

ALMA 11-16

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INTRODUCTION

Most of these chapters take place in Ammonihah, where Alma and Amulek attempt to preach the gospel. They have some success but also face incredible trials. In the end, Ammonihah suffers for its wickedness from a Lamanite invasion, but the Nephites enjoy a period of peace that allows more gospel teaching.

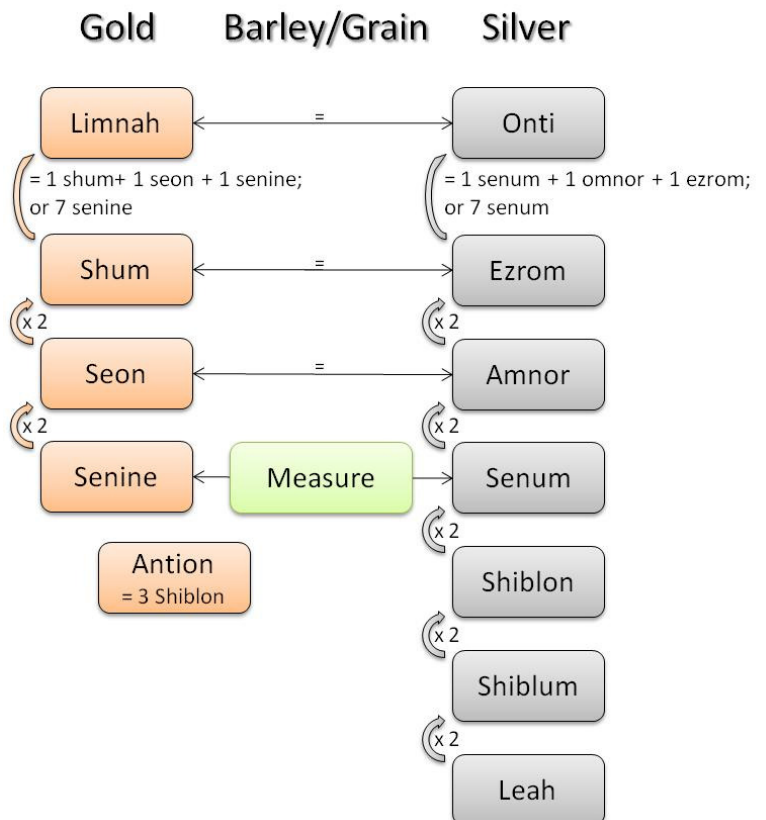
ALMA 11 AMULEK VERSUS ZEEZROM

This chapter is a continuation of Alma 10, Amulek's words to the people, especially to Zeezrom. It starts with an explanation of Nephite weights and measures (not "coinage" as the chapter heading says, since the Nephites didn't use coins as we know them, but did use certain weights of metals and commodities), but mostly focuses on Amulek's testimony and Zeezrom's reaction.

1-3 These verses explain how Nephite lawyers and judges were paid, and how people could be compelled to come before them for trial.

3-19 A summary of these weights and measures is at right. These measures are uniquely Nephite, as Mormon points out, and were established during the reign of Mosiah (we don't know if that's Mosiah₁ or Mosiah₂, who was the last king). Note that the spellings of some of these measures are different in early manuscripts, such that Skousen has determined that the critical text will use ezrum (not ezrom) and shilum (not shiblum). I have used the terms on the chart that is in the current Book of Mormon to avoid confusion.

20 **for the sole purpose to get gain.** The lawyers and judges stirred people up against one another because they were



paid by the time they spent doing their work (verses 1-3).

21 **Zeezrom.** We were introduced to Zeezrom at the end of chapter 10. He is called “an expert in the devices of the devil” here but we will see that he converts to the truth and commits his life to teaching the gospel.

22 **here are six onties of silver.** In an “I told you that story so I can tell you this one” relationship, Mormon related all the details in verses 3-19 about Nephite weights and measures so that we would know just what kind of a bribe Zeezrom was offering Amulek. We already know Amulek was rich (so he said in 10:4), so a little bribe wouldn’t even have been interesting. So Zeezrom offered him six onties, which is equal to 42 senum, or 42 days’ pay for a judge. We can assume that judges were paid fairly well—at least more than the average person—so this was perhaps several months income (or supply of grain) for ‘the man on the street.’ People hearing him offer this amount must have been stunned, but Amulek wasn’t even fazed.

24 **thou lovest that lucre more than him.** Amulek revealed Zeezrom’s true motivator—a love for riches was more powerful than his belief in God.

25 **thou hadst it in they heart to retain them.** By the power of the Spirit, Amulek announced that Zeezrom’s offer of six onties was a false one anyway—he was going to keep them for himself once his aim was achieved of discrediting Amulek.

26 **Thou sayest there is a true and living God.** Zeezrom immediately changed the subject to avoid looking bad to a new line of questioning, which was to discredit Amulek’s belief in Christ.

31 **An angel hath made them known.** Amulek’s response of the source of his knowledge—an angel—again caused Zeezrom to change directions, for he had no rejoinder to such a response. You cannot refute someone’s testimony about seeing an angel with logic or disagreement.

34 **Shall he save his people in their sins?** This was a key doctrine of those who followed Nehor, which was the majority of the people of Ammonihah. They believed that “all mankind should be saved” (Alma 1:4), regardless of anything they do or do not do. Zeezrom is thus asking Amulek about a key Nehorite doctrine that most in his audience believed to build resentment from the crowd when Amulek disagrees with him.

35 **See that ye remember these things.** Zeezrom was indeed a skillful lawyer, for he took the three lines of questions he had followed with Amulek and wove them together, thinking to highlight contradictions. But the differences he pointed out were more disagreements between the gospel and Nehor’s doctrines, not real contradictions in Amulek’s words, which shows that Zeezrom was really playing to his audience—they would immediately agree with him and see Amulek as wrong.

39 **he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.** Jesus is the Father in several ways, including his role in creation, which is what Amulek referred to here.

40 **he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe.** Amulek is not teaching that the atonement is only for the righteous, but that only those who repent and believe get the ultimate benefit from the atonement. See verse 41 (“the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption”) and *Student Manual*, 187.

43 **reunited again in its perfect form.** See *Student Manual*, 187-188 for a lengthy commentary on the resurrection.

44 **one Eternal God.** Amulek taught that “Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit” are “one Eternal God.” This is not trinitarianism as some critics have claimed, but a true doctrine of the unity of purpose of all three.

46 **this is all that I have written.** Amulek said more, but Mormon had made the point he wished to make and has much more to say about the Ammonihah mission, so he moved on.

ALMA 12 ALMA VERSES ZEEZROM

1 **to unfold the scriptures beyond that which Amulek had done.** Though he had clearly learned much in recent weeks from Alma and an angel, Amulek had not spent as much time in the scriptures as had Alma. Alma determined to follow up Amulek’s initial success with Zeezrom with some doctrinal exposition from the source.

2 **heard by the people round about.** From the context, it seemed that there was a crowd, but Mormon confirmed it with this comment.

5 **what I say unto thee I say unto all.** Alma boldly called out Zeezrom’s lies but made sure that the crowd listening knew that what he was saying was addressed to everyone there. Zeezrom might have been the spokesman, but the sins he was exhibiting were apparently fairly common.

7-8 **What does this mean.** Zeezrom’s change of heart was driven by his fear of God and judgment. His question reflects that fear, for he asked about what will happen after this life, especially resurrection and judgment.

9-11 **to know the mysteries of God.** In the Book of Mormon, the “mysteries” means the plan of salvation, the doctrines necessary for returning to the presence of God. People in Alma’s audience heard him and Amulek say the same things, but some heard nonsense and some heard profound truths. See *Student Manual*, 188.

15 **we must come forth and stand before him.** Judgment will come to all, and when it does we will be forced to acknowledge God’s greatness, fairness, mercy, and justice, as he judges us all according to our words and works, saving all who bring forth “fruit meet for repentance.”

16-18 **a second death, which is a spiritual death.** We all die a mortal or first death, which separates our bodies from our eternal spirits. The second death is a spiritual one, a separation between us and God. We are all subject to the second death, just like we are all subject to the first death, if it were not for the atonement of Christ. This death is so miserable that it is compared to being in “a lake of fire and brimstone,” for it is “as though there had been no redemption made.” They are eternally miserable because they cannot be redeemed but they cannot die, since it is after the resurrection.

20 **Antionah.** Trying to catch Alma in his words, a “chief ruler” named Antionah questions him about the resurrection and the tree of life in the garden of Eden. Isn’t it interesting how well these apostates seemed to know the scriptures, quoting them and giving details of the stories?

22 ***This is the thing which I was about to explain.*** You can almost hear the humor in Alma’s voice. ‘Thanks for the setup, because that was actually my next point, Antionah.’

23 ***if it had been possible for Adam.*** Of course, it wasn’t possible, because God knew exactly what was going on. But speaking theoretically for a minute, Alma postulates that if Adam *could* have eaten of the tree of life, he would have lived forever in a sinful and fallen state. That would not have been merciful.

24 ***there this life became a probationary state.*** The *Student Manual* (p. 189) notes that Alma is the only one in scripture to mention the term “probationary state” or “probationary time.” True enough. But the term “probation” is used many times by Nephi, Lehi, Jacob, even Laman and Lemuel. In these passages, they refer to “days of probation” or “state of probation,” so the concept was not original to Alma. It is, however, original to the Book of Mormon, as no such term is used in the Bible.

27 ***it was appointed unto men that they must die.*** The fall and the coming of death into the world was not an accident or even an unfortunate event. It was “appointed” meaning it was God’s plan.

28-30 ***man should know concerning the things.*** God’s mercy is exhibited when he lets us know the plan, sharing the reason we are in this fallen state, through angels and prophets.

33-34 ***then will I have mercy upon you.*** God’s words are quoted in this verse.

37 ***seeing we know these things, and they are true.*** Alma’s call to action included first a testimony of what he and Amulek had just taught, instruction about what would happen if they did not obey, and what would happen if they did.

ALMA 13 MELCHIZEDEK AND PRIESTHOOD

1 ***I would cite your minds forward.*** This odd phrase at first sounds like Alma is asking them to look to the future, but then he talks about the past, so it doesn’t make sense. But “forward” has several meanings, including “to bring something into view or consideration.” So perhaps Alma is saying, ‘I would have you consider this.’

2 ***that thereby the people might know.*** Alma is speaking of ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood in these verses, then he states that men are ordained “after the order of the Son,” so that “people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.” How does being ordained to the Melchizedek priesthood help others with the atonement? Alma says that priesthood holders were also foreordained to this calling; that they receive it with faith and good works; that with the priesthood, they become high priests forever; and that they become sanctified, pure, and spotless. In all of these things they are types of Christ. See also verse 16.

3 ***the manner after which they were ordained.*** After this phrase begins a parenthetical remark by Alma (or Mormon?). It’s as if he started to write about ordination, but then realized he needed to say something else. The insertion, which is related but takes a different direction, goes to the end of verse 7. Then verse 8 returns to this phrase, “Now they were ordained after this manner...” Scholars have identified this same pattern in the Old Testament, called *repetitive resumption*, where an editor begins to write something, then interrupts it with another thought, then returns to the

original point by repeating the phrase. Another example in the Book of Mormon is Alma 17:13 (Gardner).

3 ***being called and prepared from the foundation of the world.*** Alma's (or Mormon?) point here is that priesthood holders are all foreordained to the priesthood.

4 ***while others would reject the Spirit of God.*** The Doctrine & Covenants says it this way, "Many are called, but few are chosen....because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men" (D&C 121:34-35).

5 ***they were on the same standing.*** No one was given preferential treatment but were all given the opportunity to hold the priesthood.

6 ***to teach his commandments.*** One of the primary responsibilities of a priesthood holder is to teach others, "that they might also enter into his rest."

9 ***And thus it is. Amen.*** In the Book of Mormon manuscripts and in the 1830 edition, there is a chapter break here. It's clear from the context that Alma resumed his teaching at a later time, not only by the ending here but by the beginning of the next verse: "Now, as I said..." But the amount of time between the two is not stated or even hinted.

12 ***entered into the rest of the Lord.*** Paul took up this theme in Hebrews 4-5.

14 ***even as the people in the days of Melchizedek.*** Alma alludes to these people but offers little more details other than they were wicked and repented under his leadership (verses 17-18). We have to look to the Joseph Smith Translation for more details (see "Joseph Smith Translation" in the back of the LDS Bible, p. 797-798, Genesis 14:25-40), where we learn that they were righteous people and even translated like those of the city of Enoch.

18 ***did reign under his father.*** This is not mentioned in our Old Testament or the Joseph Smith Translation. Apparently, Melchizedek's father was a regional king over a larger area, and Melchizedek was king over the city of Salem under him. This is a pattern of kingship followed by the Lamanites during Alma's time, so it was likely at least somewhat familiar to his listeners.

19 ***none were greater.*** An amazing statement, considering that those before Melchizedek and after him included Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many more.

21 ***the day of salvation draweth nigh.*** This could have many meanings, but Jesus' name in Hebrew is 'Jehovah is salvation.' The day of Jesus mortal ministry was indeed drawing nigh.

24 ***angels are declaring it unto many at this time.*** Alma and Amulek were certainly included in this, but Alma's statement is broader, for it includes "all parts of our vineyard" (verse 23). The activity of angels ministering to men seems to have increased in this period not long before the coming of Jesus to Bethlehem.

25 ***Would to God that it might be in my day.*** Alma's longing to know of the birth of Christ is strong, but it will not happen in his lifetime. But perhaps Alma was privileged to be one of those appearing to the shepherds, singing praises to God?

let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice. Though he'd love to have it happen in his lifetime, yet he declares his joy no matter when Jesus comes, because he knows the ultimate blessing that will occur as a result of that coming.

27-30 Alma's wish for the people was not one of destruction or retribution for their sins, even though he had personally suffered at their hands. Instead, he prays for lofty blessings and eternal rewards for the people of Ammonihah. They will sadly return his kind and hopeful prayers with persecution and death.

ALMA 14 MARTYRS AT AMMONIHAH

1 many of them did believe. Alma's and Amulek's words touched many in the city. In his first visit, he had no success. Now he had many converts who "began to repent" and "search the scriptures." It does demonstrate that the scriptures, in some form, were readily available, even in this city several days' journey from the capital, Zarahemla.

2 desirous that they might destroy. Sadly, though, their converts were far fewer than their enemies. This group would cause great pain and eventually bring about the destruction of the city.

5 witnessed against them. Bound "with strong cords (verse 4), the two men had a plethora of witnesses who basically testified how Alma and Amulek's words were contrary to the doctrines of Nehor—their 'trial' was on their teachings.

6-7 Zeezrom was astonished. Feeling the judgments of God coming down upon him and upon his people, Zeezrom plead for Alma and Amulek, but he was persecuted and cast out.

7 sent men to cast stones at them. The men who believed in the gospel were cast out of the city and had stones thrown at them. It doesn't say they were killed by stoning but certainly their injuries could have been quite serious from such treatment.

8 cast into the fire. With the men out of the way, the persecutors took their wives and children and their scriptures and threw them all into a fierce fire to be destroyed.

9-11 How can we witness this awful scene? It's hard to imagine how the two men must have felt. These are people who had merely believed their teachings, and how in their faith and innocence were being slaughtered for that belief. The men had the ability to call upon God to save them, but Alma listened carefully and perhaps painfully to the Spirit which said, 'No.' See *Student Manual*, 195-196, especially Pres. Spencer W. Kimball's comments on 196.

12-13 perhaps they will burn us also. Amulek's chilling words were perhaps said with great resignation, but so was Alma's reply: "Be it according to the will of the Lord."

14 he smote them with his hand. The chief judge, who remains nameless in his evil, hits Alma and Amulek with his hands. Over the course of the next few days, the record captures seven instances where he does this (14, 15, 17, 20 [twice], 24, and 25). Besides being hit, they also suffered by being bound with cords (22), spit upon (21), mocked (22), starved (22), stripped of clothing (22), and left in prison for many days (18, 22).

16 **after the order and faith of Nehor.** Though not explicitly called out until this verse, we could have known this just by their comments and actions.

17 **answered him nothing.** Alma and Amulek’s response was silence—mentioned three times (17, 18, and 19).

23 **twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year.** Amulek earlier testified what day he had met Alma (10:6), so we can see from this verse that it has been just over three months since that day.

25 **the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek.** After many days of suffering in silence, and after each of their visitors had beaten and mocked them, Alma finally rose up and said a prayer: “How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance.” The result was that the strength was indeed given them to break their bonds, and a great earthquake (which apparently only impacted the prison) brought down the building, killing everyone except Alma and Amulek, who escaped unharmed. It’s hard not to see the parallel with Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, at least in his words: “O God, where art thou?...How long shall they hand be stayed...Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions...Remember thy suffering saints, O our God” (D&C 121: 1-6). Perhaps Joseph prayed for a similar outcome, hoping the Lord might replicate the experience in this chapter? In his case, though, the outcome was more like that of Alma’s people under persecution in Helam—they were given the strength to endure the trials until their deliverance came.

29 **even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions.** A striking image. Though lions are referenced many times in the scriptures, the other reference to “two lions” is in describing the throne of Solomon, the son of David, which had a lion on either side.

ALMA 15 SIDOM

1-2 **into the land of Sidom.** There are seven references to Sidom in the Book of Mormon, all in this chapter. Other than its proximity to Ammonihah and ability to take in a fair number of refugees, we do not know much about this area. But here Alma, Amulek, Zeezrom, and the other men who had been driven out of Ammonihah found a place to gather and hear the full message of the gospel from Alma.



2 *all that had happened unto their wives and children.* It is hard to imagine those conversations with men who had no choice but leave but who surely never imagined such an outcome for their families.

3-5 *Zeezrom lay sick.* He was sick in body with a fever, but more importantly sick in spirit, believing that his wickedness had gotten these two preachers killed. When he learned they were alive, he mustered enough faith to call for them and ask to be healed.

5 *they went immediately.* What a great heart these men exhibited. They did not make him wait, nor did they question his sincerity—they just picked up and went to the house where Zeezrom was.

10 *have mercy on this man, and heal him.* After giving Zeezrom the chance to express his new-found faith, Alma prays for God's power to heal him, which happens immediately.

12 *Alma baptized Zeezrom.* Like Saul after his experience on the Damascus road, as soon as he is healed by priesthood and faith, Zeezrom is ready to make a covenant with God and join the church.

14 *they were many.* Converts came not only among the people cast out of Ammonihah, but from the land of Sidom and “all the region round about,” allowing Alma to establish a strong community there, with ordained priesthood leaders.

15 *Ammonihah...repented not.* The righteous among them had been found by Alma's second mission. With Amulek's help, they had gathered out those ready to accept the truth. The rest of the people were stuck on Nehor's doctrines, awaiting their destruction.

16 *Amulek having forsaken all.* Amulek was a wealthy man in Ammonihah, but now he had lost all of that. He was rejected by his former friends and family. No mention is made of Amulek's wife and children. It is likely that they were killed in the fire with the other families. If true, it makes his plea to Alma that they should save them all the more poignant.

17 *seeing a great check.* In other words, Alma saw that his mission had been successful, that he had helped put a stop to wickedness, and that the people were organized to worship and support each other.

18 *took Amulek and came over to the land of Zarahemla.* Alma took Amulek home with him, even having him live in “his own house.” The record doesn't say how long they had this arrangement, but Alma showed great kindness to this man who had readily believed his words and had supported him and stayed by his side through great persecutions and trials.

19 *thus ended the tenth year.* This year, which we date to about 81 BC, started back in Alma 8:3. It was an amazing and eventful year for Alma, with converts in several cities, a long journey to what was probably near the northern edge of Nephite civilization at that time, and much suffering, both experienced and witnessed.

ALMA 16 AMMONIHAI DESTROYED, PEACE IN THE LAND

1 *in the eleventh year.* This single chapter covers four years, the 11th to the 14th year of the reign of the judges, or about 81 to 78 BC.

fifth day of the second month. Making just over seven months since Alma and Amulek met. On this day came “a cry of war.”

2-3 *the armies of the Lamanites.* Coming up on the west side of the wilderness, the Lamanite army had bypassed the center of the Nephite lands. The first city they came to was Ammonihah. Thus without warning, just a few months after they taunted Alma, “We will not believe thy words if thou shouldst prophesy that this great city should be destroyed in one day” (Alma 9:4), that is exactly what happened (verse 10). The Lamanites then went further east/north to “the borders of Noah” and began to destroy and take captive people there. Some must have escaped and fled to Zarahemla to let them know what was happening. Notice that the Nephites had to “raise a sufficient army”—they either had no standing army or one that was so small that it took time to gather up sufficient numbers of citizens to make a response to the Lamanites.

5 *Zoram, and he had two sons, Lehi and Aha.* Other than the events in this chapter, we know nothing of this military leader and his two sons, but they demonstrated faithfulness and military skill in this incident. The next military leader mentioned in the book of Alma is Captain Moroni, but not until chapter 43.

having heard that he had the spirit of prophecy. Zoram and his sons know Alma was the high priest, but they went to him at this time because they had also heard of his prophesying, such as his prediction that Ammonihah would be destroyed, which they had just witnessed.

6 *Alma inquired of the Lord.* It doesn’t say how long the military had to wait for Alma’s response. It may not have been long but it still showed their patience and faith.

cross the river Sidon in the south wilderness. Alma told them that the Lamanite army was heading south already, probably back the way they came, and that the army could encounter them as they crossed the Sidon river down near Manti.

7 *crossed over the river.* Zarahemla was on the west side of the river, so they had to cross it to head toward Manti, which was on the east of the river and further south.

8 *not one soul of them had been lost.* The military mission was completely successful, scattering the attacking Lamanites and rescuing the captives, who were returned to their own lands in the north.

9-11 *it was called Desolation of Nehors.* The swift destruction of Ammonihah was dealt with by burying the piles of dead bodies. The smell was so bad that no one would live there for many years (in Alma 49, it is mentioned again as a fortified city of Moroni).

12 *until the fourteenth year.* Three years of peace followed the destruction of Ammonihah and the rescue of the captives of Noah, which gave Alma and his companion Amulek and other righteous leaders and teachers sufficient time to greatly strengthen the church throughout the land.

16 *pour out his Spirit...to prepare the minds...their hearts.* The missionaries acknowledged that people were only converted by the Spirit of the Lord, that their words would have no effect unless the Spirit had first prepared their minds and hearts.

18 *these things ought not so to be.* The priests taught against all manner of wickedness among the people.

19 ***the coming of the Son of God***. More importantly, they taught that Jesus Christ was coming soon and taught of his atonement and resurrection.

20 ***he would appear unto them after his resurrection***. There was no confusion among the Nephites at this time—they knew that Jesus would appear to them after he had successfully fulfilled the mission the Father had given him.

21 ***having got victory over the devil***. At least for a time, the Nephite nation was in a period of righteousness, with the word of God “preached in its purity” and “blessings upon the people.” Thus we take a break from the story of Alma and transition back in time fourteen years and much further south, to learn about the experiences of the sons of Mosiah and their companions among the Lamanites in the next few chapters.

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