

through Christ. To the people of Gideon, Alma delivered a profound prophetic oracle regarding the birth of Jesus and the ATONEMENT he would make, “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind . . . that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy . . . that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). In Zarahemla, Alma stressed the need for the new birth and for acquiring the image and attributes of the Master; in doing so, he provided a series of over forty questions that assess one’s depth of conversion and readiness to meet one’s Maker (see Alma 5).

In Ammonihah, Alma and his convert Amulek were accused of a crime, taunted, and imprisoned for several weeks without clothing or adequate food. After being forced to witness the burning of several faithful women and children, Alma and Amulek were miraculously delivered and their persecutors annihilated. The discourses of Alma and Amulek on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement are among the clearest and most fundamental theological statements on these subjects in scripture (see Alma 11–12, 34, 42). In explaining humility, faith, and prayer to the poor in Antionum (Alma 32–34), Alma and Amulek set forth a pattern whereby those without faith in Christ (or those within the fold who desire to strengthen their belief) would plant the seed of the word of Christ in their hearts and eventually receive the confirming impressions of testimony that come by the power of the HOLY GHOST.

Some of the most penetrating doctrinal information in the Book of Mormon comes through words that Alma spoke to his sons. To HELAMAN₁, his eldest son and successor, Alma eloquently recounted the story of his own conversion, gave him loving fatherly counsel, and entrusted him with custody of the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the plates of Ether, and the LIAHONA (Alma 36–37). To Shiblon, he gave wise practical advice (Alma 38). To his errant youngest son, Corianton, who eventually went on to serve valiantly in the church, Alma explained the seriousness of sexual sin, that wickedness never was happiness (Alma 39, 41:10), that all spirits will be judged after death and will eventually stand before God after a perfect resurrection (Alma 40), and that the word “restoration” does not mean that God will restore a sinner to some former state of happiness (Alma 41), for

divine mercy cannot rob justice when the law of God has been violated (Alma 42).

A relatively young man at the time of his conversion, Alma lived fewer than twenty years thereafter. Yet in those two decades he almost single-handedly invigorated and established the cause of truth and liberty in the Nephite church and society. Never forgetting the thunderous voice of the angel at the time of his conversion, Alma always carried with him this unchanging desire: “O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! . . . that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth” (Alma 29:1–2). When he left one day and was never seen or heard again, his sons and the church supposed “that [the Lord] received Alma in the spirit, unto himself,” even as Moses (Alma 45:19), drawing an apt comparison between these two great lawgivers, judges, commanders, spiritual leaders, and prophets.

For Latter-day Saints, Alma’s life and lessons are rich and timeless. He serves as a hope to parents who have wandering children, and as a beacon to those who stray. He stands as a model public servant, a sterling illustration of the new life in Christ, a fearless preacher, missionary, and gifted theologian. Alma was a prophet who received a prophet’s reward.

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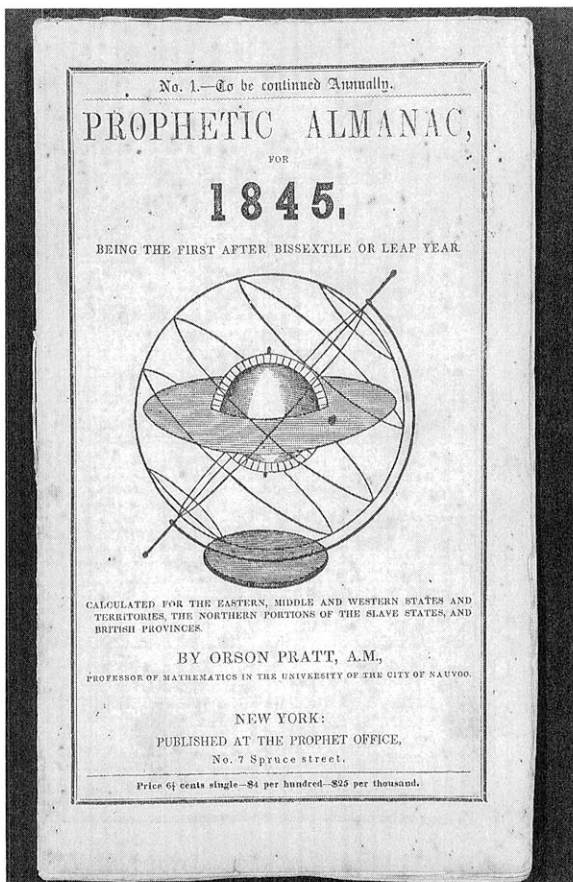
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ALMANACS

Early Mormon almanacs (1845–1866) first borrowed heavily from standard almanacs being published, but then came to focus on interests of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Since 1973 the *Church Almanac* has printed only information pertaining to the Church.

Orson Pratt, an apostle, published the first Mormon almanacs in New York City in 1845 and 1846. Basing his *Prophetic Almanac for 1845* on standard American almanacs, Elder Pratt added a few articles about doctrines of the Church. Then



Title page of the first Mormon Almanac, Orson Pratt's *Prophetic Almanac*, published in New York in 1845. It contained standard calendar information, significant historical dates, and a comparison of "the Doctrines of Christ" with "the Doctrines of Men." Recent LDS Church Almanacs have presented statistics and information about Church history and officers. Photographer: William W. Mahler. Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University.

his 1846 issue broke from the standard mold and became a distinctively Mormon almanac.

Between 1851 and 1866, William Wine Phelps published fourteen known issues of *Deseret Almanac* (from 1859–1864 entitled *Almanac*) in Salt Lake City. Also borrowing from standard almanacs, he added religious and cultural articles and some notes pertaining to frontier-society needs.

The current *Deseret News Church Almanac* is prepared and edited by the staff of the CHURCH

NEWS, in cooperation with the Historical Department of the Church. It was published annually from 1974 to 1983, but biennially thereafter. Presently it is a 352-page, soft-bound, ready-reference of facts and statistics of the Church. It is intended for use in libraries, schools, and other institutions, as well as private homes. The *Almanac* prints thousands of historical and contemporary items about the Church, such as brief biographical sketches of all past and present GENERAL AUTHORITIES; a year-by-year historical chronology of the Church since the 1820s; a month-by-month chronology of major events in the Church during the past two years; and past and current information about STAKES, MISSIONS, AREAS, and TEMPLES throughout the world, including histories, populations, and numbers of Church units.

Liberal use is made of photographs. In addition to photos of current events, users see photographs of all current and past General Authorities for whom there are pictures available, including an 1853 daguerreotype of the Prophet Joseph SMITH's uncle, John Smith, who was an assistant counselor in the FIRST PRESIDENCY and later the PATRIARCH TO THE CHURCH.

Each biennial issue of the *Almanac* is updated and revised. Copies may be purchased at Church DISTRIBUTION CENTERS or ordered by mail from the *Deseret News*, P.O. Box 1257, Salt Lake City, UT 84110.

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DELL VAN ORDEN

ALTAR

A focal point of religious worship throughout the ages, and in most cultures, has been the altar—a natural or man-made elevation used for prayer, sacrifice, and related purposes. Sacrifice on the altar was a basic rite. The characteristic worship practice in Old Testament times was sacrificial in nature, and consequently the altar became one of the most important ritual objects described in that book of scripture.