

CHAPTER 31

Alma 36–39

Introduction

Alma 36–39 contains Alma’s final counsel to his three sons: Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. The counsel given to faithful Helaman and Shiblon differed greatly from the counsel given to wayward Corianton. To a certain extent we determine what kind of counsel we might receive in our lives by how faithful we are to the counsel we have already been given (see Alma 12:9–11).

Alma’s conversion story provides one of the clearest examples of how we can know when we have been forgiven of our sins. Through Alma’s counsel to Shiblon, we learn the power and value of steadfastness in our lives. Finally, the poignant counsel given to Corianton teaches how serious and destructive sexual transgression is.

Commentary

Alma 36. Chiasmus

• *Chiasmus*, sometimes called an inverted parallelism, is a Hebrew literary form where words or ideas are arranged in a certain order and then repeated in reverse order. This repetition emphasizes important ideas and words. In addition, the writer’s main idea is often located at the center of the chiasmus.

Alma used chiasmus to tell the story of his conversion to his son Helaman. The presence of Semitic literary forms such as chiasmus in the Book of Mormon is an external witness that the book is what the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that it is: a translation of an ancient text written in a Middle Eastern language.

The following chart will help you recognize the chiasmus in Alma 36. For convenience, positions are designated in the chart from left to right, starting with the letter *A* and ending with the letter *P*. Thus, the thought expressed in the beginning verse of the chiasmus, Alma 36:1 (labeled position *A*), is repeated in the last verse of the chiasmus, Alma 36:30 (also in position *A*). The thought in Alma 36:2 (labeled position *D*) is repeated in verse 29 (also in position *D*), and so forth.

- A.** Give ear to my words (v. 1)
- B.** Keep the commandments of God, and ye shall prosper in the land (v. 1)
- C.** Do as I have done (v. 2)
- D.** Remember the captivity of our fathers, for they were in bondage (v. 2)
- E.** He surely did deliver them (v. 2)
- F.** Trust in God (v. 3)
- G.** Supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions (v. 3)
- H.** Lifted up at the last day (v. 3)
- I.** I would not that ye think that I know of myself—but of God (v. 4)
- J.** Born of God (v. 5)
- K.** I went about seeking to destroy the church of God (v. 6)
- L.** Neither had I the use of my limbs (v. 10)
- M.** I thought that I might not be brought to the presence of my God (v. 15)
- N.** The pains of a damned soul (v. 16)
- O.** Harrowed up by the memory of my many sins (v. 17)
- P.** I remembered one Jesus Christ, a Son of God (v. 17)
- P.** I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God (v. 18)
- O.** Harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more (v. 19)
- N.** Joy as exceeding as was my pain (v. 20)
- M.** My soul did long to be there (in the presence of God) (v. 22)
- L.** My limbs received strength again (v. 23)
- K.** I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)
- J.** Born of God (v. 26)
- I.** My knowledge is of God (v. 26)
- H.** Supported under trials, troubles, and afflictions (v. 27)
- G.** Trust in him (v. 27)
- F.** He will deliver me and raise me up (vv. 27–28)
- E.** He has delivered them out of bondage and captivity (v. 28)
- D.** Retain a remembrance of their captivity (v. 29)
- C.** Know as I do know (v. 30)
- B.** Keep the commandments of God, and ye shall prosper (v. 30)
- A.** This according to his word (v. 30)

Notice that the central message of the chiasmus focuses on the time in Alma’s life when he experienced great pain and sorrow and turned to Jesus Christ for relief (see Alma 36:17–18).

Alma 36:2–3. Remembering the Mercies of God

- Alma 36:2–3 continues a theme emphasized throughout the Book of Mormon. Nephi began his account by saying he would show us that “the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). In Alma 36, Alma taught his sons to remember the captivity of their fathers and how God delivered those who trusted in Him (see Alma 36:2–3, 29).

Later, Moroni exhorted us to “remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam” (Moroni 10:3). It might have been stated most emphatically by Alma the Younger: “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?” (Alma 5:6).

Alma 36:6–10. Alma “Fell to the Earth”—Two Days or Three?

- “Some readers of the Book of Mormon have claimed there is a discrepancy in the accounts of the conversion of Alma as recorded in Mosiah 27:23 and Alma 36:10. It is true that one account mentions ‘two days and two nights’ and the other says ‘three days and three nights,’ but there is no apparent discrepancy because they are not referring to exactly the same thing. In the account in the book of Mosiah the time element clearly refers to the period of fasting by the priests; no exact length of time is indicated for Alma’s unconscious state.



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Note the major details of the account: After Alma was confronted by an angel and realized the enormity of his sins, he fell to the earth almost as if dead. Then he was carried to his father in this helpless condition. The father of Alma then called in the priests of the church and ‘*after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights*, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up.’ (Mosiah 27:22–23. Italics added.) In the account in the book of Alma, however, the term ‘three days and three nights’ clearly refers to the *total time* Alma could not open his mouth nor use his limbs. (Alma 36:10.)” (Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* [1976], 217–18).

Alma 36:11–16. Godly Sorrow

- President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught about the difference between worldly sorrow and the deeper godly sorrow necessary for repentance:

“It is not uncommon to find men and women in the world who feel remorse for the things they do wrong. Sometimes this is because their actions cause them or loved ones great sorrow and misery. Sometimes their sorrow is caused because they are caught and punished for their actions. Such worldly feelings do not constitute ‘godly sorrow.’ . . .

“Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that our behavior caused the Savior, He who knew no sin, even the greatest of all, to endure agony and suffering. Our sins caused Him to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having ‘a broken heart and a contrite spirit.’ (See 3 Ne. 9:20; Moro. 6:2; D&C 20:37; 59:8; Ps. 34:18; 51:17; Isa. 57:15.) Such a spirit is the absolute prerequisite for true repentance” (“A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, 4).

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles further explained one of the reasons for godly sorrow: “The painful consequences of sin were purposely put in His plan of happiness by a compassionate Father in Heaven so that you need not follow that tragic path in life. A sinner will not only

suffer in this life, but sins that have not been forgiven through true repentance will cause anguish beyond the veil [see D&C 19:4, 15–24]” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 87).

ALMA 36:17–21

How did Alma obtain relief from his personal agony? How did he describe being forgiven?

Alma 36:17–21. “I Could Remember My Pains No More”

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) pointed out the need to completely rely on Jesus Christ in the repentance process:

“In Alma’s account the sensitive reader can in a measure identify with him, feel his pains, experience his great sense of horror at the recognition of the depth of his sin. The reader can then share also in the great relief which Alma was to find. How did he gain this relief? In the same way every transgressor does—by partaking of the miracle of forgiveness through genuine repentance and by casting himself wholly on the mercies of Jesus Christ. . . .

“Now anguish was turned to joy, pain to calm, darkness to light. Only now could Alma have peace. He emphasized to his son Shiblon the sole source of that peace.

“‘. . . And never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul’ (Al. 38:8.)” (*Miracle of Forgiveness* [1969], 365–66).

- President Ezra Taft Benson explained that sincere repentance requires a change of heart:

“Repentance means more than simply a reformation of behavior. Many men and women in the world demonstrate great willpower and self-discipline in overcoming bad habits and the weaknesses of the flesh. Yet at the same time they give no thought to the Master, sometimes even openly rejecting Him. Such

changes of behavior, even if in a positive direction, do not constitute true repentance. . . .

“. . . Repentance involves not just a change of actions, but a change of heart” (“A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, 2).

Alma 36:23–24. Evidence That a Person Has Been Born Again

- President Ezra Taft Benson described the change that is a part of the new birth: “When we have undergone this mighty change, which is brought about only through faith in Jesus Christ and through the operation of the Spirit upon us, it is as though we have become a new person. Thus, the change is likened to a new birth. Thousands of you have experienced this change. You have forsaken lives of sin, sometimes deep and offensive sin, and through applying the blood of Christ in your lives, have become clean. You have no more disposition to return to your old ways. You are in reality a new person. This is what is meant by a change of heart” (“A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, 4).

Alma 36:30. “Prosper in the Land”

- Alma referred to a recurring theme in the Book of Mormon of prospering in the land. Alma 36:30 gives contextual meaning to that phrase. It is not necessarily intended that all inhabitants will become materially rich in this life. Rather, there is a spiritual meaning to the word *prosper*. This verse teaches us that if we do not “keep the commandments of God,” then we shall not prosper but be “cut off from his presence.” Therefore, those who prosper in the land are those who are successful in obtaining the spiritual blessings of being close to the Lord. They are on a track that will lead to entering the Lord’s presence.

Alma 37. The Importance and Value of Scripture

- To help prepare his son Helaman to be the spiritual leader and the new record keeper for the people, Alma stressed the importance of the scriptures. Some of the major points he made are that the Lord would preserve the brass plates and the Nephite record in a marvelous but simple way (see Alma 37:1–5). He commanded his son to keep a record of his people and taught him that the scriptures are designed to enlarge our memory,

convince us of the error of our ways, and bring us to a knowledge of God and His plan of salvation (see vv. 8–9). Then he reminded his son that only one who keeps the commandments is worthy to record scripture (vv. 14–16). Alma further promised his son, and us, that following the words of Christ will “carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” (v. 45).



Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described ways we could get more from our personal scripture study: “The scriptures contain the words of Christ and are a reservoir of living

water to which we have ready access and from which we can drink deeply and long. You and I must look to and come unto Christ, who is ‘the fountain of living waters’ (1 Nephi 11:25; compare Ether 8:26; 12:28), by reading (see Mosiah 1:5), studying (see D&C 26:1), searching (see John 5:39; Alma 17:2), and feasting (see 2 Nephi 32:3) upon the words of Christ as contained in the holy scriptures. By so doing, we can receive both spiritual direction and protection during our mortal journey” (“A Reservoir of Living Water” [CES fireside for young adults, Feb. 4, 2007], 1).

ALMA 37:1–8

What topic was Alma addressing when he spoke of the power of small and simple things? In what ways does scripture study fit this principle?

Alma 37:6–7 “Small and Simple Things”

- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught the importance of giving heed to small and simple things:

“We observe vast, sweeping world events; however, we must remember that the purposes of the Lord in our personal lives generally are fulfilled through the small and simple things and not the momentous and spectacular. . . .

“Great and marvelous events seem to motivate us, but small things often do not hold our attention. Noting that the Liahona worked by faith, Alma stated, ‘Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means . . . [the people of Lehi] were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey’ (Alma 37:41).

“Is our journey sometimes impeded when we forget the importance of small things? (see Alma 37:46). Do we realize that small events and choices determine the direction of our lives just as small helms determine the direction of great ships? (see James 3:4; D&C 123:16). . . .

“ . . . We need to have family and personal prayers; study the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon; hold family home evenings; follow the admonition of the Savior to love one another; and be thoughtful, kind, and gentle within the family. Through these and other similar small and simple things, we have the promise that our lives will be filled with peace and joy” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 4, 8; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 6, 8).

Alma 37:19. The Power of the Book of Mormon

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles listed some ways in which the power of the Book of Mormon is and will be demonstrated: “What then is the power of the Book of Mormon? It will proclaim the everlasting gospel; it will gather Israel; it will build the New Jerusalem; it will prepare a people for the Second Coming; it will usher in the Millennium—at least it will play such an important part in all of these that its value and power can scarcely be overstated” (*The Millennial Messiah* [1982], 171).

Alma 37:21, 27–29, 32. Not Reveal Secret Works of Darkness

- President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained that teaching about sin in too much detail may stir one’s curiosity to experiment with sin:

“I am convinced that two of the major mistakes are to teach too much about the subject and to teach it at the wrong time. . . .

“I know of more than one instance in which a young person has been led to experiment in gross and perverted immorality because of a suggestion that originated with his bishop in an interview.

“Those who teach, and I refer to leaders, to teachers, and to parents, should keep in mind this message. Picture a father and mother leaving home for a period of time. Just as they go out the door they say to their little children who are to be left untended during their absence, ‘Now children, be good. Whatever you do while we are gone, do not take the footstool into the pantry, and do not climb to the fourth shelf and move the cracker box and reach back and get the sack of beans and take a bean and put it up your nose, will you?’

“Some of us are just that foolish. The humor of the illustration is wry humor when you think of the first thing that happens after the parents are gone. Surely we can be wiser than that. Young people should know from the very beginning that chastity is a sacred subject” (*Teach Ye Diligently* [1975], 256–57).

Alma 37:35 . What Blessings Come from Learning in Our “Youth to Keep the Commandments of God”?

- President Ezra Taft Benson described the power that comes from learning to keep the commandments early in life while still young: “Give me a young man who has kept himself morally clean and has faithfully attended his Church meetings. Give me a young man who has magnified his priesthood and has earned the Duty to God Award and is an Eagle Scout. Give me a young man who is a seminary graduate and has a burning testimony of the Book of Mormon. Give me such a young man and I will give you a young man who can perform miracles for the Lord in the mission field and throughout his life” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, 59; or *Ensign*, May 1986, 45).
- The scriptures give several examples of the Lord calling those who are still in their youth to be His leaders: Joseph Smith was 14 years old (see Joseph Smith—History 1:7); Mormon was 15 years old (see Mormon 1:15); the Old Testament Samuel was still a “child” when called by the Lord (1 Samuel 3:1–10).

President Joseph F. Smith testified of the relationship between keeping the commandments early in life and being called to serve the Lord later: “You may look around today, and who are the leaders among the people but those who early and zealously devoted themselves to the faith? And you may foretell who are to be the leaders by observing the boys who show self-respect and purity and who are earnest in all good works. The Lord will not choose men from any other class of his people. . . . The opposite course, waiting to serve the Lord until the wild oats of youth are sown, is reprehensible. There is always something lacking in the man who spends his youth in wickedness and sin, and then turns to righteousness in later years. . . . There are regrets and heartburnings in repenting late in life from the follies and sins of youth, but there are consolation and rich reward in serving the Lord in the vigorous days of early manhood” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 335).

ALMA 37:38–47

What specific parallels do you see between the Liahona and the scriptures or between the Liahona and the Holy Spirit in our day?

Alma 37:38–47. The Liahona

- Over the years several General Authorities have described different means in which the Lord continues to guide us in our journey of life, like a Liahona.

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy compared the words of Christ to the Liahona: “So we see, brethren and sisters, that the words of Christ can be a personal Liahona for each of us, showing us the way. Let us not be slothful because of the easiness of the way. Let us in faith take the words of Christ into our minds and into our hearts as they are recorded in sacred scripture and as they are uttered by living prophets, seers, and revelators. Let us with faith and diligence feast upon the words of Christ, for the words of Christ will be our spiritual Liahona telling us all things what we should do” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 38; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 37).

- President Thomas S. Monson compared the Liahona to an individual's patriarchal blessing: "The same Lord who provided a Liahona for Lehi provides for you and for me today a rare and valuable gift to give direction to our lives. . . . The gift to which I refer is known as a patriarchal blessing" (*Live the Good Life* [1988], 36).

President Spencer W. Kimball compared the Liahona to the light of Christ, or our conscience:

"Wouldn't you like to have that kind of a ball . . . ?

". . . The Lord gave to . . . every person, a conscience which tells him everytime he starts to go on the wrong path. . . .

". . . Every child is given it" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1976, 117; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 79).

- Elder David A. Bednar compared the Liahona to the gift of the Holy Ghost:

"As we each press forward along the pathway of life, we receive direction from the Holy Ghost just as Lehi was directed through the Liahona. . . .

"The Holy Ghost operates in our lives precisely as the Liahona did for Lehi and his family, according to our faith and diligence and heed. . . .

"And the Holy Ghost provides for us today the means whereby we can receive, 'by small and simple things' (Alma 37:6), increased understanding about the ways of the Lord. . . .

"The Spirit of the Lord can be our guide and will bless us with direction, instruction, and spiritual protection during our mortal journey" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2006, 31; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 30–31).

Alma 38:12. "Bridle All Your Passions"

- A bridle is the headgear used on a horse. It includes reins and a bit, which give the rider control.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy and his wife Marie explained that a bridle was meant to direct, not destroy, desires and



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passions: "Is self-denial wise because something is wrong with our passions, or because something is right with our passions? Alma taught his son: 'See that ye bridle all your passions, *that ye may be filled with love.*' (Alma 38:12; emphasis added.) He did not say eliminate or even suppress your passions, but *bridle* them—harness, channel, and focus them. Why? Because discipline makes possible a richer, deeper love" (*The Belonging Heart* [1994], 302).

Alma 39. The Law of Chastity

- "Do not have any sexual relations before marriage, and be completely faithful to your spouse after marriage. Satan may tempt you to rationalize that sexual intimacy before marriage is acceptable when two people are in love. That is not true. In God's sight, sexual sins are extremely serious because they defile the power God has given us to create life. . . .

"Before marriage, do not do anything to arouse the powerful emotions that must be expressed only in marriage. Do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person's body, with or without clothing. Do not allow anyone to do that with you. Do not arouse those emotions in your own body.

"In cultures where dating or courting is acceptable, always treat your date with respect, never as an object to be used for your lustful desires. Stay in areas of safety where you can easily control your physical feelings. Do not participate in talk or activities that arouse sexual feelings.

"Homosexual activity is a serious sin. If you find yourself struggling with same-gender attraction, seek counsel from your parents and bishop. They will help you.

"Victims of rape, incest, or other sexual abuse are not guilty of sin. If you have been a victim of any of these crimes, know that you are innocent and that God loves you. Seek your bishop's counsel immediately so he can help guide you through the process of emotional healing" (*For the Strength of Youth: Fulfilling Our Duty to God* [2001], 27–28).

Alma 39:3. The Seriousness of Sexual Sin

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland spoke of the devastating impact of sexual sin and the importance of preserving your virtue until you are married: “*In matters of human intimacy, you must wait!* You must wait until you can give everything, and you cannot give everything until you are legally and lawfully married. To give illicitly that which is not yours to give (remember, ‘you are not your own’ [1 Corinthians 6:19]) and to give only part of that which cannot be followed with the gift of your whole self is emotional Russian roulette. If you persist in pursuing physical satisfaction without the sanction of heaven, you run the terrible risk of such spiritual, psychic damage that you may undermine *both* your longing for physical intimacy *and* your ability to give wholehearted devotion to a later, truer love. You may come to that truer moment of ordained love, of real union, only to discover to your horror that what you should have saved you have spent, and that only God’s grace can recover the piecemeal dissipation of the virtue you so casually gave away. On your wedding day the very best gift you can give your eternal companion is your very best self—clean and pure and worthy of such purity in return” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 100; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 76–77).

- President Boyd K. Packer described the relationship between the power of creation and the plan of salvation: “The power of creation—or may we say procreation—is not just an incidental part of the plan: it is essential to it. Without it the plan could not proceed. The misuse of it may disrupt the plan.

“Much of the happiness that may come to you in this life will depend on how you use this sacred power of creation” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 136–37; or *Ensign*, July 1972, 111).

ALMA 39:4

What did Alma say Corianton should have been doing that would have kept him safe from temptation? How can you apply that in your life?

Alma 39:5. Next to Murder in Seriousness

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained the connection between the worth of a soul and the Atonement, helping us understand why sexual transgression is so serious:

“In exploiting the body of another—which means exploiting his or her soul—one desecrates the Atonement of Christ, which saved that soul and which makes possible the gift of eternal life. And when one mocks the Son of Righteousness, one steps into a realm of heat hotter and holier than the noonday sun. You cannot do so and not be burned.

“Please, never say: ‘Who does it hurt? Why not a little freedom? I can transgress now and repent later.’ Please don’t be so foolish and so cruel. You cannot with impunity ‘crucify Christ afresh’ [see Hebrews 6:6]. ‘Flee fornication’ [1 Corinthians 6:18], Paul cries, and flee *‘anything like unto it’* [D&C 59:6; italics added], the Doctrine and Covenants adds. Why? Well, for one reason, because of the incalculable suffering in both body and spirit endured by the Savior of the world so that we *could* flee. We owe Him something for that. Indeed, we owe Him everything for that. ‘Ye are not your own,’ Paul says. ‘Ye [have been] bought with a price: therefore *glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s*’ [1 Corinthians 6:19–20; italics added]. In sexual transgression the soul is at stake—the body and the spirit” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 99–100; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 76).

Alma 39:6. What Is the Unpardonable Sin?

- The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) gave further knowledge about the unpardonable sin: “All sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition. What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him. After a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost, there is no



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repentance for him. He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it; and from that time he begins to be an enemy. This is the case with many apostates of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (*History of the Church*, 6:314).

Alma 39:9. “Go No More after the Lusts of Your Eyes”

- How does going “no more after the lusts of your eyes” apply to us? In today’s world with advanced technology, there are many ways Satan offers such temptations. Many prophets in recent years have warned us about the dangers of pornography in its many forms.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the dangers of allowing evil into our minds: “Our Savior emphasized the importance of sexual purity when he taught that it was sinful for a man to even look upon a woman to lust after her [see Matthew 5:28]. . . . We are surrounded by the promotional literature of illicit sexual relations, on the printed page and on the screen. For your own good, avoid it. Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call a brain. The brain won’t vomit back filth. Once recorded, it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life” (“Things They’re Saying,” *New Era*, Feb. 1974, 18).

- President Ezra Taft Benson described several ways Satan tries to get pornography into our minds:

“Consider carefully the words of the prophet Alma to his errant son, Corianton, ‘Forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes’ (Alma 39:9).

“‘The lusts of your eyes.’ In our day, what does that expression mean?

“Movies, television programs, and video recordings that are both suggestive and lewd.

“Magazines and books that are obscene and pornographic.

“We counsel you, young men, not to pollute your minds with such degrading matter, for the mind through which this filth passes is never the same afterwards. Don’t see R-rated movies or vulgar videos or participate in any entertainment that is immoral, suggestive, or pornographic. Don’t listen to music that is degrading” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, 58; or *Ensign*, May 1986, 45).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) added his testimony to the evils of pornography:

“Pornography is printed and pictorial material designed to excite us and attract us into areas that will only bring regret. It is enticing in its appeal. It plays on the instincts that lie within all of us, God-given instincts placed within us for his great purposes. Pornography is a tool of the devil to twist those instincts to forbidden ends. It most often involves beautiful young women and handsome young men. The purpose of its creation is to put dollars in the pockets of its creators. The result of its use is to warp the minds and excite the passions of those who fall into its trap. It brings billions to its creators. It leads to heartache and pain and regret for those who indulge in it.

“It is found in magazines that can be bought at most newsstands, in theaters showing R- and X-rated movies, and on our television screens in our homes” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [1997], 460).

- The phrase “cross yourself,” as used in Alma 39:9, is not familiar to us today. However, in Webster’s 1828 dictionary, we find the following helpful definitions that relate to Alma’s counsel to his son: “To erase, to cancel, to counteract, to stop, to preclude” (*Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828* [1967]). All of these actions apply well to what one must do to avoid moral transgression, the topic Alma was teaching his son Corianton. Refer also to the footnote for Alma 39:9b, which refers to self-mastery in the Topical Guide (p. 461)).

Alma 39:11–12. Leading Others from the Truth

- In Alma 39:11–12, Alma explained to Corianton, his wayward son, the fact that our negative examples can lead others away from the gospel.

President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) warned of the seriousness of leading people away from the truth:

“I think the greatest crime in all this world is to lead men and women, the children of God, away from the true principles. We see in the world today philosophies of various kinds, tending to destroy faith, faith in God, faith in the principles of the gospel. What a dreadful thing that is.

“The Lord says if we labor all our days and save but one soul, how great will be our joy with him; on the other hand how great will be our sorrow and our condemnation if through our acts we have led one soul away from this truth.

“He who blinds one soul, he who spreads error, he who destroys, through his teachings, divine truth, truth that would lead a man to the kingdom of God and to its fulness, how great shall be his condemnation and his punishment in eternity. For the destruction of a soul is the destruction of the greatest thing that has ever been created” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:314).

Alma 39:12–13, 15. “Turn to the Lord” and Acknowledge Your Faults

- “If you have committed sexual transgressions, begin the process of repentance now so you can find inner peace and have the full companionship of the Spirit. Seek the Lord’s forgiveness. Talk with your bishop. He will help you obtain the forgiveness available to those who truly repent” (*For the Strength of Youth*, 28).



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- Elder Richard G. Scott explained what you must do in order to “turn to the Lord” and be forgiven of serious sins, such as immorality: “For a moment I speak to anyone who has succumbed to serious temptation. Please stop now. You can do it with the

help from an understanding parent, bishop, or stake president. Serious transgression such as immorality requires the help of one who holds keys of authority, such as a bishop or stake president, to quietly work out the repentance process to make sure that it is complete and appropriately done. Do not make the mistake to believe that because you have confessed a serious transgression, you have repented of it. That is an essential step, but it is not all that is required. Nor assume that because someone did not ask you all the important details of a transgression, you need not mention them. You personally must make sure that the bishop or stake president understands those details so that he can help you properly through the process of repentance for full forgiveness” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 89; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 69–70).

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that the Lord will be with and strengthen you as you properly repent: “To you is extended the peace and renewal of repentance available through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In such serious matters the path of repentance is not easily begun or painlessly traveled. But the Savior of the world will walk that essential journey with you. He will strengthen you when you waver. He will be your light when it seems most dark. He will take your hand and be your hope when hope seems all you have left. His compassion and mercy, with all their cleansing and healing power, are freely given to all who truly wish complete forgiveness and will take the steps that lead to it” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 101–2; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 78).

Alma 39:17–19. The Plan of Salvation Was Known Before the World Was Created

- Some religions recognize a life of some kind after mortality; however, very few proclaim belief in a life before mortality. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained what the Lord knew even before the Creation: “The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence . . . ; the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now;’ He knew of the fall of Adam, the iniquities of the antediluvians, of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family . . . ;

He comprehended the fall of man, and his redemption; He knew the plan of salvation and pointed it out; He was acquainted with the situation of all nations and with their destiny; . . . He knows the situation of both the living and the dead, and has made ample provision for their redemption” (*History of the Church*, 4:597).

Points to Ponder

- When Alma was convinced of the reality of God and the gospel, he immediately began to suffer great sorrow for his past sins. Why do you think that happened? How does that apply to us today?
- Alma emphasized the importance of the scriptures to his son Helaman. Modern prophets continue to do the same with us. Do you or someone you know enjoy the blessings of daily scripture study? In what

ways do the scriptures bless the lives of those who regularly feast on them? How can you establish or strengthen your personal scripture study habit?

- What can we learn from Shiblon’s example that will help us remain strong through both good and bad times?

Suggested Assignments

- The principles of Alma’s repentance and forgiveness experience are the same for us today even though the circumstances are different than ours. Write a one-page paper summarizing some of the principles involved and how they apply to us now.
- Alma told Corianton that sexual transgressions are next to murder in seriousness. Write out a specific plan of steps you can take now to safeguard your purity.