

INIQUITY ENTERS THE CHURCH

(Alma 2)

V1-3

Mormon has finished a chapter on wars and contentions, and then notes that in the next year there are no wars nor contentions. While this might be seen to be a very good thing, and it was, it nevertheless does not adequately describe the conditions in Zarahemla. This verse gives the good news of the year, to be contrasted with the bad news beginning in verse 2.

In spite of the reprieve from contentions and wars, the people of Zarahemla nevertheless suffered the consequences of the past years contentions and wars. They suffered for the loss of their loved ones, and perhaps even more to the point, they suffered directly because of the damage to their food supplies. This particular battle apparently took place before they had gathered their harvest.

V4-10

There are two possible answers to the nature of these baptisms following the great repentance. The first is that they had already been baptized, and that this was a baptism of recommitment.(v. 4-7)

Just two years after the famine of the sixth year of the reign of the judges we have a description of people becoming rich, and then listing a very specific set of descriptors. (v.8-10) The cause of the famine was the destruction of the crops in the war. This was not a famine caused by drought or poor soil.

V11-17

Along with the physical trappings of wealth, the next aspect of the particular cultural code that competed with the gospel was the division into ranks. This is precisely what is being described here. The pride leads to a desire for the world, and this leads them to begin to see themselves as better than others who do not bear the trappings of the world that they do.

The progress of the church slows down. Mormon attributes it to the pride of some of the members. It is little wonder that the progress of the church halts when the famine that forced humility is abated, and those inside the church begin to be more worldly than those who do not join. The church would have ceased to offer anything to these people, who could get the trappings of the world without the church. (v.15-17)

V18-22

Notice that Alma equates this apostasy from the church to “the destruction of the people.”(v.18)

Inequality was another of the classic hallmarks of the apostate religion. This people who, with Benjamin, covenanted to become the people of Christ and to do away with these inequalities are not back at it again, only a couple of generations after that great event (v.19)

Mormon has been laying the foundation for the coming contentions that will lead up to the tremendous apostasy prior to the birth of Christ. These inequalities begin to persecute those who truly believed in the way of God. Now Mormon will begin to describe the steps Alma took to combat this encroaching evil. (v.20-22)

V23-28

Alma’s solution to this impending religious crisis is to separate once again the positions of government of the land and government of the church, much as happened with his father and King Mosiah. Alma appoints Nephihah to be the chief judge and Alma retains his position as the chief high priest over the church. Nephihah was therefore to deal with the matters concerning the land, and Alma concentrated on the matters of the soul. The rapid disintegration of the church into the ways of the world prompts this action, and Alma wants to be able to give this problem his full attention.

1. What specific "wickedness" in the church was a "great stumbling-block" to others?

2. What did Alma hope to do by "preaching the word of God”?