

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows."—MARK xiii, 8.

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THE REPENTANT LAWYER.

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When Alma the younger, in the eighty-second year before the birth of our Savior, visited the corrupt city of Ammonihah,* he found it cursed with numerous lawyers and judges, who were perverting the law and parodying justice by acquitting the guilty and condemning the righteous, whilst they accumulated riches by taking bribes from those who had committed crime, as well as by blackmailing the innocent. In these nefarious arts they, through prolonged practice, had grown expert; and the more villainous the lawyer or corrupt the judge, the higher he was esteemed and the greater were his gains. Conspicuous amongst the eminent council who graced the bar of Ammonihah stood Zeezrom. He was the leading criminal lawyer of his circuit; no subterfuge was too contemptible, no chicanery too degrading, when used in behalf of his client; witnesses were suborned to testify favorably, unfavorable witnesses were bribed, threatened or spirited away. No

man's testimony was safe in his hands; he could give the plainest language the most improbable meanings, and, on the basis of this contortion, build up spurious arguments with all the eloquence and fervor of which the Nephite language was capable. Naturally he loved a bad cause; in the first place he hated righteousness, and again, the worse the cause the greater the *eclat* if he carried his points. Such a man was deemed eminently fit to oppose the preaching of Alma and Amulek. No matter what they said, he could twist it from its proper meaning; find blasphemy and heresy in the sublime truths of the Gospel, and extract treason from the simplest of God's laws. He was not only willing, but anxious for the contest; he flattered himself that silencing these distinguished defenders of the Cross of Christ would be a unique and signal triumph, one that would add fresh laurels to his brow, and bring new clients to his chambers. But Zeezrom had not taken into his calculation the power that sustained the two prophets who now so valiantly

* Book of Mormon, New Edition, pages 256, 265.

opposed the iniquity of the citizens of Ammonihah, and laid bare their vileness. Of the power of God he knew nothing; he had not learned that there was a Revealer of secrets who could proclaim on the house-tops or on the public highway the most hidden thoughts of men's hearts. Like a famous Frenchman of modern times, he opened the attack with a *cœur legere*. He questioned and cross-questioned, he promised and threatened, he twisted and turned, he abused and villified, but all to no purpose, he was caught in his own trap; his heaven-inspired opponents made manifest his thoughts and intentions, they exposed his lying, they overthrew his sophistries and, with a power more than human, they exhibited the blackness of his heart. As they proceeded the power of God increased upon them, their words grew yet more forcible until Zeezrom himself felt their power. As his corruptions were laid bare he began to tremble, first with rage, then with fear. Bad as he was, he was not the worst amongst his people, and when once he realized the power he was combating, his heart began to acknowledge its guilt.* With this feeling he commenced to inquire of Alma, not in mockery, but in solemn earnestness with regard to the kingdom of God. The answers he received were like a two-edged sword, piercing to his inmost soul, bringing a terrible realization of his awful position before God, and encompassing him about with the pains of hell. He realized that he had been a leader in iniquity, that his lyings and deceivings had greatly contributed to drag the people down to their existing corruption, and that he was among those most responsible for their hardness of heart. In this frame of mind he made an effort to plead with the people, he acknowledged his guilt, he testified to the virtue and integrity of Alma and his companion, and interceded in their behalf. But in vain. The degraded populace reviled him, they mocked at him, they said he was possessed of a devil: and further, they spat on him, then they cast stones at him, and

* Book of Mormon, New Edition, page 276.

ultimately, with some others, they drove him out of their city, whilst the two prophets, with many who believed in their holy message, were thrown into prison, there to suffer all the indignities, persecutions and annoyances that apostate hate could inflict. Nor was this the worst, these reprobates took the wives and babes of those believers whom they had driven away, and mercilessly burned them to death in one great martyr's fire, and in their devilish glee and savage exultation they carried the two enchained prophets to the place of sacrifice, that they might harrow up their souls with the view of the sufferings of the perishing women and children.* Amulek's brave and impetuous spirit could ill bear the fearful scene; the groans, the cries, the supplications of the tortured innocents carried untold agony to his soul. He begged Alma to exercise the power of God that was in them to save the martyrs. But the Holy Spirit revealed to Alma that this sacrifice was by Heaven's consent, that holy angels were bearing the unimprisoned spirits to the unutterable glories of the presence of the Father, and that He in His wrath would avenge their deaths with swift judgment on those who slew them.†

Whilst this fearful tragedy was being enacted in Ammonihah, Zeezrom—trembling, heart-sick and faint—wandered to the neighboring town of Sidom, and with him went the other Gospel refugees. The horrors of the damned took hold of him, until his body succumbed to the agony of his mind. He was scorched with a burning fever, which continually increased until the glad tidings reached his ears that Alma and Amulek were safe, for he had feared that through his iniquities they had been slain. No sooner did they reach Sidom than he sent for them, for his heart began to take courage. They did not hesitate, but at once proceeded to where he suffering lay. When they entered his presence, he imploringly stretched

* Book of Mormon, New Edition, page 276.

† Ammonihah and its people were destroyed by the Lamanites the succeeding year—page 280.

forth his hands and besought them to heal him. Alma questioned him regarding his faith in Christ, and finding that the good seed had germinated in his bosom and brought forth fruit, this mighty High Priest cried unto the Lord, "O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith, which is in Christ." When Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet and walked, to the great astonishment of all who witnessed it. Alma then baptized the repentant lawyer, who began from that time forth to preach the glorious message of eternal salvation. His energy, his wisdom, his learning, his talents were now used towards the upbuilding of the kingdom of God, with as much zeal as he had before labored for corruptible riches and worldly fame, for Zeezrom was a whole-souled, courageous man; he did nothing by halves—when he served the devil, he was a profitable servant; when he turned to God, he did it with all his heart. From this time forth Zeezrom became a preacher of righteousness, laboring under the direction of Alma, who then presided over the Church of Christ throughout all the land, and we next hear of him ministering with Amulek to the people in the land of Melek.

Some seven years after the conversion of Zeezrom, a dangerous apostasy occurred in Antionum, a section of the country to the east of Zarahemla.* A vile creature named Zoram was persuading the people to deny the Savior and his atonement, and to bow down to dumb idols. Thither the ever watchful Alma hastened, taking with him Amulek, Zeezrom, his own two younger sons, and three of the sons of King Mosiah, as fellow missionaries (B. C. 75.)

* Book of Mormon, New Ed., page 326.

Their labors, however, were not attended with entire success. Unceasingly they plead with the Zoramites to forsake their vain and foolish innovations, to cease their impious teachings, and return to the true Church, but only a portion of the people—the poor and the more humble—hearkened and obeyed. The rich, the proud, the priests, the office-holders (which last named appear, on the American Continent, to ever be the leaders in corruption and most hardened in heart), rejected the message, and drove those who believed its timely warning out of their midst. These persecuted ones fled to the land of Jershon, where they were kindly received as brethren, nourished and had their wants supplied. This manifestation of charity and brotherly love greatly angered the impenitent followers of Zoram, who shortly after affiliated with the Lamanites, and commenced one of those frequent recurring wars* that at that era of Nephite history wrought such widespread desolation amongst both Nephites and Lamanites.

We learn no more of the actual history of Zeezrom from the sacred record, though his name and teachings are more than once referred to by later servants of God. We also read of a city of Zeezrom,† and, as it was the custom of the Nephites to name their cities, towns and villages after whoever founded them,‡ it is highly probable that in the colonization of the country so vigorously carried on in the age that Zeezrom lived, that he commenced the building of this place, and it would not be unreasonable to believe that he dwelt in the midst of its citizens as their high priest or chief judge.

* Book of Mormon, New Ed., page 359.

† " " " " 403.

‡ " " " " 256.

By honesty and integrity you will gain credit everywhere, and your word will be thought more valuable in any business you may be concerned in than all the lawyers' bonds in the world.

The most agreeable of all companions is a simple, frank man, without any high pretensions to an oppressive greatness—one who loves life, and understands the use of it—obliging at all hours—above all, of a golden temper, and steadfast as an anchor. For such a one you may gladly exchange the greatest genius, the most brilliant wit, the profoundest thinker.