

CHAPTER 28

Alma 23–29

Introduction

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies clearly demonstrated the powerful change that comes upon individuals who accept the gospel and make covenants to follow Jesus Christ. They provided an example of profound, full conversion that comes from a sincere effort to emulate the Savior in every aspect of life. Along with the converted Lamanites, the sons of Mosiah and Alma also showed the spiritual power that comes from the continuous desire to repent, to keep covenants, and to serve the Lord through missionary work and righteous living. As you study Alma 23–29, look for specific actions and attitudes that will help you deepen the strength of your personal conversion. Also look at the numerous descriptions of joy and rejoicing that come as a result of being engaged in sharing the gospel with others.

Commentary

Alma 23:1–5. “The Word of God Might Have No Obstruction”

- The king of the Lamanites removed restrictions that had kept the gospel from being taught among his people, and the missionaries went forth preaching throughout the land. President Thomas S. Monson related a similar event as he described the circumstances surrounding the decision made by the government of the German Democratic Republic to allow missionaries to preach in that land after years of restricted Church activity:

“Our ultimate goal was to seek permission for the doorway of missionary work to open. Elder Russell M. Nelson, Elder Hans B. Ringger, and I, along with our local German Democratic Republic church leaders, headed by President Henry Burkhardt, President Frank Apel, and President Manfred Schutze, initially met with State Secretary for Religious Affairs Kurt Löffler as he hosted a lovely luncheon in our honor. He addressed our group by saying, ‘We want to be helpful to you. We’ve observed you and your people for twenty years. We know you are what you profess to be: honest men and women.’

“Government leaders and their wives attended the dedication of a stake center at Dresden and a chapel at Zwickau. As the Saints sang ‘God be with you till we

meet again’—‘Auf Wiedersehen, Auf Wiedersehen’—we remembered Him, the Prince of Peace, who died on the cross at Calvary. I contemplated our Lord and Savior, when He walked the path of pain, the trail of tears, even the road of righteousness. His penetrating declaration came to mind: ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’ (John 14:27).

“Then it was back to Berlin for the crucial meetings with the head of the nation, even Chairman Erich Honecker.

“. . . We were driven to the chambers of the chief representatives of the government.

“Beyond the exquisite entry to the building, we were greeted by Chairman Honecker. We presented to him the statuette *First Step*, depicting a mother helping her child take its first step toward its father. He was highly pleased with the gift. He then escorted us into his private council room. There, around a large round table, we were seated. Others at the table included Chairman Honecker and his deputies of government.

“Chairman Honecker began, ‘We know members of your Church believe in work; you’ve proven that. We know you believe in the family; you’ve demonstrated that. We know you are good citizens in whatever country you claim as home; we have observed that. The floor is yours. Make your desires known.’



“I began, ‘Chairman Honecker, at the dedication and open house for the temple in Freiberg, 89,890 of your countrymen stood in line, at times up to four hours, frequently in the rain, that they might see a house of God. In the city of Leipzig, at the dedication of the stake center, 12,000 people attended the open house. In the city of Dresden there were 29,000 visitors; in

the city of Zwickau, 5,300. And every week of the year 1,500 to 1,800 people visit the temple grounds in the city of Freiberg. They want to know what we believe. We would like to tell them that we believe in honoring and obeying and sustaining the law of the land. We would like to explain our desire to achieve strong family units. These are but two of our beliefs. We cannot answer questions, and we cannot convey our feelings, because we have no missionary representatives here as we do in other countries. The young men and young women whom we would like to have come to your country as missionary representatives would love your nation and your people. More particularly, they would leave an influence with your people which would be ennobling. Then we would like to see young men and young women from your nation who are members of our Church serve as missionary representatives in many nations, such as in America, in Canada, and in a host of others. They will return better prepared to assume positions of responsibility in your land.'

“Chairman Honecker then spoke for perhaps thirty minutes, describing his objectives and viewpoints and detailing the progress made by his nation. At length, he smiled and addressed me and the group, saying, ‘We know you. We trust you. We have had experience with you. Your missionary request is approved.’

“My spirit literally soared out of the room. The meeting was concluded. As we left the beautiful government chambers, Elder Russell Nelson turned to me and said, ‘Notice how the sunshine is penetrating this hall. It’s almost as though our Heavenly Father is saying, “I am pleased.”’

“The black darkness of night had ended. The bright light of day had dawned. The gospel of Jesus Christ would now be carried to the millions of people in that nation. Their questions concerning the Church will be answered, and the Kingdom of God will go forth.

“As I reflect on these events, my thoughts turn to the Master’s words, ‘In nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things’ (D&C 59:21). I confess the hand of God in the miraculous events pertaining to the Church in the German Democratic

Republic” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 68–69; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 52–53).

Alma 23:6. Converted unto the Lord and Never Did Fall Away

- It is remarkable that not one of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies ever left the Church or became less active (see Alma 27:27). President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) has repeatedly stressed the importance of retaining recent converts. He has said there is no point in doing missionary work unless those converted stay active:



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“With the increase of missionary work throughout the world, there must be a comparable increase in the effort to make every convert feel at home in his or her ward or branch. Enough people will come into the Church this year to constitute more than 100 new average-size stakes. Unfortunately, with this acceleration in conversions, we are neglecting some of these new members. I am hopeful that a great effort will go forward throughout the Church, throughout the world, to retain every convert who comes into the Church.

“This is serious business. There is no point in doing missionary work unless we hold on to the fruits of that effort. The two must be inseparable” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 69–70; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 50).

Alma 23:17. What Does the Name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* Mean?

- The name *Anti-Nephi-Lehi* could indicate the joining together of the descendants of Nephi and those who followed him with the other posterity of Lehi: “The name ‘Anti’ of ‘Anti-Nephi-Lehi’ may be a reflex of the Egyptian *nty* ‘he of, the one of.’ Thus, rather than having the sense ‘against,’ it has the meaning ‘the one of Nephi and Lehi’” (Stephen D. Ricks, “Anti-Nephi-Lehi,” in Dennis L. Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* [2003], 67).

Alma 24:10. Guilt Taken Away through the Atonement

- President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, testified that we can apply the Atonement of Jesus Christ to remove our guilt:



“For some reason we think the Atonement of Christ applies *only* at the end of mortal life to redemption from the Fall, from spiritual death. It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life. When we

are racked or harrowed up or tormented by guilt or burdened with grief, He can heal us. While we do not fully understand how the Atonement of Christ was made, we can experience ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ [Philippians 4:7]. . . .

“We all make mistakes. Sometimes we harm ourselves and seriously injure others in ways that we alone cannot repair. We break things that we alone cannot fix. It is then in our nature to feel guilt and humiliation and suffering, which we alone cannot cure. That is when the healing power of the Atonement will help.

“The Lord said, ‘Behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent’ [D&C 19:16]. . . .

“The Atonement has practical, personal, everyday value; apply it in your life. It can be activated with so simple a beginning as prayer. You will not thereafter be free from trouble and mistakes but can erase the guilt through repentance and be at peace” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 28–29; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 23–24).

Alma 24:11. “All That We Could Do” to Repent

- The Anti-Nephi-Lehies did “all that [they] could do . . . to repent” (Alma 24:11). In 2 Nephi 25:23 Nephi explained: “It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” From the king of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies we learn that part of all we can do is “to repent of all our sins.”

Alma 24:17–19. Burying Our Weapons Deep

- By burying their weapons deep in the earth, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies promised the Lord that they would never use them again. Scripture records, “They were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin” (Alma 24:19). Their actions demonstrate the complete abandonment of sin following sincere repentance.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught that abandonment of sins often requires a change in our lifestyle: “In abandoning sin one cannot merely wish for better conditions. He must make them. He may need to come to hate the spotted garments and loathe the sin. He must be certain not only that he has abandoned the sin but that he has changed the situations surrounding the sin. He should avoid the places and conditions and circumstances where the sin occurred, for these could most readily breed it again. He must abandon the people with whom the



sin was committed. He may not hate the persons involved but he must avoid them and everything associated with the sin. . . . He must eliminate anything

which would stir the old memories” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 171–72).

Alma 24:22–27. The Examples of the Righteous Resulted in the Conversion of Many

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles remarked that our resolve to keep our covenants may lead to the conversion of others:

“The king of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies instructed his people to bury their weapons deep in the ground that they might not be tempted to use them when their Lamanite brethren came to do battle against them. The people followed their king’s instructions, viewing their actions as ‘a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood’ (Alma 24:18). When the Lamanites attacked, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies ‘went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves’ on the ground before their attackers (Alma 24:21). The Lamanites killed a thousand and five of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies before the slaughter stopped. Why did the slaughter stop, and what were its consequences? From the account in Alma we learn the answers to these questions: . . .

“‘Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen . . . , for they repented of the things which they had done. . . .

“‘. . . The people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved.’ (Alma 24:24–26) . . .

“While the message of the story is not to insist on universal pacifism, we do learn that by not returning aggressions from others we can have a profound effect on them. Literally, we can change their hearts when we follow Christ’s example and turn the other cheek. Our examples as peaceable followers of Christ inspire others to follow him” (*Living with Enthusiasm* [1996], 127–28).

Alma 24:30. Leaving Neutral Ground

- A person who falls away from the Church after having been a member is typically “worse than [if]

they had never known these things” (Alma 24:30).

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained this position in a conversation with another member. A brother Isaac Behunin once told the Prophet Joseph Smith, “‘If I should leave this Church I would not do as those men have done: I would go to some remote place where Mormonism had never been heard of, settle down, and no one would ever learn that I knew anything about it.’


“The great Seer immediately replied: ‘Brother Behunin, you don’t know what you would do. No doubt these men once thought as you do. Before you joined this Church you stood on neutral ground. When the gospel was preached, good and evil were set before you. You could choose either or neither. There were two opposite masters inviting you to serve them. When you joined this Church you enlisted to serve God. When you did that you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it. Should you forsake the Master you enlisted to serve, it will be by the instigation of the evil one, and you will follow his dictation and be his servant’” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 324).

Alma 25:1–12. Prophecy Fulfilled

- Alma 25:1–12 records the fulfillment of Abinadi’s prophecy regarding the wicked priests of King Noah (see Mosiah 17:15–20). Note how Mormon documented for the reader the fulfillment of the prophecies of Abinadi. Consider the results of those who reject the prophets, like Abinadi, and claim that the prophet has sinned. Modern revelation also contains a warning to those who “lift up the heel against mine anointed” (see D&C 121:16–22).

Alma 25:17. The Lord “Verified His Word unto Them in Every Particular”

- One of the great lessons that emerges from this section of the book of Alma is that God always keeps His promises. The Lord had told King Mosiah that many would believe his sons’ teachings and that He would deliver them “out of the hands of the Lamanites” (Mosiah 28:7). For the fulfillment of these promises, see Alma 17:4, 35–39; 19:22–23; 26:1–4. This is just one of numerous scriptural illustrations that reinforce the

doctrinal truth that God is bound when we do what He says (see D&C 82:10 .

Alma 26:5–7. What Are Sheaves?

- The word *sheaves* means quantities of stalks and heads of grain bound together. Ammon’s mention of sheaves in Alma 26:5 refers to the converts brought into the Church by faithful missionaries who thrust in their sickles.

ALMA 26:11–14

What evidences do you find that Ammon’s rejoicing was in the Savior’s power and mercy, rather than boasting of himself?

Alma 26:15–16. “Who Can Glory Too Much in the Lord?”

- Just as Ammon felt to glory in the Lord and to sing His praises, so should we. Sister Sheri L. Dew, while serving as a counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, taught us concerning the role Jesus Christ plays in our daily lives:

“Is it possible to be happy when life is hard? To feel peace amid uncertainty and hope in the midst of cynicism? Is it possible to change, to shake off old habits and become new again? Is it possible to live with integrity and purity in a world that no longer values the virtues that distinguish the followers of Christ?”

“Yes. The answer is yes because of Jesus Christ, whose Atonement ensures that we need not bear the burdens of mortality alone. . . .

“Through the years I, like you, have experienced pressures and disappointments that would have crushed me had I not been able to draw upon a source of wisdom and strength far greater than my own. He has never forgotten or forsaken me, and I have come to know for myself that Jesus is the Christ and that this is His Church. With Ammon I say, ‘[For] who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy . . . ? Behold, . . . I cannot say the smallest part which I feel’ (Alma 26:16).

I testify that in this, the twilight of the dispensation of the fulness of times, when Lucifer is working overtime to jeopardize our journey home and to separate us from the Savior’s atoning power, the only answer for *any* of us is Jesus Christ” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 85–86; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 67).

Alma 26:27. Perseverance Leads to Success

- The success the sons of Mosiah experienced among the Lamanites exceeded their expectations (see Alma 26:30–31). As they began their missions, the Lord promised, “I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls” (Alma 17:11). With this promise they “took courage to go forth unto the Lamanites to declare unto them the word of God” (Alma 17:12). Success in their endeavors did not come automatically, even though the Lord had promised it. During the course of their 14-year mission, they experienced “all manner of afflictions” (Alma 26:30). The record further indicates their hearts became “depressed, and [they] were about to turn back” (Alma 26:27). Yet, trusting in the promises of the Lord, they continued their efforts. Then, as He always does, the Lord honored His promises and rewarded their perseverance.



Alma 26:27–30. The Realities of Missionary Service

- Elder F. Burton Howard of the Seventy shared how his reading Alma 26 as a young missionary impacted his testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon:

“I was reading again the twenty-sixth chapter of Alma and the story of Ammon’s mission. I read out loud, as

I sometimes do, trying to put myself in the position of the characters in the book, imagining that I was saying or hearing the words, that I was there. Once more I went over the report, and, with a clarity which cannot be described and which would be difficult to comprehend by one who has not experienced it, the Spirit spoke to my soul, saying, *Did you notice? Everything that happened to Ammon happened to you?*

“It was a totally unexpected sentiment. It was startling in its scope; it was a thought that had never occurred to me before. I quickly reread the story. Yes, there were times when my heart had been depressed and I had thought about going home. I too had gone to a foreign land to teach the gospel to the Lamanites. I had gone forth among them, had suffered hardships, had slept on the floor, endured the cold, gone without eating. I too had traveled from house to house, knocking on doors for months at a time without being invited in, relying on the mercies of God.

“There had been other times when we had entered houses and talked to people. We had taught them on their streets and on their hills. We had even preached in other churches. I remembered the time I had been spit upon. I remembered the time when I, as a young district leader assigned by the mission president to open up a new town, had entered, with three other elders, the main square of a city that had never had missionaries before. We went into the park, sang a hymn, and a crowd gathered.

“Then the lot fell on me, as district leader, to preach. I stood upon a stone bench and spoke to the people. I told the story of the restoration of the gospel, of the boy Joseph going in to the grove and the appearance of the Father and the Son to him. I remembered well a group of teenage boys, in the evening shadows, throwing rocks at us. I remembered the concern about being hit or injured by those who did not want to hear the message.

“I remembered spending time in jail while my legal right to be a missionary in a certain country was decided by the police authorities. I didn’t spend enough time in prison to compare myself to Ammon, but I still remember the feeling I had when the door was closed and I was far away from home, alone, with only the mercies of the

Lord to rely on for deliverance. I remembered enduring these things with the hope that ‘we might be the means of saving some soul’ (Alma 26:30).

“And then on that day as I read, the Spirit testified to me again, and the words remain with me even today: *No one but a missionary could have written this story. Joseph Smith could never have known what it was like to be a missionary to the Lamanites, for no one he knew had ever done such a thing before*” (“Ammon: Reflections on Faith and Testimony,” in *Heroes from the Book of Mormon* [1995], 124–25).

Alma 27:21–24. Forgiving Our Enemies

- Alma had previously called upon the inhabitants of Zarahemla to change their hearts (see Alma 5:6, 12–14, 26). He also declared that the Lord “sendeth an invitation unto all men” (Alma 5:33). This matches a similar invitation by the Lord through Nephi, that God “denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33). The inhabitants of Zarahemla embraced Alma’s message, and when it became necessary to forgive their enemies, they offered land and protection to the people of Ammon.

President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) admonished each of us to similarly forgive our enemies:

“Consider, for example, this instruction from Christ to his disciples. He said, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44).

“Think what this admonition alone would do in your neighborhood and mine, in the communities in which you and your children live, in the nations which make up our great global family. I realize this doctrine poses a significant challenge, but surely it is a more agreeable challenge than the terrible tasks posed for us by the war and poverty and pain the world continues to face. . . .

“We all have significant opportunity to practice Christianity, and we should try it at every opportunity. For example, we can all be a little more forgiving” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 22–23; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 18).

Alma 28:1–12. Hope Follows the Death of the Righteous

• Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared the following experience he had with a righteous priesthood leader dying of a terminal disease:

“My friend came to accept the phrase ‘Thy will be done’ as he faced his own poignant trials and tribulations. As a faithful member of the Church, he was now confronted with some sobering concerns. Particularly touching were his questions, ‘Have I done all that I need to do to faithfully endure to the end?’ ‘What will death be like?’ ‘Will my family be prepared to stand in faith and be self-reliant when I am gone?’



“We had the opportunity to discuss all three questions. They are clearly answered in the doctrine taught to us by our Savior. We discussed how he had spent his life striving to be faithful, to do what God asked of him, to be honest in his dealings with his fellowmen and all others, to care for and love his family. Isn’t that what is meant by enduring to the end? We talked about what happens immediately after death, about what God has taught us about the world of spirits. It is a place of paradise and happiness for those who have lived righteous lives. It is not something to fear.

“After our conversation, he called together his wife and the extended family—children and grandchildren—to teach them again the doctrine of the Atonement that all will be resurrected. Everyone came to understand that just as the Lord has said, while there will be mourning at the temporary separation, there is no sorrow for those who die in the Lord (see Revelation 14:13; D&C 42:46). His blessing promised him comfort and reassurance that all would be well, that he would not have pain, that he would have additional time to prepare his family for his departure, and even that he would know the time of his departure. The family related to me that on the night before he passed away,

he said he would go on the morrow. He passed away the next afternoon at peace, with all his family at his side. This is the solace and comfort that comes to us when we understand the gospel plan and know that families are forever.

“Contrast these events with an incident which happened to me when I was a young man in my early twenties. While serving in the Air Force, one of the pilots in my squadron crashed on a training mission and was killed. I was assigned to accompany my fallen comrade on his final journey home to be buried in Brooklyn. I had the honor of standing by his family during the viewing and funeral services and of representing our government in presenting the flag to his grieving widow at the graveside. The funeral service was dark and dismal. No mention was made of his goodness or his accomplishments. His name was never mentioned. At the conclusion of the services, his widow turned to me and asked, ‘Bob, what is really going to happen to Don?’

“I was then able to give her the sweet doctrine of the Resurrection and the reality that, if baptized and sealed in the temple for time and all eternity, they could be together eternally. The clergyman standing next to her said, ‘That is the most beautiful doctrine I have ever heard!’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 88–89; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 66).

Alma 29:4–5. God Grants unto Men According to Their Desires

• Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that our desires affect our personal development and eventually determine our eternal blessings:

“Desires . . . become real determinants, even when, with pitiful naïveté, we do not really want the consequences of our desires. . . .

“Therefore, what we insistently desire, over time, is what we will eventually become and what we will receive in eternity. . . .

“Righteous desires need to be relentless, therefore, because, said President Brigham Young, ‘the men and women, who desire to obtain seats in the celestial kingdom, will find that they must battle every day’ (in

Journal of Discourses, 11:14). Therefore, true Christian soldiers are more than weekend warriors. . . .

“. . . Remember, brothers and sisters, it is our own desires which determine the sizing and the attractiveness of various temptations. We set our thermostats as to temptations.

“Thus, educating and training our desires clearly requires understanding the truths of the gospel, yet even more is involved. President Brigham Young confirmed, saying, ‘It is evident that many who understand the truth do not govern themselves by it; consequently, no matter how true and beautiful truth is, you have to take the passions of the people and mould them to the law of God’ (in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:55). . . .



“. . . Therefore, declared President Joseph F. Smith, ‘the education then of our desires is one of far-reaching importance to our happiness in life’ (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 297). Such education can lead to sanctification until, said President Brigham Young,

‘holy desires produce corresponding outward works’ (in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:170). Only by educating

and training our desires can they become our allies instead of our enemies!” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 26–28; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 21–22).

Points to Ponder

- How can the example of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies help you deepen the strength of your own conversion?
- Just as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies buried their weapons in a covenant with God (see Alma 24:17–18), what are you doing on a regular basis to demonstrate to the Lord that you also have been fully converted?
- How might Alma’s missionary efforts among the Nephites (see Alma 4–15) have prepared him to receive the converted Lamanites who had been taught by the sons of Mosiah?

Suggested Assignments

- Just as the Lamanites buried their weapons of war so that they would never again use them, we have to rid ourselves of sins or weaknesses that keep us from coming unto God. Identify a sin or weakness in your life that you would like to eliminate. Outline a plan to help you overcome it, and put your plan into action.
- Read Alma 26 and 28, looking for the reasons Ammon and Alma gave for their joy. List these reasons and choose one or more to more fully make part of your life.