoramites and Alma, the younger. We see the value of reading the scriptures and the effects upon our testimony when we neglect to read them. We learn from the

Zoramites, the sin of self-righteousness and how it can also enter into our lives by our actions toward others.

We learn that afflictions can also come to those who are in the Lord's service. As we continue to press forward and are obedient in fulfilling our duty, the Lord will bless us. Our pain will be "swallowed up in the joy of Christ" (Alma 31:38). The joy and blessings we will receive while being in the Lord's service, will be greater than the afflictions we will experience.

In the next lesson [BM#28], we will learn more about Alma's mission to the Zoramites. We will learn how faith and humility are necessary ingredients in providing the fertile soil necessary for the word of God to bear fruit.