

THE CHURCH IN ZARAHEMPLA IS CLEANSED AND SET IN ORDER

(Alma 4)

Alma ordains some new priests and elders in the church at Zarahemla (v. 1). Nonmembers who repent are baptized into the church (v. 2) and members who fail to repent are excommunicated from the church (v. 3). Thus, Alma reestablishes the church in Zarahemla (v. 4).

In verse 1, "he ordained priests and elders", the church in Zarahemla is the oldest one among the Nephites. Alma senior established it some 40 years earlier (see Mosiah 11:97-103) and Alma junior has been maintaining. It is plain from 2:11-12 that the order of priests and elders is in practice, so why is Alma ordaining new ones here in Zarahemla?

Verse 4 says Alma "began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla". If his father had done that about 40 years ago, then what he is really doing is reestablishing it, or as it says in verse 7 "Alma had made these regulations" it. The contentions and problems within the church had caused it to go into disorder. But why did it go into such disarray?

We are informed in verse 7-8 that Alma is grieved over the condition of the church, and so are many of the teachers, priests, and elders. "Many"? Why are not all of them grieved as is Alma? Probably because some of them have gone bad, and are among those whom Alma is calling to repentance in the Alma 3:61 who "have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray"). If they've gone bad and don't repent, then they end up being excommunicated. So, new ones have to be ordained in their place.

It's also possible that Alma simply wanted more priests and elders in the church so they could give more attention to the individual members. But, this cannot be the sole cause as it doesn't answer why only "many" and not all of the priests were grieved over the condition of the church and why the church had to be reestablished.

The preaching of the word of God was available to all people, none were excluded (v. 5). And, furthermore, the church members gathered together often to fast and pray for those who were not members of the church (v. 6).

After Alma had regulated the church in Zarahemla he moved on to visit the church in the land of Gideon (v. 7-8) where he declared the word to them by the spirit of prophesy according to his testimony in Christ (v. 9-10).