

ALMA PREACHES REPENTANCE

(Alma 3:1-26)

V1-2

After abridging the history (Alma 2), Mormon makes a quick editorial comment to introduce the words of Alma given to the church at Zarahemla. The rest of the chapter is apparently a verbatim quotation of Alma's words from his own account without editing or comment by Mormon.

V3-13

Alma is applying the principle which he was confronted with by the angel in Mosiah 11:174-175. The events Alma relates occurred some 40 years earlier and account for the establishment of the church as they know it among them (ex. Mosiah 11:44-104).

The series of statements and rhetorical questions by Alma are largely accusatory, as he knows perfectly well the people have forgotten about the roots and core beliefs of their church. The underlying accusation is the contemporary church is sliding far away from his father Alma's original church as it was set up in Mosiah 11:6-21 and then later again in Mosiah 11:97-104. As there are almost certainly some of the original church members still alive and they are the children of those original church members they know their history well. The present departure is a deliberate one.

The text presents themes of both physical (v. 5-7) and spiritual salvation (v. 8-24), with considerable emphasis on the spiritual.

This matter of remembering the captivity of your fathers is one that is emphasized most in Deuteronomy. There, the Israelites are told to remember their bondage in Egypt and the covenants with their fathers 14 times, and they are told to not forget 8 times (see Deuteronomy 8, Deuteronomy 32:7).

Another theme unique to Deuteronomy is the idea of leaving the Lord for other gods whom Israel does not know, other gods that have not proven themselves to Israel (see Deuteronomy 11:28, Deuteronomy 13). This concept goes hand in hand with them ignoring their own history with the Lord.

The Lord knows it is easy for people to go into denial and he is addressing that fact, telling them it is unacceptable. He has proven Himself to them repeatedly in the past, why does He have to keep proving Himself to every generation?

V14-26

The thesis here forms the core idea for the rest of the chapter. The members of the original church knew they had spiritual salvation (v. 18-20) because they believed the preaching of the prophet Abinadi (v. 21-22). This brought about a great change in their hearts and desires (v. 23-24). They humbled themselves before God, so this change was permanent. They endured to the end, and so they were saved (v. 25-26).

Alma's point is the present church has not had a permanent change of heart as the original church did, they are not enduring to the end as their fathers did. Hence his questions regarding the condition of their hearts, and his accusations of them in of being stray sheep. By way of contrast he spends the rest of the chapter telling the current church they are not like their fathers.