

## “More Than One Witness”

Lesson

23

Summary

*Alma 8–12*

### Scripture Summary:

*Alma preaches and baptizes in Melek—He is rejected in Ammonibab and leaves—An angel commands him to return and cry repentance unto the people—He is received by Amulek, and the two of them preach in Ammonibab. [About 82 B.C.]*

*Alma commands the people of Ammonibab to repent—The Lord will be merciful to the Laminites in the last days—If the Nephites forsake the light, they shall be destroyed by the Lamanites—The Son of God soon cometh—He shall redeem those who repent and are baptized and have faith in his name.*

*Lehi descended from Manasse—Amulek recounts the angelic command that he care for Alma—The prayers of the righteous cause the people to be spared—Unrighteous lawyers and judges lay the foundation of the destruction of the people.*

*Nephite coinage set forth—Amulek contends with Zeezrom—Christ will not save people in their sins—Only those who inherit the kingdom of heaven are saved—All men shall rise in immortality—There is no death after the resurrection.*

*Alma contends with Zeezrom—The mysteries of God can be given only to the faithful—Men are judged by their thoughts, beliefs, words, and works—The wicked shall suffer a spiritual death—This mortal life is a probationary state—The plan of redemption brings to pass the resurrection and, through faith, a remission of sins—The repentant have a claim on mercy through the Only Begotten Son. [About 82 B.C.]*

### Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights:

**Order in the Court!** Alma refers to the “order of the Church.” The Lord always had an order of governing the dealings with his children. Modern Judaism struggles with a lack of religious order evident by disputations about interpretations of Jewish law, yet the State of Israel provides a framework for religious freedom. “Israel's Declaration of Independence guarantees religious freedom and the safeguarding of holy places for all peoples ‘without distinction of creed, race or sex’ . . . each religious community has its own courts with jurisdiction over personal matters, and their own community schools, should parents opt for a religious education.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Is There a Balance of Religion and State?** “. . . Maintaining a balance between the religious and the secular has caused problems in Israel . . . the Orthodox wing believes that all traffic and public works should stop on the Sabbath . . . non-religious, however, feel that this is tantamount to forcing religious observance on others. This results in(an) inconsistency . . .” “In Jerusalem, no buses run on Sabbath while in Haifa there is public transport on that day.” “. . . some cafes and places of entertainment . . . are open on the Sabbath. Yet, there are certain Orthodox neighborhoods completely blocked off to all vehicles, both public and private.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Does Biblical Law Affect Modern Jewish Law?** The State of Israel has established a legal system based on Biblical law yet it is greatly influenced by the British system of Law established during the Mandate period prior to Israel becoming a state. Some modern/biblical considerations of legal terms follow. The first includes information about witnesses. That is followed by some insight about lawyers and “pleaders.”

**Witnesses:** “The laws involving witness are many. Not all people are qualified to testify before the court. Among those not admissible are slaves, minors (before bar mitzvah), lunatics, the deaf and dumb, the blind, criminals who have not repented their crime, relatives of any party involved in the case or the judges, one who stands to gain from his testimony . . .” “Any person who has seen the event but does not testify is liable to punishment which will be meted out to him by God. In criminal cases the witness is under obligation to testify of his own accord; in civil cases the duty to testify arises only when the man is summoned to do so.” “. . . The Bible declares that in order to convict, the evidence must be given by at least two witnesses . . .” “Halakhic requirements of the marriage ceremony include: the *huppah* (canopy); the giving of the ring by the groom to the bride in the presence of two valid witnesses.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Lawyers and Judges:** The term “Rabbi” used to mean one trained in the law, or in other words, a lawyer. The higher degrees of Rabbi would have been the judges and court leaders. “During the 19th century, the functions of the rabbi began to change and many communities demanded that their leaders be versed not only in Talmud and Jewish law but also in secular studies. To meet these new conditions, rabbinical seminaries were organized, issuing a variety of ‘rabbinical degrees.’” “The Hebrew word for court is *bet din* (plural: *battei din*), which literally means ‘house of judgment’; in rabbinic literature it is the term for a Jewish court of law. We find *battei din* which handle the legal problems of the Israelites from the times of Moses. The rule of the law is an important principle of

Judaism. The Torah stresses that justice must not be meted out by the parties themselves but must be administered by impartial judges.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Religious and Secular Courts:** “. . . In the modern period . . . the function of the *bet din* has been limited to purely religious matters. Nevertheless, throughout the ages Jews have been encouraged to bring their disputes before a *bet din* rather than a secular court, and in the Middle Ages any Jew turning to a secular court to decide a dispute with another Jew was considered a traitor to the Jewish people.” “In Israel today, where an elaborate network of *battei din* has been established under the Supreme Rabbinical Court of Israel, the term *bet din* has come to mean the rabbinic court which has, by act of the Knesset, jurisdiction in matters of personal status in addition to its normal religious function.” “In a *bet din* there were no lawyers either for the defense or the prosecution. The judges themselves questioned the witnesses and the parties involved and arrived at their own conclusions. In the State of Israel, however, there are men who are known as ‘pleaders’ who represent people appearing before the *bet din*.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Jewish “Disputations:”** The history of disputations or polemics is common in Judaism, both biblically and in more recent times. The arguments, proving and disproving, appeared both positively and negatively, for and against, the Jews. It is human nature, yet more so, a characteristic of Jewish culture to have two-sided debates. “Throughout history Jews have often been called on to defend their faith against non-believers in public debates known as disputations or polemics. Often these disputations were conducted in friendly atmospheres of mutual respect, but all too often these debates took on aspects of bitterness.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Jewish/Christian Disputations:** “The developing rift between Christianity and Judaism and the animosity after their final split in the second century C.E. produced many great disputations. A crucial one occurred about the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (c. 135 C.E.) between the Christian Justin Martyr and the Jew Tryphon. While the two adversaries expressed friendship toward each other, the argument became bitter.” “Christian-Jewish disputation continued and Muslim-Jewish debates, which began in the 10th century, developed as well. Questions concerning the text of the Bible and Jewish way of life were discussed. The Jews questioned the Koran's value and attacked Muhammad in the process.” “Nahmanides defended Judaism at the famous Disputation of Barcelona in 1263. Fearlessly questioning the nature of Christian authority and teaching, Nahmanides asked why, if the Messiah had come, the world was still torn by war. He was declared the victor and given a monetary prize for his efforts.” “Disputations still occurred in the 20th century.” (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

**Learning the Other’s Point of View:** These kinds of disputations have drawn Jews away from dialogues with believers in Jesus, the Messiah. Disputations require some learning of the other’s point of view. Jews know very little about Jesus’ restoration of the original order that Father in Heaven gave Adam and his children. However, in the last days, more and more Jews are becoming aware that religious order was restored from time to time throughout history and that there may need for a final restoration that has to happen in these latter-days. These restorations consistently review the “beginning to the end,” the plan of salvation, the true order of God.

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