

Alma 31:1

1 ***Zoramites***

The Zoramites were a group of apostates who had left the Nephite religion and started their own church. In chapter 31, we are given an account of their teachings in some detail. Note the following phrases from that chapter which describe the doctrines of the Zoramites. Mormon tells us they had “fallen into great errors” (v.9); they rejected the traditions of their Nephite brethren as being “handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers” 9v. 16); they did not want to be “led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief in Christ” (v. 17); and they refused “to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about” 9v. 22).

Familiar echoes? Indeed they are. The Zoramites are a reflection of some of Korihor’s primary teachings. In other words, the Zoramites represent the end result of Korihor’s philosophy.... What an irony that Korihor should come to his end by the hands of the very people who practiced what he preached.

Selected writings of Gerald N. Lund [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999], 130-131

Alma 31:1

2 ***Bow down to dumb idols***

There is no mention in the text of specific gods to which the Zoramites had devoted themselves, except that the people were lifted up in pride through their virtual worship of gold, silver, and fine goods (verses 24-25). We are guilty of idolatry whenever the object of our adoration, our devotion, or the ardent desires of our hearts is anything other than the true and living God. Whenever a people have strayed from the ordinances they become idolatrous: “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.”

Millett & McConkie, Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol 3, p. 215

3 **Four False Beliefs**

1. Sherem	Jacob 7:7-9	Only Mosaic Law No prophets or prophecy
2. Nehor	Alma 1:4	Universal Salvation No need for repentance Paid ministry
3. Korihor	Alma 30	Anti-Christ Philosophies of Man
4. Zoram	Alma 31:9-17	They did not observe the law of Moses (31:9) They had forsaken daily prayer (v.10) They perverted the ways of the Lord (v. 11) They built synagogues for the purpose of worshiping one day a week (v. 12) They built a prayer stand from which they offered the same prayer (vv. 13-18) They believed God was and would always be a spirit (v. 15) They believed the traditional beliefs of the Nephites were false (v. 16) They believed there would be no Christ (v. 16) They believed they were chosen to be the elect of God (vv. 16-17)

Alma 31:5*Power of the Word*

- 4 “The gospel is the only answer to the problems of the world. We may cry peace. We may hold peace conferences. And I have nothing but commendation for those who work for peace. But it is my conviction that peace must come from within. It cannot be imposed by state mandate. It can come only by following the teachings and the example of the Prince of Peace.”

Ezra Taft Benson, *Title of Liberty*, pp. 213-214

- 5 There are no armaments, no governmental schemes, no international organizations, and no mechanisms for the control of weapons which can preserve an unrighteous people. . . . Alma has given us compelling evidence of his conviction that repentance is more effectual than arms in maintaining peace. You will recall that he was the elected chief judge of the Nephite nation. As such he was the governor of the people of Nephi and commander-in-chief of their armies. Seeing many of them dissenting and conniving with the enemy, he, notwithstanding his power to strengthen and command his armies, placed the affairs of state in other hands that he himself might cry repentance unto the dissenters. . . .

Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report, Apr. 1950*, pp. 87-88

- 6 True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.

Boyd K. Packer, *Conference Report, Oct. 1986*, p. 20

- 7 Decaying cities are simply a delayed reflection of decaying individuals. . . . The commandments of God give emphasis to improvement of the individual as the only real way to bring about the real improvement in society.

Ezra Taft Benson, *A Plea for America*, p. 18

- 8 Bad religion breeds bad societies.

Rodney Turner

- 9 The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of the people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.

Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, p.6

- 10 We don't want or mean to fight with the sword of the flesh, but we will fight with the broad sword of the Spirit.
Joseph Smith [HC, 5:138]

- 11 Often we spend great effort in trying to increase the activity levels in our stakes. We work diligently to raise the percentages of those attending sacrament meetings. We labor to get a higher percentage of our young men on missions. We strive to improve the numbers of those marrying in the temple. All of these are commendable efforts and important to the growth of the kingdom. But when individual members and families immerse themselves in the scriptures regularly and consistently, these other areas of activity will automatically come. Testimonies will increase. Commitment will be strengthened. Families will be fortified. Personal revelation will flow.

Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1986, 81

12 Do not expect the world's solutions to the world's problems to be very effective. Such solutions often resemble what C.S. Lewis wrote about those who go dashing back and forth with fire extinguishers in times of flood (see *The Screwtape Letters* [1959], 117-18). Only the gospel is constantly relevant, and the substitute things won't work. Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 45

13 While in exile at St. Helena, Napoleon asked another man in his suite, "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" Then Napoleon went on to say: "I will tell you." Napoleon compared himself and other heroes of antiquity with Christ and then showed how far Jesus surpassed them all. "I think I understand somewhat of human nature," said Napoleon, "and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man, but not one is like Him. Jesus Christ was more than man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself, founded great empires; but upon what did the creation of our genius depend? Upon force, Jesus alone founded His empire upon love and to this very day millions would die for Him."

Mary Ellen Smoot, "Everything Money Cannot Buy," Satellite Broadcast, 3 Feb. 2002, Brigham Young University [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2002], 4

Alma 31:21

14 *Rameumptom*

"Rameumptom." Although this name may look strange in English, it has appropriate Semitic roots recognizable to students of Semitic languages. The preface "ram" is frequently used to indicate a high place. For example, later in the Book of Mormon we read of the hill Ramah. Also, in modern Israel are the town of Ramallah (located in the tops of the Judean hills just north of Jerusalem) and Rameem (which literally means "the heights" and is located on the top of the hills near the Lebanese border).

Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 213

How significant is it that the Rameumptom was built "high above the head"?

15 Consider the following scriptures that speak of "high" things and are connected with pride. The Zoramite prayer indicates five times that they thought they were better than others.

Ephesian 2:2—Satan is "the prince of the power of the *air*"

Genesis 11:4-9—"Let us build a ...*tower*, whose top may reach unto heaven"

Luke 11:43—"Woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye love the *uppermost seats* in the synagogues"

1 Corinthians 4:6—"No one of you be *puffed up* for one against another"

1 Nephi 8:26—"A great and spacious building... stood as it were *in the air, high above* the earth"

1 Nephi 11:36—"the great and spacious build was the *pride* of the world"

Psalms 131:1—"My heart is not haughty... Neither do I exercise myself in ... things *too high*" (emphasis added)

Brian S. Garman, *Search These Things Diligently*, p. 210

16 Their weekly group-devotion on the "Rameumptom," a prayer tower that dominated their synagogues, consisted of this single, formalized, self-congratulatory prayer. Having taken care of their spiritual obligations for the week, "they returned to their homes, never speaking of their God again until they had assembled themselves together again to the holy stand." (Alma 31:23.) Their choral exercise in vanity sufficed to appease their God and permitted them to freely indulge themselves. Having been predestined to holiness and salvation, they had no need for daily prayer or obedience to restrictive commandments. The issue of life after death had been fully and happily settled; they could get on with the things of this world. Such is the underlying assumption of every "Sunday religion." It renders God a practical irrelevance. He exists, but he need not be taken too seriously. The false doctrines of Sherem, Nehor, Korihor, and Zoram were both predictive and representative of those apostate religious beliefs—Christian and non-Christian—that shroud the world in spiritual darkness in these latter days.

Rodney Turner "A faith unto *Salvation*" *Studies in Scripture*, edited by Kent P. Jackson, Vol 8, pp. 18-19

17 Latter-day Saints seem naturally inclined to focus upon their works. This propensity to rely so heavily on works that document obedience seems to be an outgrowth of our present technological, behavioristic society, which places so much emphasis on observable achievement. Increasingly encumbering and complex, family, career, and even Church activities can disperse attentions toward multiple distractions among tasks and programs. Illusionary time and goal management techniques, if not grounded in a basic Christian nature, can further contribute to task-based rituals and repetitions in life. By extending ourselves laterally outward in noisy worldly ways, we risk becoming swallowed up in the proud illusion of progress (Alma 31:27), when what we need is to extend quietly inward toward humility and upward toward God. As with the apostate Zoramites who lacked the essential humility that leads to faith, the achievements and prosperity that embellish our lives become meaningless trappings of mortality with no eternal significance without faith. Doing home teaching, earning a scout merit badge, or doing other assigned acts of service can become little more than offerings on the Rameumptom (Alma 31:21), if our hearts are not earnest and our daily nature not Christian.

Elaine Shaw Sorensen, *Alma, The Testimony of the Word*, ed. By Nyman and Tate, p. 131

Alma 31:28

18 *Costly Apparel*

The souls of our brothers and sisters who may seem to be more feeble and less honorable are precious. The Church has need of them. We should make every attempt to know them and to help them claim the full blessings and joys of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our prayers should be as Alma's: "Give unto us, O Lord, power and wisdom that we may bring these our brethren, again unto thee." (See Alma 31:35.)

We must remember that our salvation is intertwined with the salvation of others. We must *care more* for those who seem to *care less* for their faith.

Carlos E. Asay, "Nurturing the Less Active," *Ensign*, Oct. 1986, 15.

19 "Our society may well be as guilty as the wealthy Zoramites of using fashion as 'the science of appearances, inspiring us with the desire to seem rather than to be' (Edwin Hubbell Chapin). In our day the costly apparel syndrome may be identified as one aspect of the modern-day term 'conspicuous consumption.' The word conspicuous alludes to the visual side of vanity—the need to be seen, to be recognized. Consumption refers to that which we take in or that which we consume. Conspicuous consumption may be defined as that which we take to ourselves in order to be recognized and approved by others. By its very definition, the person trapped in conspicuous consumption, especially as it applies to 'costly apparel,' must be focused on the opinions of others, because what is 'in' today may be 'out' tomorrow. Vanity then becomes its own punishment, because there is never time to be satisfied—the eyes and opinions of others can turn so quickly to embrace someone else. For us, the disease that afflicted the Zoramites encompasses more than clothing. It can include cars, houses, boats, diplomas, and anything else that has a foundation where the need for the approval of man carries more weight than the need to be accepted by God."

K. Douglas Bassett, *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, 1991 Sperry Symposium, pp. 18-19

20 My six-year-old son, Boyd, who was in the final months of a battle with cystic fibrosis, became very close to one of my students whom I will call Tom. When I would bring Boyd to seminary, he and Tom were inseparable. I'm sure Tom's major motivation for coming to class was connected with his desire to be with my son. The school where I taught was one of the wealthiest in the area, and wearing the "right" clothing was very important to the majority of the students. However, Tom's parents did not have a great deal of money, which was reflected in the clothes he wore to school. Perhaps this is one of the reasons he connected so well with my son. Tom's unfashionable apparel, as well as his social isolation in school, gave him an instant identification with this little boy whose body was not so fashionable either.

My son's condition continually grew worse, and near the end of the school year he passed away. His funeral was held at the church where I taught seminary, next to the high school. Like so many of my students, Tom came directly from his classes to attend the funeral. As he entered the chapel, he was stopped by one of the employees of the mortuary, who inquired, "Do you think you're dressed appropriately to show the necessary respect to this little boy and his family?"

Tom was devastated. He immediately left the building like a Zoramite cast out of the synagogue because of the *coarseness of his apparel*. To my knowledge he never attended seminary or church again. In his mind, this was the last straw for his already wavering testimony. As hard as I tried, I could not get him to come back. Is it possible that some of us in the Church could unwittingly be sending the same message that was given to Tom as well as to the unfashionable among the Zoramites?

President Gordon B. Hinckley has given us counsel against the improper use of body piercing and tattoos (see *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 99). His counsel was directed to members of the Church, who are to refrain from such practices as a token of respect for our bodies, which the Savior identified as temples (see John 2:19-21). It is important to note that President Hinckley's words were meant for us personally; they were not given as a license to judge anyone else who chooses to participate in body piercing or tattoos. Someone with a nose ring or a tattoo might not feel welcome at church if we take President Hinckley's counsel incorrectly by casting judgmental glances or verbal innuendo about his or her appearance. If so, then it is we, the members of the Church, who take on the role of the prideful Zoramites in the Book of Mormon.

The challenge to us as members of the Church is to not judge others by their appearance while at the same time recognizing that the world will judge the Church by the appearance of its members. That is why students of church-owned schools as well as missionaries are required to dress and groom in a conservative fashion.

Jack R. Christianson and K. Douglas Bassett, *Life Lessons from the Book of Mormon [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 114-115*

Alma 31:31-33, 38

21 *Comfort in Afflictions*

I Suppose I am talking to some who have had worry and trouble and heart burnings and persecution, and have at times been caused to think that they never expected to endure quite so much. But for everything you suffered, for everything that has occurred to you which you thought an evil at that time, you will receive fourfold, and that suffering will have had a tendency to make you better and stronger and to feel that you have been blessed. When you look back over your experiences you will then see that you have advanced far ahead and have gone up several rounds of the ladder toward exaltation and glory.... Take it individually or take it collectively, we have suffered and we shall have to suffer again; and why? Because the Lord requires it at our hands for our sanctification.

The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, comp. Clyde J.

Williams [1984], 117-18"

22

God never bestows upon His people, or upon an individual, superior blessings without a severe trial to prove them, to prove that individual, or that people, to see whether they will keep their covenants with Him, and keep in remembrance what He has shown them. . . . So when individuals are blessed with visions, revelations, and great manifestations, look out, then the devil is nigh you, and you will be tempted in proportion to the vision, revelation, or manifestation you have received."

Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 3:205-206

23 “It has been wisely observed that a blessing is anything that brings us nearer to God. Thus our afflictions often become our greatest blessings. It is in our extremities that most often we meet God, not in our comfort. Thus any time conditions come to pass—even what at the time might be construed as tragic or unfortunate conditions—that lead us toward the truth or contribute to our eventual well-being, we have indeed been blessed.”

Robert Millet and Joseph McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 3:224

24 “Why is non-endurance a denial of the Lord? Because giving up is a denial of the Lord’s loving capacity to see us through ‘all these things’! Giving up suggests that God is less than He really is. . . . So much of life’s curriculum consists of efforts by the Lord to get and keep our attention. Ironically, the stimuli He uses are often that which is seen by us as something to endure. Sometimes what we are being asked to endure is His ‘help’—help to draw us away from the cares of the world; help to draw us away from self-centeredness; attention-getting help when the still, small voice has been ignored by us; help in the shaping of our souls; and help to keep the promises we made so long ago to Him and to ourselves. . . . Whether the afflictions 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 amid a symphony of salvational 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.”

Neal A. Maxwell, *BYU Fireside*, December 2, 1984