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## Experiential Knowledge and the Covenantal Relationship in Alma 7

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## EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP IN ALMA 7

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**Abstract:** *A favorite scripture of many faithful saints is Alma 7 where it describes how the Savior came to Earth to understand, in the flesh, not only human sin, but human suffering. He did this in order to succor and heal us. Despite its obvious appeal, two points may seem curious to some readers. First, the doctrinal power of verses 11–13, which form a chiasm, has as its apex not the “mercy in succoring us,” as might be expected, but the “in the flesh” detail. Why? Upon closer examination, it appears that, in addition to performing the Atonement, Christ needed a mortal experience in order to add a complete experiential knowledge to his omniscient cognitive knowledge. That could only be obtained, in its fulness, “according to the flesh,” hence the emphasis in the chiasm. A second possible curiosity is that Alma ends his beautiful teaching with his brief testimony, which lends an air of closure. Then, the topic appears to change completely and seemingly inexplicably to a discussion of repentance and baptism. Again, why? Closer examination reveals that the next two verses (14–15) form a second chiasm. If the first chiasm can be viewed as a statement of what Christ offers us, the second may be viewed as what we offer Christ. He runs to us in 7:11–13; we run to him in 7:14–15. When viewed together, the two chiasms form a two-way covenantal relationship, which Alma promises will result in our eternal salvation.*

One of the masterpieces within the Book of Mormon is surely the one-chapter gem of Alma 7. Alma, himself, proclaims his description of the mission of Christ to be “one thing which is of *more importance* than they all” (Alma 7:7). Grant Hardy points out that, “in Gideon, Alma is . . . straightforward, with some of the clearest prophecies in the Book of Mormon of Jesus’ life.”<sup>1</sup> Truly, the explication of Christ’s

mission and the way to access the gift of his healing power are priceless messages to the people of Gideon, to the Church, and to the world.

### **Background and Overview for the Discourse of Alma 7**

The back story for the power-discourse of Alma is that he had been serving in Zarahemla as the chief judge over the land. He then made the decision to transfer his considerable political, military, administrative, and prosecutorial power of the judgment seat to “a wise man” (Alma 4:16–17). However, he retained his position as high priest over the church so that he could concentrate on preaching “in pure testimony” (Alma 4:19). Alma began that preaching in his own capital city where, after much labor, he enjoyed success in bringing the faithful of the city back to the fold and establishing “the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla” (Alma 6:4). Fueled by that success, Alma then traveled to the recently built “city of Gideon” (Alma 6:7).

Alma chapter 7 is wholly self-contained.<sup>2</sup> It begins with Alma explaining that he had been too occupied with administration to come earlier, and he begins his preaching in Gideon by saying, “This is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth,” i.e., in-person (Alma 7:1). Alma then spends the next six verses in an inspired introduction — expressing his trust that the people of Gideon were not “in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren,” the people of Zarahemla; that they were less materially-focused; and that they did “not worship idols but that [they did] worship the true and the living God” (Alma 7:6).

Alma opens the formal part of the sermon with a description of the need for the people to “prepare the way of the Lord” because “the Son of God cometh” (Alma 7:9). He then extends several prophecies about the birth of the Savior to the virgin, Mary, who would “bring forth ... the Son of God” (Alma 7:10).

It is the next three verses (Alma 7:11–13), which present the comforting concept of a merciful God who runs to succor us, that have provided such incredible comfort to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Latter-day Saints. On a personal note, I remember being taught a very different view when I was 10 or 11 and a member of a different church. I was taught that Christ was tempted ... but resisted. He suffered ... but overcame. Those temptations allowed him to obtain the moral standing and authority to judge us and then to condemn us for failing to resist our own temptations and for giving in to our own suffering. I remember the teacher of that church basing that interpretation on Hebrews 4:15:

“[Jesus] was tempted like as we are, *yet without sin*.” It seemed as if I were being taught that Jesus was saying: “I resisted that same temptation, and I didn’t sin. It was easy! Why couldn’t *you* have resisted, too? Why did you sin?”<sup>3</sup>

Imagine my joy, a few years later, when I learned of the corrective knowledge of the Restoration and specifically these verses in Alma 7:11–13. I learned that the true purpose of Christ’s condescension (1 Nephi 11:16, 26) and his mission was not to condemn us at all. It was to empathically understand us, reassuringly comfort us, and completely succor us “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2; 2 Nephi 25:13). It was as if Christ’s true purpose was suddenly clarified for me. He was really saying something like, “I faced that same temptation; it was terrible! Here, let me wipe your tears and put my arm around you to comfort and console you. Don’t despair; together, we will get through this. Lean on me — I’ll help you. I’ll lift you. I’ll carry you.” The discovery of that difference was life changing. Alma 7 has remained one of my favorite sermons ever since.<sup>4</sup> Fiona and Terryl Givens have expressed God’s motivation to elevate us in these words: “Our Heavenly Parents created us for our glory, not for theirs, and Christ orients his entire divine activity around the grand project of bringing us to where he is. How can we not adore such a one?”<sup>5</sup>

### The Multidimensional Messages of Verses 11–13

The three verses of Alma 7:11–13 most clearly present this glorious message of empathic understanding and complete healing. And that is how Alma’s lesson is almost universally taught in the restored Church. The key element of these verses is appropriately taught and learned with an emphasis on the comfort and succor they offer. The word *succor* comes from the Latin *succurrere*, meaning “run to the help of,” and this element of running to help is often rightly stressed in lessons, in writing, and in sermons that focus on his tremendous and loving willingness to take upon his own back our pains and infirmities and to heal us from our pains.<sup>6</sup> In writing about the condescension of Christ, Gerald Lund drew a comparison with the father of the Prodigal Son.

“*But when he was yet a great way off*, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20; emphasis added). It was not required that the son come all the way back. The father was watching and went out to meet him while he was yet a long way off.<sup>7</sup>

Writing about running to us to heal us even though we are “a long way off,” Elder Holland wrote that the “Atonement brings an additional kind of rebirth. . . . With his mighty arm around us and lifting us, we face life more joyfully even as we face death more triumphantly.”<sup>8</sup>

Usually less emphasized, at least using these specific three verses, is the Resurrection itself, i.e., that he would die and take back his body, thus bursting the bands (or bonds<sup>9</sup>) of death so that we, too, may rise again to be with him. That point is strongly made in other scriptural verses and its importance cannot be overly stressed, but it is not the main emphasis in Alma 7. Instead, the emphasis of these three verses is almost always focused on the succoring and the healing aspect. The knowledge of the ability of Christ to comfort and succor has been a priceless gift of these few verses for almost 200 years.<sup>10</sup> It leaps off the page in the traditional chapter and verse format. But that is not all. When examined in parallelistic format, these words turn out to form an elegant and powerful ancient chiasm. That chiasm, when examined, seems to switch the emphasis of Alma 7:11–13 from the *why* of the great sacrifice to the *how*.

Before explaining this, let me remind the reader that not all chiasms can pass muster as “intentional,” i.e., real, chiasms rather than “inadvertent,” i.e., false.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Alma 7:11–13, there seems to be no question and no debate about its authenticity as a parallelistic unit, so let us examine it in detail. Note that the structure below is not mine alone. It was also identified in at least two other studies, those of Alan C. Miner and of Donald Parry.<sup>12</sup> These same verses are also presented as a chiasm on the *Book of Mormon Central* website.<sup>13</sup> The verses are outlined below:

- (7:11) A<sub>1</sub> And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind;  
 B<sub>1</sub> and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
- (7:12) C<sub>1</sub> And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people;  
 D<sub>1</sub> and he will take upon him their infirmities,  
 E<sub>1</sub> that his bowels may be filled with mercy,  
 F<sub>1</sub> according to the flesh,  
 F<sub>2</sub> that he may know according to the flesh  
 E<sub>2</sub> how to succor his people  
 D<sub>2</sub> according to their infirmities.

- (7:13) C<sub>2</sub>            Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless  
                                          the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh  
 B<sub>2</sub>                    that he might take upon him the sins of his people,  
 A<sub>2</sub>                    that he might blot out their transgressions according to  
                                          the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the  
                                          testimony which is in me.

One change that I have made differs from how Donald Parry presented this chiasm and agrees with *Book of Mormon Central*. Admittedly, the phrase “Now the Spirit knoweth all things” (C<sub>2</sub>) is something of an outlier and it is not clear where it fits. Parry presented this phrase as a part of D<sub>2</sub>. But putting “according to their infirmities” together with “Now the Spirit knoweth all things” doesn’t seem to fit, logically. It might even suggest that the spirit knows about the infirmities, which seems to be the exact *opposite* of the overall message of the chiasm: the spirit doesn’t know about the infirmities, the flesh does.<sup>14</sup> That’s why the comfort of Jesus is explicitly based on, because of, “according to,” or in the flesh. Placing the phrase in C<sub>2</sub>, which is how it is presented in *Book of Mormon Central*, suggests that, while Christ had spirit knowledge, “nevertheless” he needed to suffer in the flesh for some reason. Spirit knowledge was not enough; he needed flesh in order to take upon him death (C<sub>1</sub>) and to experience human suffering (C<sub>2</sub>) “according to the flesh.” This is the third time that the phrase “according to the flesh” is used, so it is clearly critically important. As mentioned above, it moves from the *why* of the sacrifice to provide the *how*, thus explaining the placement of the connecting word “nevertheless.” Even though “the Spirit knoweth all things” cognitively, that was not enough; Christ needed knowledge that could only come from the experience “according to the flesh.” That small modification is critically important as we will see.<sup>15</sup>

Viewing the three verses of 7:11–13 in chiasmic format appears to provide two important insights that may come as surprises to some readers. The first and biggest surprise concerns the apex or climax at the center of the chiasm. Neal Rappleye has provided a literature review of various scholars who have developed rules or sets of criteria for evaluating the validity of proposed chiasms.<sup>16</sup> The majority of these scholars specifically identified the apex of any chiasm as the most important part. It is the apex that serves as the “climax,” “crescendo,” or “turning point” of the entire parallelistic unit.<sup>17</sup> Everything hinges on that turning point. The scriptural insight or lesson of the first part of a chiasm has built up to that apex and then will be repeated in inverse order as it steps down from that apex. Often, that apex is a single concept or idea; other times



it is a concept or idea that is twinned, most likely for emphasis. In either case, the apex represents the point of the chiasm — both the structural point and the conceptual point.

As John Welch noted in Rappleye’s article, the “central section [of any chiasm] should be marked and highly accentuated.”<sup>18</sup> In the same article, Craig Blomberg stated, “The center is the climax and should be a significant passage worthy of that position.”<sup>19</sup> John Breck called the apex the “thematic center.”<sup>20</sup> The various scholars differed in the certainty of the elements — from calling the elements merely “constraints,” to “requirements,” and even, “laws” — but all agree on the importance of the apex. “A climax or turning point should be found at the center.”<sup>21</sup>

So, what is the “thematic center” or “significant climax” or “turning point” of verses 11–13? As mentioned earlier, most sermons, lessons, and published commentaries rightly stress the healing and comforting power that comes from knowing that Christ fully and completely understands mortal sin, pain, and infirmity. This has been of great significance to me and to millions of others. Therefore, the obvious expectation is that this emphasis of healing our wounds should also be the apex, climax, thematic center, and turning point of the verses when viewed as a chiasm.

But it is not.

The twinned-apex of the chiasm emphasizes, instead, Christ’s own learning: “That he may know according to the flesh” (the F steps). This is repeated twice, presumably for emphasis. That his “bowels are filled with mercy” and that he wants to run to us (succor us) is paired in the next, and lower, E steps. This seems significant. Why would this be the case? What is Alma saying to us? What does he want us to learn from this? These are the fundamental questions that I will address in this first section of the paper.

One of the primary reasons for our travel through the “land of darkness and the shadow of death” (Job 12:20–21) is so that we can directly experience the challenges of mortality and then learn to exercise our agency: “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). We are told that is the very purpose of life: “True happiness comes from the personal, spiritual growth that rises out of the fires of mortal experience. . . . Trials, then, are a fundamental part of the plan of life. . . . Mortality would be a testing period during which we could learn how well we would use our agency when away from our Father’s presence.”<sup>22</sup>

## Cognitive and Experiential Knowledge: What is the Difference?

I suggest that there is a major distinction between cognitive learning and experiential learning. To be sure, we are to gain *cognitive* knowledge during our mortal journey. We are admonished in D&C 90:15 to “set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people.” The Book of Mormon endorses cognitive learning when it tells us that “to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29). In D&C 88:118, we are told, “Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” Why? Because “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19).

Modern apostles have concurred. President Henry B. Eyring noted that “you are interested in education, not just for mortal life but for eternal life. When you see that reality clearly with spiritual light, you will put spiritual learning first and yet not slight the secular learning. In fact, you will work harder at your secular learning than you would without that spiritual vision. . . . Our education must never stop. If it ends at the door of the classroom on graduation day, we will fail.”<sup>23</sup> President Russell M. Nelson has admonished, “Your mind is precious! It is sacred. Therefore, the education of one’s mind is also sacred. Indeed, education is a religious responsibility. . . . Our Creator expects His children everywhere to gain an education as a personal endeavor.”<sup>24</sup> That is all primarily cognitive knowledge, and it is a blessing from God. It might be noted that the acquisition of deep *cognitive* knowledge has historically been, and still is, an extremely rare privilege in the world and few have the opportunity to receive it in any depth. That may be why the “word of wisdom” and the “word of knowledge” are separate and distinct spiritual *gifts* (D&C 46:17–18) and “all have not every gift” (D&C 46:11).

Even more important than the primary learning from the “Tree of Knowledge” (Moses 3:9) is to gain *experiential* knowledge. Far from being a rare privilege, that particular type of knowledge is poured out in often frustrating abundance upon every human being without exception because of their mortal experiences. As Robert Millet has explained, this knowledge will be thrust upon us by the nature of the world into which we are born:

We do not believe, as did John Calvin, that men and women are, by virtue of the Fall, depraved creatures. We do not believe, as did Martin Luther, that men and women are so inclined to evil that they do not have even the capacity to choose good on their own. We do not believe, as does much of the Christian world, that because of the Fall little children are subject to an “original sin.” ... [However] to say that we do not inherit an original sin through the Fall is not to say that we do not inherit a fallen nature and thus the capacity to sin. Fallenness and mortality are inherited. They come to us as a natural consequence of the second estate.<sup>25</sup>

An analogy that may highlight this important distinction between cognitive and experiential learning comes from the field of medicine. Let’s suppose that a world-renowned male gynecologist and obstetrician had delivered thousands of babies under all conditions and faced dozens of fetal emergencies. Let’s further suppose that he had presented hundreds of professional papers, published scholarly articles and books, taught interns, and knew more about birth than any woman ever knew. Still his vast understanding would be restricted to intellectual, academic, and fact-based knowledge. There is one thing he would not know. He would lack experiential knowledge. He would not know, nor would he ever know, what it is like to actually feel deep labor pains, to struggle against the irresistible urge to push, and to feel numbing exhaustion swept away in the joy of holding a life that came out of his very body. That is a taste of the difference between cognitive versus experiential knowledge.

A second illustration comes from the ongoing tension that currently exists in the field of alcohol and drug counseling. Those who approach addiction treatment from a background of book reading, classwork, and on-the-job training — i.e., cognitive knowledge — are looked at with discounting suspicion and distrust by those who approach addiction treatment out of their own personal struggles with alcohol and/or drugs and their hard-won recovery — experiential knowledge. One side claims, “You can’t *know* depth from a book,” while the other retorts, “You cannot *know* breadth based only on your own unique recovery.”

One might ask, then, “Which type of knowledge is best?” That is not a helpful question. They are two entirely different ways of knowing. Ideally, both are required in the travail of child-bearing or for the difficult challenges of alleviating suffering in fighting demon addictions. In our own lives, both kinds of knowledge are required. Whatever *cognitive*

knowledge we had in our pre-existent state (and it sounds as if we had a lot) was blocked by the veil and must be regained — at least the part that is relevant for each person’s highly individualized mortal journey. But much more important is the *experiential* knowledge that we did not possess in the premortal state. It is in this mortal existence that we learn to master our appetites such as control over temptations and bodily desires. We cannot learn this in the Spirit World for the simple reason that we did not have physical bodies. Thus, Alma teaches that “*this life* is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of *this life* is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). By contrast, while some cognitive learning is idiosyncratically important in our mortal life, it is the *next* life that we may most easily acquire the majority of factual, informational type of knowledge, knowledge that is hard to acquire now — cognitive learning. Why is it hard to acquire now? First, it is said, although not necessarily correct, that we only use 10 percent or so of our brains. Imagine if we could use 100 percent.<sup>26</sup> Second, even if the first point is questionable, Hugh Nibley convincingly advances that idea that humans are limited to thinking only uni-lineally, while God thinks multi-lineally. He writes:

Once we can see the possibilities that lie in being able to see more than one thing at a time (and in theory the experts tell us there is no reason why we should not), the universe takes on new dimensions. . . . Quite peculiar to the genius of Mormonism is the doctrine of a God who could preoccupy himself with countless numbers of things.<sup>27</sup>

Now, consider Jesus Christ. If it was so necessary for us to gain experiential knowledge, what about our friend, Savior, and Elder Brother?<sup>28</sup> Let me be clear: There is no question that Christ, a full member of the Godhead, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Creator of all things that were created, was already fully omniscient. To believe less is to deny the full divinity of God the Son. “Believe in God,” Mosiah tells us. “Believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man does not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” (Mosiah 4:9). Or, as Nephi exclaimed, “O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things and there is not anything save he knows it” (2 Nephi 9:20). And, as Alma exults, “my God . . . has all wisdom and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things” (Alma 26:35). But is that cognitive comprehension, or experiential comprehension?

It seems to me that we are talking here about cognitive knowledge and not experiential or existential knowledge. As far as has been revealed, the Son of God had not yet navigated through any kind of mortal journey. We might say, he had not yet *experienced* a mortal *experience*. Basing his conclusion on several scriptures, including D&C 93:11–14,<sup>29</sup> one teacher expressed,

Of course Jesus was a God and a member of the Godhead before He was born into mortality, but perhaps we can say that He had not yet fully developed all the attributes of Godhood. ... Apparently, Jesus's completion of the Atonement gave him needed experience. ... Thus, our Savior *gained* perfect empathy.<sup>30</sup>

We know, in addition, that Jesus did not yet have a mortal body for it was his spiritual body that was shown to the brother of Jared. In Christ's own words: "Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; ... and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:16). But he also apparently needed the experiential knowledge that appears to come only in, through, and from a truly mortal experience in the flesh.

Jesus Christ taught this same lesson when he compared the need for Joseph Smith to gain tangible and painful experience with his own tangible and painful condescension.

Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? (D&C 122:7–8.).

The implication is that our own mortal experience must, at least in some small degree, mirror Christ's own descent below all. In other words, his temptations and suffering, like his baptism, were undertaken at least in part, "to fulfill all righteousness"<sup>31</sup> and required a mortal experience "according to the flesh" (Alma 7:11–13). This point was powerfully made by Neal Maxwell when he observed:

Later, in Gethsemane, the suffering Jesus began to be "sore amazed" (Mark 14:33), or, in the Greek, "awestruck" and "astonished." Imagine, Jehovah, the Creator of this and other worlds, "astonished"! Jesus knew cognitively what He must do, but not experientially. He had never personally known the exquisite and exacting process of an atonement before. Thus, when the agony came in its fulness, it was so much,

much worse than even He with his unique intellect had ever imagined!<sup>32</sup>

### How Did Christ Achieve Full Experiential Knowledge?

Referring to Christ's experiential learning as outlined in Alma 7:11–13, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wrote:

Christ walked the path every mortal is called to walk so that he would know how to succor and strengthen us in our most difficult times. He knows the deepest and most personal burdens we carry. He knows the most public and poignant pains we bear. He descended below all such grief in order that he might lift us above it. There is no anguish or sorrow or sadness in life that he has not suffered on our behalf and borne away upon his own valiant and compassionate shoulders.<sup>33</sup>

Tad R. Callister expressed it this way:

No mortal can cry out, “He does not understand my plight, for my trials are unique.” There is nothing outside the scope of the Savior's experience. . . . The Savior knows, understands, and feels every human condition, every human woe, and every human loss. . . . There is no hurt he cannot soothe, rejection he cannot assuage, loneliness he cannot console.<sup>34</sup>

The prophet and head of the Church, Russell M. Nelson, has recently taught:

In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Savior took upon Himself *every* pain, *every* sin, and *all* of the anguish and suffering *ever* experienced by you and me and by everyone who has ever lived or will ever live.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the apostle Paul stated that “[Jesus] was *in all points* tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15).

The question is how inclusive is “every” and how many is “all points”? Over the course of the history of this world, humans have faced millions, possibly billions, of unique temptations, afflictions, adversities, and idiosyncratic experiences on just our own Earth. Did Christ vicariously experience all of them? That is, of course, unimaginable to mortal understanding. On the other hand, so is the core doctrinal principle that Christ suffered the penalty for *every* sin ever committed, or that will be committed, both in this world and in other worlds.<sup>36</sup> Both of these concepts may be among the unknowables of the Atonement.

Like Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night and was told he had to be born again, we may be left to marvel as he did, “How can these things be?” (John 3:7–9). The correct answer to the question, “How was this accomplished?” is that we simply do not know. In Nephi’s great vision, he is asked, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” (In other words, “Do you understand why God the Son had to become mortal, according to the flesh?”) We are left to admit, as did Nephi, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

On the other hand, the questions still bear consideration. As Russell M. Nelson has taught, “The more we know about the Savior’s ministry and mission — the more we understand His doctrine and what he did for us.”<sup>37</sup> It seems at least worth trying to attain some degree of understanding of what Tad Callister calls “the intensity of his offering.”<sup>38</sup>

If “every” (from President Nelson’s earlier quote) literally means *every*, and if Paul’s “all points” literally means *all*, then we are left to marvel at some mechanism of divinity that we cannot understand. If so, that would be a miracle. That would be fine, since “with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27; also, Luke 1:37).<sup>39</sup> However, if it is a miracle, we can still attempt to understand it. One aid to understanding any miracle is knowing that God does not violate natural law. Brigham Young taught:

Yet I will say with regard to miracles, there is no such thing save to the ignorant — that is, there never was a result wrought out by God or by any of His creatures without there being a cause for it. There may be results, the cause of which we do not see or understand, and what we call miracles are no more than this — they are the results or effects of causes hidden from our understandings.<sup>40</sup>

James E. Talmage suggested the same idea when he wrote:

Miracles are commonly regarded as occurrences in opposition to the laws of nature. Such a conception is plainly erroneous, for the laws of nature are inviolable. However, as human understanding of these laws is at best but imperfect, events strictly in accordance with natural law may appear contrary thereto.<sup>41</sup>

What, then, could be the “laws of nature” in play? What could help us understand the apparent totality of the experiential knowledge that Christ obtained — according to the flesh? Could the “every” and “all

points” actually be every and all major *categories* of mortal experience? It is at least possible that *categories* of experience provided him with the comprehensive experiential knowledge through some kind of divine transfer of learning. In other words, the knowledge of a category of experiences could subsume all similar sub-experiences that fell within that category.

As one simple and simplistic example, Jesus was never tempted to disobey modern laws of the land and to speed on the freeway or run a red light in the wee, silent hours of the early morning. Such conditions did not exist in the meridian of time. However, he may have been encouraged, at least by some of his followers, to disobey the laws of Rome. One of those laws compelled Jews to carry a Roman’s soldier’s pack, which included heavy armor, one mile. How did Jesus respond to the question about violating this law? According to the KJV he shocked everyone (as he often did) by teaching: “go with him twain.”<sup>42</sup> That response addressed the *category* of not submitting to temptations to disobey law. Similarly, Matthew 5:40–41 has him teaching, “And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also,” thus teaching the *category* of returning love for legal challenges.

As another example, Jesus was obviously never tempted to avoid U.S. Federal taxes by exaggerating a withholding on an annual IRS tax return. However, he was tempted by the Jewish chief priests and scribes to avoid Roman taxes. When asked, “Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?” he replied, “Why tempt ye me?” Then he taught the principle — the *category* — “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s” (Luke 20:23–25).

This possible explanation of there being *categories* of experience, which transferred over to give Christ perfect experiential knowledge, rather than him experiencing every specific human event has an analogy to the temptations of Jesus in the desert. We sometimes overlook that crucial part of his suffering, but to do so is a grave mistake. His three temptations in the desert were the first time, that we know of, where he faced major adversity. Satan would not have tempted him unless he had the possibility of succumbing.<sup>43</sup> Elder Bruce R. McConkie pointed out just how bad those temptations were when he wrote:

Our Lord’s temptations were real and a part of his necessary trials and tests... We know he was called upon to choose the right in the *hardest and most difficult* situations ever imposed upon mortals. ... His temptations were *over and above* those of any other person.<sup>44</sup>



This corresponds to Mosiah's teaching: "And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death" (Mosiah 3:7). Thus, his own physical cravings for food and water after fasting in the desert 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2–3) may have been every bit as intense and urgent as the cravings of any drug or sexual addict. Although he never snorted cocaine or injected heroin, he faced the *category* of carnal cravings when he denied his body food and water for those 40 days. We cannot even imagine such a fast. If the 40 days were literal, and not just symbolic, it would have killed any mortal man.<sup>45</sup> "No morsel of food entered his mouth, no drop of water wet his parched lips or dripped down his throat," writes Elder McConkie. "His body cried out for food."<sup>46</sup> Thus, he had far more than just "book learning" about physical cravings. That is why he could truly be a "wonderful counsellor"<sup>47</sup> to those suffering from addictions as well as to everyone else. Surely his being a wonderful counselor is a major emphasis of the passage being discussed in this paper. Alma's words are "that he may know ... how to succor [i.e., know how to counsel] his people" and be a "wonderful counselor" to them (Alma 7:11–13 and Isaiah 9:6).

The idea of categories of temptations was, in fact, taught by David O. McKay over a hundred years ago. In a *Conference Report*, he taught that the three *categories* of temptation that Jesus overcame in the desert (he called them, "three forms") encompassed the majority of specific human temptations:

Now, nearly every temptation that comes to you and me comes in one of those forms. Classify them, and you will find that under one of those three nearly every given temptation that makes you and me spotted [by the evils of the world], ever so little maybe, comes to us as: (1) *a temptation of the appetite*; (2) *a yielding to the pride and fashion and vanity of those alienated from the things of God*; or (3) a gratifying of the passion, or a desire for the riches of the world, or power among men. Now, when do temptations come? Why, they come to us in our social gatherings, they come to us at our weddings, they come to us in our politics, they come to us in our business relations, on the farm, in the mercantile establishment, in our dealings in all the affairs of life.<sup>48</sup>

Of at least equal relevance is that the specific wording in Alma 7:11 seems to bear out this idea of categories. Verse 11 does not say that Christ experienced every specific temptation; rather it says that he experienced

“temptations of every kind.” The word *kind* is important. It occurs in the Book of Mormon 40 times, almost exclusively within the phrase “of every kind.” Similarly, in the Old Testament the word *kind* generally translated from the Hebrew *mîn* occurs 31 times, almost exclusively in the phrases “after its kind” or “according to its kind.” *Mîn* occurs primarily in the creation story, the flood account, and in lists of clean and unclean animals. According to one authoritative website:

*Mîn* does refer to various kinds of living creatures without a predisposition as to how large a category is intended. Only context can tell us that. [However] ... this confirms the general category of a “form” or “kind.” ... The Hebrew term *mîn* carries a sense of all types of divisions between plants and animals, not necessarily in the taxonomies of modern scientific divisions.<sup>49</sup>

Although it can be problematic to apply modern meanings to scriptures written thousands of years ago, a reasonable understanding can often be gained by looking at the context for the usage of each word. Table 1 contains nine examples of the word *kind* in the Book of Mormon and *mîn* in the Old Testament and Pearl of Great Price. All of them appear to suggest broad categories rather than every specific instance within a category.

Scripture	Context	Discussion
1 Nephi 8:1	Lehi and family take seeds “of every kind,” grain “of every kind,” and fruit “of every kind”	Could the travelers transport all possible varieties of seed, grain, and fruit or did they take samples from several categories?
Mosiah 8:8	Ammon and his party stumble across bones of Jaredites and ruins of buildings “of every kind”	Did Ammon find ruins of every possible building or ruins of a large variety of types of buildings?
Alma 7:11	Christ was prophesied to suffer pains and afflictions and temptations “of every kind”	This is the question posed in this article. Did Jesus suffer all conceivable afflictions and temptations — or categories of them?
Alma 36:27	Alma tells his son that he was “supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions”	Whether Christ experienced every conceivable trial or not, Alma could not have; hence he talks about kinds and “all manner of,” meaning categories.

Scripture	Context	Discussion
Alma 60:3	Moroni complains to Pahoran that his men suffered “all manner of afflictions of every kind”	There is no doubt that Moroni’s men suffered greatly but they suffered categories and not every possible affliction.
Helaman 12:1–2	The Lord blesses and prospers his people “in gold, and in silver, and all manner of precious things of every kind and art”	Does this reference to “all manner” of precious things and art “of every kind” include all art pieces created or all <i>manner</i> of things and “every kind” of art?
Genesis 1 Moses 2 Abraham 4	God commanded/prepared the earth to bring forth grasses, fruit trees, and animals after their own kind	The meaning here seems to be that the vegetation and animals reproduced in the same category; i.e., dogs gave birth to dogs, not to lion cubs or crocodiles.
Genesis 6:19–20	Noah is to take “two of every sort” of fowl, cattle, and creeping things after their kind, “two of every sort”	Could Noah have taken thousands of pairs of all varieties of fowl, cattle, and creeping things into the ark or do “sorts” and “kinds” of creatures imply categories?
Leviticus 11:14–16	Unclean fowls <i>include</i> eagles, ossifrage, osprey, “vulture, and the kite after his kind”	Here the <i>category</i> is “fowls” and specific <i>instances</i> of the category are listed “after his kind” suggesting “within this category.”

**Table 1.** Selected Examples of the Concepts of Kind, Sort, or Manner.

Let’s return to the analogy of the obstetrician. As a mortal man, Jesus Christ did not carry and give birth to a child any more than any other man has — or could. However, he experienced the same *categories* of the experience from which he could have obtained transferred experiential knowledge. His physical pain in Gethsemane and on the cross was more intense than any mother’s labor pains have ever been or could ever be. His agony was so severe that it caused him to literally “tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore” (D&C 19:18). He *cognitively* understood childbirth long before the birth of any mortal child; he *experientially* understood childbirth when he experienced that category and degree of pain “according to the flesh.”

Given that Christ condescended to have a healthy mortal body and a full mortal experience, one proverbial elephant in the room is whether his experiences of mortal life included the categories of marriage, marital intimacy, and parenthood. Those three major aspects of life represent a huge array of motivation, joy, longing, passion, hurt, and even abuse. They have been a major force in the lives of essentially every human being, man and woman throughout the history of the world. An obvious

question is whether these three categories (marriage, marital intimacy, and parenthood) were also parts of Christ's mortal experience. Note that the Church takes no official position on a marriage for Jesus although people's speculations on this question have intensified with recent books and movies addressing this possibility.<sup>50</sup> There is compelling evidence and logic in favor of marriage and parenthood but there is also compelling evidence and logic opposing the idea that he married and bore offspring. A review of almost 200 years of statements and writings by prominent Church leaders and others addressing these questions was published in 2021 in *BYU Studies Quarterly*. The author, Christopher James Blythe, writes that "belief in a married Christ prospered in the early decades of the Church with little controversy among members, until leaders in the early twentieth century discouraged its public discussion while never disparaging the concept."<sup>51</sup> However, since the questions are sensitive and sacred, and the Church has taken no official position, we will not discuss these questions further, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. However, we might close this thought by adding one relevant and important point offered by Terryl Givens. He noted, "The powers associated with procreation, and the marital institution that Mormons see as instituted *before* the fall, together endow sexuality with an uncompromised status as holy, divine, and in some sense, eternal."<sup>52</sup>

Whether Jesus was married or not, suffice it to say that Christ's mortal life included, in some way, *every* category of experience, allowing him to obtain an intense experiential understanding of all human life, probably by some kind of transfer experience. For example, Jesus Christ never had his appendix surgically removed. He never went blind. He never experienced a broken bone.<sup>53</sup> He never suffered the cognitive decline and the loss of dignity of old age. Nor did he ever lose a loved one to a drunk driver. So, can he really understand our unique mortal experiences? Yes, he can — either: 1) because of some divine ability of which we are unaware or 2) because he experienced *every category* of experience — according to the flesh. Exactly why that experiential learning was absolutely necessary and how it was accomplished is a matter of conjecture; that it *was* absolutely necessary is a matter of scripture.

So far, the distinction between cognitive and experiential knowledge seems solid and important. The real test, though, is whether the text of the Book of Mormon — the actual wording in the chiasm of Alma 7:11–13 — supports this difference. It seems so, because of one brief phrase that is easily glossed over or obscured by the overall message of the chiasm. It

occurs in step  $C_2$  where we are told, “Now the *Spirit* knoweth all things.” What Spirit? It couldn’t be the Holy Ghost in this context. Alma is talking about the birth and mission of Jehovah as Jesus — one member of the Godhood. There is no logical reason to mention, so suddenly and so briefly, an attribute of a second member of the Godhead. In any case, even if the phrase did refer to the Holy Ghost, which seems unlikely, that changes little. The unembodied Holy Ghost did not have experiential knowledge either. He did not have an experience “in the flesh” because he has not (yet) taken on flesh.

If the phrase, the *Spirit* knoweth all things, is a general statement about *all* premortal spirits, the phrase is obviously not true and not correct. While we don’t know much about premortal spirits, it is a tenet of our faith that premortal spirits have not yet had a mortal experience and have not yet had an opportunity to learn experientially. They will learn experientially, through learning agency in this mortal world, and also learn cognitively — which learning continues on into the next life.<sup>54</sup> Our premortal spirits certainly did *not* know all things.

If the phrase “the Spirit knoweth all things” refers to the as-yet unembodied Spirit of Jesus Christ, that would be partially correct. It would be a true and correct statement of, at the least, his omniscience in cognition, understanding, and knowledge. Jehovah did know all things cognitively while he was in his premortal spirit form. Step  $C_2$  continues with a caveat, “nevertheless...” Nevertheless, what? “Nevertheless, the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh.” This is the third time that the phrase “according to the flesh” is stated. It is an obvious reference to Christ’s mortality. This suggests, among other lessons, that there is something that occurs in a mortal and physical experience that modifies or adds, in some way, to the attribute that his spirit already knows “all things.” It seems likely that this refers to his adding *experiential* knowledge to his already perfect and complete *cognitive* knowledge.

This idea is further supported by the twinned apex in the F steps. There we find the dual reference to his mortal experience (“according to the flesh; according to the flesh”). However, step  $F_2$  adds the additional phrase, “that he may know.” Again, this suggests that some type of knowing was connected to his condescending to become mortal and have a mortal experience. That would seem to indicate experiential knowledge — that “he may know according to the flesh” (7:12). This helps explain exactly why the all-important apex of this chiasm is the double phrase, “according to the flesh” (the F steps) and *not* the more intuitively expected mercy and succoring. That latter emphasis, which

is the one that captures the most attention, falls one step lower in the E steps. In sum, it may be that even though “the Spirit knoweth all things” *cognitively* (Alma 7:13), the temptations and the Atonement had to be physical, they had to be literal, and they had to be experiential — “according to the flesh” (7:12). “It was part of the eternal plan.”<sup>55</sup>

### Four Aspects of the Atonement

Both the fact of Christ’s taking on mortal flesh (F steps) and his ability to provide succor (E steps) go together. Similarly, they are connected to his sharing of infirmities (D steps), his dying for us (C<sup>1</sup>), his empathy (B steps), and his redemption (A<sup>2</sup>) and form one great whole. As Robert Millet put it, “the Atonement is the central act of human history, the pivotal point in all time, the doctrine of doctrines.”<sup>56</sup> However, there may be value in separating out the four main elements or aspects of the Atonement. All of these four aspects are addressed, to a lesser or greater degree, in the chiasm of Alma 7:11–13. These four aspects include the Resurrection; his pain, suffering, and death (including his temptations); his healing and succoring of us; and a part of Christ’s own progression. I will talk about each of these in turn.

The first aspect of the Atonement, that Christ came back to life, is of supreme importance. It was Christ’s Resurrection that broke the bands of death for all mankind. Our mortal bodies, now subject to illness and death, will rise again and be made incorruptible. Although this aspect is likely the most important of the four, it is not the major focus of these particular verses (Alma 7:11–13). We must look elsewhere, to other scripture, for an emphasis on the Resurrection aspect itself.

The same is true for the second aspect: that Christ suffered to expiate our sins is similarly not the major focus of these verses. This is not to minimize his suffering. In fact, we might note that the suffering of Christ occurred not only in Gethsemane and on the cross, but throughout his life. In their appropriate zeal to venerate the pain and suffering of the Atonement, some authors gloss over the fact that Christ’s sacrifice occurred in at least three *other* settings as well:

1. During his beyond-human temptations in the desert.<sup>57</sup>
2. Throughout his adult life and his ministry (“Lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” — Mosiah 3:7).

3. At the horror of his scourging, flogging, and the indignity of the crown of thorns (“with his stripes we are healed” — Isaiah 53:5).<sup>58</sup>

In no way is the mention of these three *other* settings meant to minimize the events of the Atonement itself. To the contrary, I wish to expand our appreciation of the full scope of his condescension. And, in fact, the death of Jesus Christ is something that we are encouraged to reflect on when we symbolically pull back the burial shroud, break the emblem of his body into small pieces, and then symbolically partake of that body and his blood during the weekly sacrament ordinance. Thus, although we do not focus on the symbol of the cross, per se, we do focus on his physical death both in the sacrament and in the temple. Although a full description and analysis of the physical death of Jesus Christ goes far beyond the scope of this short article, several excellent articles have been written on the medical aspects of his death.<sup>59</sup> His death on the cross has also been masterfully covered in numerous General Conference addresses. “More than 330 Church leaders have spoken of the Savior’s death more than 3,000 times!”<sup>60</sup> Plus this essential event has been completely treated in many full-length books.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the focus of these verses is not on his unimaginable sacrifice to expiate our sins.

Rather, the focus is on a third aspect of Christ’s condescension: his desire to understand, heal, and succor us in our *pains, losses, and infirmities*. Scriptural support for Jesus Christ’s urgent desire to understand the mortal experience is rare, even in Restoration scripture, but especially in Biblical scripture.<sup>62</sup> Relying only on the Bible, one might well focus only on forgiveness of sin and the resurrection. However, Alma 7 gives us so much more. Elder Holland points out this same distinction when he writes that Christ’s grace is more expansive than a focus only on the expiation of sin:

Most Christians believe that, based upon repentance, the atonement of Christ will redeem humankind from the final consequences of sin and death [Aspect #2]. But only those who receive the restored gospel, including the Book of Mormon, know how thoroughly the Atonement heals and helps with so many more *categories* of disappointment and heartache here and now, in time as well as in eternity [Aspect #3].<sup>63</sup>

Elder Holland teaches that this expansiveness comes particularly through the Book of Mormon:

Virtually all Christian churches teach some kind of doctrine regarding the atonement of Christ and the expiation of our sins that comes through it [Aspect #2]. But the Book of Mormon teaches that and much more. It teaches that Christ also provides relief of a more temporal sort, taking upon himself our mortal sicknesses and infirmities, our earthly trials and tribulations, our personal heartaches and loneliness and sorrows [Aspect #3] — all done *in addition* to taking upon himself the burden of our sins.<sup>64</sup>

Elder Boyd K. Packer made a similar point when he stressed:

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 [Aspects #1 and #2]. 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 [Aspect #3].<sup>65</sup>

Alma 7:11–13 thus occupies a uniquely emphasized place as one of the doctrinal pillars of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As John Welch has pointed out:

Alma mentions pains, afflictions, and temptations of *every kind*. That is a stronger statement of the expansive reach of the Atonement than we can find anywhere else in scripture. . . . Alma is the only one in scripture who emphasizes this aspect of Christ's sustaining power.<sup>66</sup>

In the words of Robert Millet, “Indeed, Jesus Christ is the Source of solace. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace.”<sup>67</sup>

There is still more. A fourth aspect of the Atonement suggests that there may have been certain benefits — *for Jesus Christ* — in his condescending from a state of divinity to accept a difficult lifetime of mortality “according to the flesh.” We approach a discussion of this fourth aspect with caution. Suggesting that there were also benefits for a divine being may seem counter-intuitive and even disrespectful. For thousands of years prior to Bethlehem, humans worshipped Christ as the premortal Jehovah. He was the creator, under the direction of the Father, of “worlds without number” (Moses 1:33). “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made” (John 1:3).<sup>68</sup> Christ condescended to come to Earth primarily as an incredible act of incomprehensible and unconditional love. It was performed for *our* benefit. We have not paid him, nor can we pay



him. We do not deserve, nor *can* we deserve, this priceless gift (see Mosiah 2:20–21). That is what is meant when it is said that the Atonement was a selfless act. President Boyd K. Packer used the term “Selfless and Sacred Sacrifice” in the title of a BYU devotional in 2015.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, President Gordon B. Hinckley referred to the Atonement as a “totally selfless act,”<sup>70</sup> and Elder Richard G. Scott called it the same thing in a Conference address in 2006. Comparing Christ’s actions to a solo rock climber, Elder Scott taught that “the Atonement was a *selfless act* of infinite, eternal consequence, arduously earned alone.”<sup>71</sup>

The Atonement was truly “selfless” in the sense that Christ did not do it for reward, praise, or adoration; he did it so that we could “buy milk and honey, without money and without price” (2 Nephi 26:25).<sup>72</sup> There is nothing we can do to earn our expiation. If there were, Christ’s Atonement would be a wage, not a free gift. “It is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). The Atonement is something that Christ provides “without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1; 2 Nephi 9:50).

However, “selfless” does not mean that his condescension did not also advance his own work and his glory. He didn’t do it for gain, but he still gained. He benefited in at least three ways. First, taking upon himself flesh meant that he obtained a mortal, physical body, something that was essential to him as it is for all of us.<sup>73</sup> Second, it allowed him to become “perfect” in the sense of complete. He did not initially have complete experiential knowledge to pair with his complete and perfect cognitive knowledge. Taking on the flesh allowed him to become complete and perfect in the experiential sense, too. Third, he was already perfect, in the sense of total righteousness and without blemish, but he had not yet completed his assigned mission. The full events of the Atonement were not yet complete. He had covenanted to certain actions that had not yet happened. The plan of salvation could not have been set in motion without that covenant. Without the covenant we would have remained spirits, and without the keeping of the covenant we would have been eternally lost, bereft of our physical bodies and the presence of God. The Atonement had not yet taken place. Russell M. Nelson, then an apostle, made that clear when he taught about the perfection of Jesus Christ:

In Matt. 5:48, the term *perfect* was [often] translated from the Greek *teleios*, which means “complete.” ... Just prior to his crucifixion, he said that on “the third day I *shall be perfected* [Luke 13:32].” ... Think of that! The sinless, errorless Lord — already perfect by our mortal standards — proclaimed his

own state of perfection yet to be in the future. His concluding words upon Calvary's cross referred to the culmination of his assignment — to atone for all humankind. Then he said, "It is finished" [John 19:30; D&C 19:19]. Not surprisingly, the Greek word from which *finished* was derived is *teleios*. That Jesus attained eternal perfection *following* his resurrection is confirmed in the Book of Mormon. ... [H]e said, "I would that ye should be perfect *even as I*, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" [3 Nephi 12:48]. This time he listed himself along with his Father as a perfected personage. Previously he had not. ... Paul taught "that they [our ancestors] without us should not be made *perfect*." Again, in that verse, the Greek term from which *perfect* was translated was a form of *teleios*.<sup>74</sup>

To summarize, Christ was already perfect/complete in his absolute righteousness and his cognitive omniscience. He was not yet perfect/complete in three other ways:

1. He needed to become perfect/complete by gaining his flesh — i.e., a physical mortal body that was soon to become a perfected immortal body.
2. He needed to become perfect/complete by adding experiential knowledge to his omniscient cognitive knowledge (through his 33 years of mortal experiences, his Temptation in the desert, and through the agonizing hours from Gethsemane to Golgotha).<sup>75</sup>
3. He needed to become perfect/complete by using that flesh to expiate the sins of mankind by dying to overcome universal death — in other words, by completing the Atonement — something that nobody else could do ("I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" — John 14:6).

This theme of Christ's perfection/completion is more than conjecture; it is scripture. In Paul's powerful words:

Though he were a Son, yet *learned* he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being *made perfect*, he *became* the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. (Hebrews 5:8)

That Christ also benefited, personally, from taking on human flesh and acquiring experiential knowledge, was taught in unmistakable words by Elder Bruce R. McConkie. He wrote that Christ's taking on

flesh “gave him the *experiences he needed to work out his own salvation.*”<sup>76</sup> Expanding on that in another of his books, McConkie proclaimed:

If the plan of salvation, ordained by the Father, was to enable all of his spirit children to advance and progress and become like him, then Jehovah also was subject to its terms and conditions. ... Our Lord’s mortality was *essential to his own salvation*. The eternal exaltation of Christ himself — though he was a God and had power and intelligence like unto his Father — was dependent upon gaining a mortal body, overcoming the world by obedience, passing through the portals of death, and then coming forth in glorious immortality with a perfected celestial body. Christ came into the world to *work out his own salvation with fear and trembling* before the Father. There neither was, nor is, nor shall be any other way for anyone. To house a spirit body, even that of a God, in an eternal tabernacle like that of the Father, requires a mortal birth and a mortal death. Christ wrought his atonement, *first for himself and his own salvation*, then for the salvation of all those who believe on his name, and finally and in a lesser degree for all the sons of Adam.<sup>77</sup>

Could Christ have accomplished any one of these four aspects of the Atonement in the absence of the others? For example, could he have suffered for our sins without ultimately dying on the cross and then being resurrected (aspect #1)? Conceivably, perhaps. But what would have been the point if he suffered for our sins but didn’t die, which death makes it possible for us to also rise again and be with him? Could he have gained experiential knowledge without using that knowledge to heal, comfort, and succor anyone? Again, conceivably, yes, but to what end? That would have been merely adding experiential knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Such a thought denies the scope and universality of his unconditional and perfect love. No, the Atonement is very much “a package deal” (to borrow a phrase from Robert Millet).<sup>78</sup> The four aspects work together into one synchronized whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Alma’s testimony is that the entirety of the Atonement was accomplished by and through the flesh. It was the flesh that faced temptations of *every kind* in the desert, adversity throughout his life, and agony in the final events of Gethsemane through Calvary (the A steps). He could take upon him “the pains and the sicknesses” and “the sins of his people” (the B steps) because of the flesh. Through his flesh, he died for us (the C steps). Because of his flesh, he was able to take upon him our infirmities (the D

steps). That laid the foundation for him to be “filled with mercy” so that he would know *how*, through experiential knowledge via the flesh, to “succor his people” (the E steps). The twin-apex or the *how*, is “according to the flesh” (the F steps).

So far in this essay, we have talked about how Jesus Christ gained a complete knowledge of all human experience. We have discussed this in an either/or manner: did he experience every individual trial, temptation, adversity, affliction, and sin, or did he experience categories that subsumed more specific instances?

There is a third possibility. He could have done both. He might have lived 33 years of mortal life that allowed him to gain experiential knowledge by category (through experiencing the stages of infancy, childhood, and adulthood; his three temptations in the desert; the constant rejection by the Pharisees; and so on). Then, he could have vicariously taken upon himself every conceivable and individual human sin through some unknowable divine process in the approximately 24 hours that included his time in Gethsemane and on the cross. In 2005, Elder Merrill G. Bateman of the Seventy emphasized the *individuality* of his paying for sin when he stated:

For many years I thought of the Savior’s experience in the garden and on the cross as places where a large mass of sin was heaped upon Him. Through the words of Alma, Abinadi, Isaiah, and other prophets, however, my view has changed. Instead of an impersonal mass of sin, there was a long line of people, as Jesus felt “our infirmities” (Hebrews 5:15), “[bore] our griefs, . . . carried our sorrows . . . [and] was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4–5). The Atonement was an intimate, personal experience in which Jesus came to know how to help each of us.<sup>79</sup>

The idea that Jesus could have lived a mortal life, with its attendant types or categories of experiences, but then vicariously faced many billions of highly individualized sins in the 24 hours of the Atonement, is truly difficult to comprehend. Various authors and teachers have speculated on how a divine process might have allowed for “a long line of people.” These speculations have included such devices as the suspension of time, the recycling of time, Nibley’s multi-lineal thinking, or even parallel universes, but the fact is, we simply do not know.

At first glance, some statements seem to suggest that Christ’s experiential learning, in order to succor us, all took place during the brief hours of the Atonement. Elder Bateman’s statement could be read

that way. Similarly, Hilton writes that “we see from the prophet Enoch that when we experience deep pain, we can find comfort at Calvary.”<sup>80</sup> He adds that “Christ’s *Crucifixion* was the answer to Enoch’s heartache. It can be the answer to our heartache as well, no matter what type [of] suffering we experience, be it mental, spiritual, emotional, or physical.”<sup>81</sup> In a related study, he writes, “Through the events of Gethsemane, Calvary, and his Resurrection, Jesus Christ suffered our pains and sins.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Sister Jean B. Bingham, speaking in General Conference, asserted, “In the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary, He felt all of *our* pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities,”<sup>83</sup> which sounds a lot like Alma 7.

I am not suggesting that any of these statements are incorrect. However, it would be easy to misinterpret such statements as claiming that the experiential knowledge talked about in Alma 7 was gained during, and only during, the brief hours of the actual Atonement. That would be a mistake. It does not seem to be what these writers and speakers are saying.<sup>84</sup> Rather, they seem to be asserting that, in taking upon himself human sins to atone for them, Jesus greatly *increased* his experiential knowledge of human suffering and pain as a byproduct of atoning for their sins. It seems to me that the hours from Gethsemane through the cross were fully involved with atoning primarily for human *sin*. It was at these two times that Christ vicariously paid for all and every individual sin as well as the collective sins of all mankind.

The enormity of that part of the sacrifice is staggering just by itself. Paying the price of all individual sins for all mortals clearly would have required some divine mechanism to accomplish. It is simply not necessary to add that the totality of Christ’s experiential learning also took place in this compressed time period. That misinterpretation defies common sense. It also discounts the significance of the rest of Christ’s life. It does not contradict anything any prophet has ever said or written about the magnitude of Christ’s free gift in the Garden and on the cross to say that a large portion of his coming to “know according to the flesh” took place earlier, *prior to* the events of the actual Atonement — in other words, during the entirety of his life. Bishop Richard C. Edgley put it this way:

His condescension was manifest by who He was and the way He lived. His condescension can be seen in almost every recorded act of His 33 years of mortality. . . . The Savior lived His teachings. He showed us the way. The God of this earth, the Redeemer of the world, condescended to minister to the

humble, despised, despairing, hopeless, and helpless. His condescension was evidenced in His everyday living.<sup>85</sup>

In addition, note that Christ's atoning for human sin (one part of the mortal experience) and his experiential learning of human pains and infirmities (a second part of the mortal experience) are, at least to some degree, separate and distinct situations. These two situations are obviously related in that sin can cause pain and infirmity and can also be caused by pain and infirmity. Yet, they are also distinct states or conditions. This idea of a distinction between the two is even hinted at by the order in which they are presented in Alma 7. Verses 11 and 12 primarily focus on his succoring us in our pains and infirmities (with a brief mention of his conquering death via his resurrection). The taking upon him of all human sin and blotting out human transgressions are not mentioned until verse 13.

This fact also seems implied by Alma's exact wording. Alma states that "he shall *go forth*, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations" (7:11). There was no *going forth* during and after Gethsemane. He was met at the edge of the Garden by armed soldiers (Jewish then Roman) who arrested him, tried him, flogged him, and nailed him to a cross.

Exactly when he *went forth* can be debated, but we know that his temptations, which as I asserted earlier are not always emphasized, took place at the beginning of his formal ministry, some three years before the few event-filled hours of the Atonement. Similarly, the opening of Isaiah's well-known prophecy of Christ's mission seems to refer to his life *prior* to Gethsemane and the cross. The great prophet wrote:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:2-3)

The prophecy then goes on to clearly reference the Atonement, but it appears certain that Christ's development of empathic understanding also took place incrementally during his entire life, and not just from the Garden to the Tomb. As the angel taught Nephi, the Son of God did not condescend to become an earthly king or even a fully-grown adult man; he condescended to become a helpless baby.<sup>86</sup> That seems significant. Nephi added, "And I beheld that he *went forth* ministering unto the

people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them” (1 Nephi 11:28). Writer Gerald Lund adds:

As he went out among the people, he made no attempt to screen out the unwashed and the unworthy. His whole life was spent dealing and working with those who were what others would define as the dregs of society — lepers, the sick, the diseased, the halt, the maimed, prostitutes, publicans, sinners. He mixed freely among them ... although when one considers who he was and where he came from, that alone was a remarkable condescension.<sup>87</sup>

And all this was pre-Gethsemane. In fact, that seems to be the whole idea behind the doctrine that Jehovah condescended to experience a full, mortal life “according to the flesh” with its attendant mortal categories of experiences.

Those experiences, almost all of which occurred prior to the 24 hours of the Atonement, also play a major role in what various Church leaders and writers have described as an intimate and total understanding of individualized mortal experience. What is important to remember is that the magnificence and centrality of the events of the Atonement are not the only aspect of Christ’s life that we must worship. His 33 years of mortal life, including the extremely important temptations in the desert and his 3-year ministry — all prior to Gethsemane — were a central part of his experiential learning. They were not irrelevant.

The take-away is that exactly *when* Jesus Christ empathically learned to succor us in our pains and afflictions is less important than the fact that he did so. And that fact is dominant in the chiasm of Alma 7:11–13. The possible surprise with which we started this section of the paper is the question of why the apex of the chiasm is *not* the intuitively expected message of his “mercy in succoring us.” We have hopefully addressed this first surprise by demonstrating that the apex of the “according to the flesh” detail is fully justified and completely fitting. The flesh was not just essential to one of the four aspects of the Atonement; it was essential to all four. All of this — all four aspects of the Atonement — were accomplished in one way, and one way only: through Christ’s voluntary condescension of taking on mortality “according to the flesh.” That is why the twinned apex of the chiasm points to that condescension into flesh as the essential point, or climax. It turns out that there is nothing surprising at all about what lies at the twin-apex of this chiasm. It is fitting, complete, and perfect that the twinned apex emphasizes that

his ability to succor, lift, and heal was accomplished only through and “according to the flesh.”

### The Covenantal Relationship in Alma 7:14–15

A second surprise at viewing Alma 7:11–13 in chiasmic form may be how abruptly it appears to end, at least on an initial reading. After verse 13, the topic of Alma’s sermon seems to switch dramatically and inexplicably. Alma first talked about the birth and atoning mission of Christ and how his taking on flesh provided the ability to provide succor. Then, all of a sudden, Alma bore a nine-word testimony and started talking about what may appear to be an entirely new topic. Suddenly, we are hearing about repentance and baptism. Why?

Compounding this sense that we are on to other things is that, of the many talks, lessons, books, and discussions of verses 11–13, almost none include any mention of the next two verses. The first set of verses (Alma 7:11–13) is presented as powerful and doctrinally saturated, which it is — but also as a gem that is isolated and self-contained, which it is not. Although everything seems to stop at the end of verse 13, that does not appear to be Alma’s intent. Rather, there appears to be a relationship with verses 14 and 15 that needs to be examined.

Before discussing that relationship, let me point out that the next two verses (Alma 7:14–15) present a powerful gem in their own right. Very notably, these two verses also form a second chiasm. The second chiasm is of a similar size, has a similar twin-apex structure, and enjoys a similar confidence or chiasticity as the first chiasm. There is little question about the authenticity of this second chiasm as a parallelistic unit. Again, this chiasm is not mine alone. It was also recognized and identified as a chiasm by two different scholars in two different studies by Alan C. Miner and by Donald W. Parry.<sup>88</sup>

- (7:14) A Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again;  
for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot  
inherit the kingdom of heaven;
- B therefore come and be baptized unto repentance,
- C that ye may be washed from your sins,
- D that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God,  
who taketh away the sins of the world,
- D<sub>2</sub> who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all  
unrighteousness.
- (7:15) C<sub>2</sub> Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay  
aside every sin, which easily doth beset you,  
which doth bind you down to destruction,



- B<sub>2</sub>        yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that  
                  ye are willing to repent of your sins
- A<sub>2</sub>        and enter into a covenant with him to keep his  
                  commandments, and witness it unto him this day by  
                  going into the waters of baptism.

In brief, step A<sub>1</sub> presents repentance and being born again, i.e., baptism, as the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. That is paired with step A<sub>2</sub>, which describes entering a covenant of keeping commandments through the witnessing ordinance of baptism or, being born again. Moving up to step B<sub>1</sub> we read a second emphasis on coming and being baptized unto repentance. That is paired with B<sub>2</sub>, which also lists coming forth as a demonstration of our willingness to repent. Moving up to step C<sub>1</sub>, we read of being washed from sin. Then, in C<sub>2</sub>, we are called upon to “lay aside every sin.” The apex, which is made up of the twin-D steps, pair the mission of the Lamb to take away every sin with the ability of Christ to save and cleanse from sin.

In sum, chiasm #2 is glorious and instructive in its own right. It is a call to action and brings to mind the choice that President Russell M. Nelson has clarified: “We can choose to be of Israel, or not. We can choose to let God prevail in our lives, or not. We can choose to let God be the most powerful influence in our lives, or not.”<sup>89</sup>

But what are we to make from the position of Chiasm #2, which directly and immediately follows Chiasm #1 with no break or commentary by Alma? These are not a chapter apart or even a dozen verses apart; they stand together. Just what is the relationship, if any, between these two chiasms? That there must be some relationship between the two is almost required by their proximity. Again, almost none of the plethora of statements and commentaries related to Chiasm #1 make any reference to Chiasm #2, which follows immediately.<sup>90</sup> One of two exceptions that I have found comes from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland who, based on the chapter and verse format, briefly alludes to a relationship. He merely notes that, “This doctrine [Alma 7:11–13] led Alma to invite his audience to lay claim to these blessings by being baptized unto repentance.”<sup>91</sup> John Welch offers a similar comment: “Alma encourages these people to come and be baptized.”<sup>92</sup> These are certainly true and correct observations, but they are limited and brief. And most commentators do not even mention a relationship, if they notice one.

It is my position that, as most scripture is layered, so there may be an even deeper layer here. A more profound relationship between Alma 7:11–13 and the following two verses seems to be powerfully

revealed when verses 14–15 are formatted with their parallelistic structure and considered as being in a relationship with verses 11–13. Then it becomes clear that these two chiasms stand as twin sentinels or gateways to eternal life.<sup>93</sup>

Chiasm #1 most heavily emphasizes the third aspect of Christ's great Atonement: his healing and succoring through his experiential knowledge gained in the flesh. In other words, Chiasm #1 could be seen as one side of a holy and binding covenant. This chiasm appears to be what *Christ* offers to *us*. "His spirit heals; it refines; it comforts; it breathes new life into hopeless hearts. It ... transform[s] all that is ugly and vicious and worthless in life to something of supreme and glorious splendor ... to convert the ashes of mortality to the beauties of eternity."<sup>94</sup> That is what Christ offers to us: the succoring healing of understanding and comfort.

Chiasm #2, on the other hand, could be seen as representing the other side of a two-part contract. Those two verses describe what *we* then offer to *Christ*: a broken and willing heart as demonstrated through the covenant of baptism. That word "willing" is easy to gloss over, but its importance cannot be overstressed. Willingness to believe and willingness to act on that belief is, in fact, the only thing that we *can* offer to Christ. In the words of Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "The submission of one's will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God's altar. ... And when we submit to His will, then we've really given Him the one thing He asks of us."<sup>95</sup>

As an important aside, Matthew Bowen, a scholar researching onomastic names in the Book of Mormon, has demonstrated that this concept of *willingness* has much greater significance than is normally recognized.<sup>96</sup> In the latter part of the Book of Mormon, Helaman's sons, Nephi and Lehi, devoted themselves to preaching and were quickly cast into prison with 300 others who were Lamanites or Nephite dissenters. They were soon "encircled about as if by fire ... [and] were overshadowed with a cloud of darkness" (Helaman 5:28). Seeing this, and hearing a voice, several prisoners cried out, "What do all these things mean?" One of the Nephite dissenters replied that they "must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ" (Helaman 5:41). He and the others immediately did so and soon felt the unspeakable joy of the Holy Spirit (Helaman 5:44–45). The 300 were then called to "go forth" among their people and share "all the things which they had heard and seen." Before long "the more part of the Lamanites were convinced." A brief Edenic state was created, and the Lord began to pour out his Spirit. We

are told that this took place “because of their easiness and *willingness* to believe in his words” (Helaman 6:36). Bowen points out that the otherwise minor character, the Nephite dissenter who facilitated this change of heart, had his name specifically identified by Mormon. Why? The man’s name was Aminadab. This was a Semitic/Hebrew-origin name made up of *‘ammî* or “my people” plus *nādāb* or “*willing*.” Bowen concludes that Mormon’s word choice in 6:36 (the *willingness* of the people) and his using Aminadab’s name (meaning “my people are *willing*”) was a “deliberate” association to underscore the covenantal relationship in the account.<sup>97</sup>

Returning to Alma’s sermon, it is highly significant that Alma used all three terms, *willing*, *covenant*, and *baptism*, in a single verse (Alma 7:15). Note that, although the actual word *willing* is used only one time in Chiasm #2, the *concept* of willingness is implicit in *every level* of the chiasm. This is reminiscent of Mosiah’s profound words that we must, like a child, be “*willing* to submit to all things which the Lords seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19). In effect, Alma is telling us that we must be:

1. *willing* to “repent and be born again” — the A steps
2. *willing* to “come and be baptized” — the B steps
3. *willing* to “be washed from your [past] sins” and “lay aside future] sins” — the C steps
4. *willing* to “have faith on the Lamb of God” — the D steps

That, then, is the covenantal relationship:

- He will run to succor us with mercy (Chiasm #1)
- We must run to him with repentant and *willing* hearts (Chiasm #2).

The status of these two chiasms as independent units, but ones that are intimately related to each other, is further illustrated by the word choices that Alma uses. Notice that Chiasm #1 begins by using the third-person pronoun. Alma teaches that: “*he* will take upon him,” “*his* people,” “*their* infirmities,” and so on. This continues down to and including Alma 7:13: “take upon *him*,” “blot out *their* infirmities,” “*his* deliverance,” etc. (This also indicates that verse 13 is truly a part of the three-verse unit of Alma 7:11–13.) Then, in verse 14, the text switches to the second-person pronoun. Alma now preaches: “say unto *you*” “*ye* must repent,” “*ye* may be washed,” and the like. Again, this seems to indicate two separate and distinct, but closely related, units: Chiasm #1 is what *he* does; Chiasm #2 is what *you* — actually, we — do in return.

Additional evidence should not be needed, but there is one more piece that can be presented. That this two-way commitment is, in fact, a covenantal relationship is proven by the very words of Alma himself. In Alma 7:15 he calls it exactly that, asking us to “enter into a *covenant* with him” (step A<sub>2</sub>). What better proof can there be than that? Why would Alma use the word *covenant* unless the two sides of the two-way agreement constituted a covenantal relationship and the terms of that covenant were articulated somewhere? And they are. They are just harder to see in chapter-and-verse format than they are in parallelistic format because they are interrupted, if I may use that word, by Alma’s brief, nine-word testimony that is tagged on to the end of Alma 7:13: “and, behold, this is the testimony which is in me.” It certainly sounds like that is a conclusion, so we tend to stop reading or at least think that particular message is finished. But, no, it is at the end of *verse 15* that the message concludes — *not* at the end of verse 13.

Then, in verse 16, Alma has an opportunity to provide a commentary on this covenantal relationship. He begins by saying, “And whosoever doeth this...” Doeth what? Be baptized? Well, of course. But surely that is only part of it. It is only the second of the four “willingnesses” requested of us. Is he not really saying, “And whosoever doeth this,” meaning, entereth into this covenant? The covenant includes Christ’s side, consisting of his majestic gift so beautifully described in Chiasm #1. The four “willingnesses” — especially baptism — are our side of the two-way covenant.

But this is not all. Alma then issues a parallel statement addressed to “the same,” meaning the ones who enter into this covenant:

will remember that *I say* unto him (present tense),  
yea, he will remember that *I have said* unto him (past tense)

But, say what? Said what? That Christ will add nothing less than “eternal life” (Alma 7:16). The repeat of the phrase “will remember” followed by the present tense “say” and the past tense “said” seems to be saying that this offer is not new; it is a renewal of a truth that has always existed. If we enter into this covenant and “keep the commandments of God from thenceforth” (Alma 7:16), we will be granted eternal life. This is an additional manifestation of the Abrahamic Covenant and the New and Everlasting Covenant: We choose Him to be our God through baptism and to serve only him; he will choose us to be his chosen people and pour blessing out upon us, most notably, eternal life.

Interestingly, there is no future tense mentioned — “*I will say*.” Perhaps this suggests that a time will come when that covenant opportunity will

no longer be available. That could be because an individual has had his or her opportunity and wasted it, an individual is “past feeling,”<sup>98</sup> or the covenant is no longer available because of some future event such as the final judgment.

The word “remember” (significantly repeated twice) also brings to mind the sacrament ordinances. In the prayers for both the bread and the water, participants renew their covenant “in remembrance” of the body or blood of the Son and promise that they will “always remember him” (repeated twice in each blessing — Moroni 4:3, 5:2; D&C 20:77, 79). As an important addition, the covenantal wording of the blessing over the bread also shares with 7:15 the comforting concept of being “willing to take upon you the name of Christ.” Willingness is enough — there is no expectation of needing to have already fully taken on the name of Christ or being fully repentant. The essence is that we are *willing*. This similarity in wording of “remember” and “willing” is further evidence that we are looking at a covenantal relationship in the association of these two chiasms.

### **The Conference Aftermath in Alma 7:17–27**

After Alma 7:16, Alma’s sermon is over. Although there are 10 verses remaining in the chapter, the main message has been delivered. That’s not to say that the last 10 verses are not important, because they are. But the core doctrine has been revealed; the invitation to the covenant has been issued, and it is time for closing comments.<sup>99</sup> In saying this, note that Alma 7 is all we have of what was actually a longer sermon. We are explicitly told that Alma “taught the people of Gideon many things which cannot be written” and that he “established the order of the church” (Alma 8:1). How interesting and enlightening it would be to have more of what Alma shared with the people.

That Alma is now beginning the summation of his sermon is indicated by the first words of Alma 7:17: “And now my beloved brethren...” That sounds like a wrap-up, and Alma, indeed, closes down the meeting by saying that he knows, through inspiration — “the manifestation of the Spirit” (Alma 7:17) — that his audience in Gideon believes in the covenant he has just described. He adds that he expected as much (Alma 7:18) and knows that the people of Gideon are “in the paths of righteousness” (Alma 7:19).<sup>100</sup> However, Alma drops in another point of doctrinal significance when he bears his testimony that, once a covenant has been delivered and accepted, God cannot break *his* side:

He cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the *right* to the left, or from that which is *right* to that which is wrong. (Alma 7:20)

On the face of it, Alma's testimony about this truth is straightforward. It is interesting to note, however, that the word, right, has an additional symbolic meaning. The right hand is generally considered to be, symbolically, the "covenant" hand.<sup>101</sup> Russell M. Nelson has noted that "the right hand suggests symbolic favor."<sup>102</sup> The right hand is the hand used in ordinances like baptism, sacrament, sustainings/oaths, and various temple rites. The importance of the right hand was scripturally demonstrated by the Master when he wrote:

He shall set his sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:33–34, 41)

At a symbolic level, then, Alma is saying that God doesn't have the slightest hint or shadow of abandoning the *covenant* he has just offered — the "right" — by going to the left. Neither will he abandon the *covenant* — the "right" — and turn to that which is wrong (Alma 7:20).<sup>103</sup> About covenants, Christ revealed to Joseph Smith that, "all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and *covenant* of my Father, which *he cannot break, neither can it be moved*" (D&C 84:40). We can count on Christ, the King, to honor 100% of his side of the covenant. The only question is our side. We can be assured that, if anyone is going to break the covenant, it will be on the human and mortal side. That is always the case, as is proven again and again throughout the pages of scripture.<sup>104</sup> "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14; D&C 121:34).

Alma then continued: "And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God" (Alma 7:21). God "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."<sup>105</sup> If we abandon our side of the covenant and by so doing become filthy or unclean, God is no longer bound, and we no longer qualify for the blessing of that covenant. At that point, "he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness" (Alma 7:21). For that reason, Alma warns, we must not enter into the covenant lightly. He wants to "awaken

you to a sense of your duty to God” to “walk blameless before him ... after the holy order of God” (Alma 7:22). The acceptance of our side of the covenantal relationship thus creates a sacred and serious obligation. By assuming that covenantal responsibility, we are expected to take on various virtues, which are listed in verses 23–24.<sup>106</sup>

At this point, Alma ends with what may well be viewed as the equivalent of a pre-Christ (and therefore, pre-apostles) “apostolic blessing.” He begins by blessing them that the Lord will “keep [their] garments spotless” (Alma 7:25). Notice that it is the Lord who makes and keeps our garments spotless, not us. He does that through the merits of the Atonement, conditional on our repentance. Having spotless garments by virtue of the Atonement, we may then sit down with the fathers of old (Alma 7:25) in the kingdom of heaven. He calls for the “peace of God” to rest upon them, their possessions, and their families (Alma 7:27). Alma then ends this magnificent sermon of our covenantal relationship with God and Christ with the terminal statement: “And thus I have spoken. Amen.”

### Summary and Conclusions

Alma 7:11–13 is usually treated as a stand-alone and doctrinally-rich single unit. These comforting verses have offered hope and solace to millions of faithful truth-seekers for almost 200 years. Some readers recognize that they form a complete chiasm. Surprisingly, though, the mention of the welcome succoring of human suffering does not form the apex of the chiasm. As I have pointed out, the twin-apex in F is, instead, the fact that Christ accomplished all “according to the flesh.” That life-long condescension constitutes the *mechanism* by which the succor comes. I have further demonstrated why this non-intuitive emphasis on the flesh is actually more appropriate and fitting than an emphasis on his succoring human pains and infirmities would have been.

Finally, I have also addressed a second possible surprise in Alma 7. Alma closed the first chiasm with the phrase “and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.” This testimonial phrase has led some students of the Book of Mormon to the perception that the door shuts at that point and the sermon has concluded. Consequently, writers, teachers, and speakers have tended to treat Alma 7:11–13 as an independent unit.<sup>107</sup> However, building upon their appreciation of the contribution of these verses, I have suggested that there is also great value in conceptualizing this chiasm as one side of an even larger unit. There is a second chiasm in Alma 7:14–15 which can be added to the chiasm of Alma 7:11–13, thereby

creating one even larger parallelistic structure. Taken together, the two chiasms can be viewed as two sides of a single two-way covenantal relationship. Chiasm #1 provides what Christ offers to us; Chiasm #2 provides what we can offer to Christ.

Elder Michael John U. Teh, a General Authority Seventy, shared in a General Conference address, “As I studied and pondered, I came to the stark realization that what I know about the Savior greatly outweighed how much I really know Him. . . . Understanding that the Atonement of Jesus Christ applies to us personally and individually will help us know Him.”<sup>108</sup> Recognizing the importance of Christ’s experiences “according to the flesh” and seeing the totality of all five verses as one comprehensive covenantal relationship (Alma 7:11–15) helps us do just that.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 302n24.
- 2 It is certain that the chapter is self-contained for six reasons: First, the previous chapter closes with Mormon’s colophon that uses



the terminal phrase, “And thus it is written. Amen” (Alma 6:8). Second, the heading in the current edition of the Book of Mormon, translated by Joseph Smith and shown in the Printer’s Manuscript, introduces the next unit of text as a single chapter. Third, Chapter 7 begins with an opening salutation written in the first person (Alma 6 and 8 are in the third person): “Behold my beloved brethren...” Fourth, the conclusion of chapter 7 is: “And thus I have spoken. Amen” (Alma 7:27). Fifth, Chapter 8, written in the third person, then opens with the transitioning phrase “And now it came to pass that...” (Alma 8:1). Sixth, the same sentence of that new chapter tells the reader that “Alma returned from the land of Gideon, after having taught the people ... to rest himself from the labors which he had performed” (Alma 8:1). For those reasons, we can examine Chapter 7 as a stand-alone sermon.

- 3 This was many years ago and I was only a child at the time. My memory may be wrong and/or the teacher may have been mistaken in how she represented the doctrine of her particular church. I am in no way suggesting that all churches other than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teach of a punitive Christ. But the point is that I came away having internalized a somewhat Calvinistic perspective of a condemning Jesus.
- 4 This same lesson is briefly taught in other scriptures. It is *Satan* who is the “accuser” (Rev 12:10), not Jesus Christ. By contrast, the role of *Christ* is to be your “advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him” (D&C 45:3).
- 5 Fiona Givens and Terryl Givens, *The Christ who Heals: How God Restored the Truth That Saves Us* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 47.
- 6 Interestingly, the Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon used the phrase “suffer his people.” See “Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa August 1829–circa January 1830,” Joseph Smith Papers, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, updated April 13, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/190>. According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary, “suffer” includes the sense of “to support; to sustain,” but it is not clear if that means sustaining in oneself or in others. “Suffer,” Webster’s Dictionary 1828, American Dictionary of the English Language, <http://www.webstersdictionary1828.com/>

Dictionary/suffer. The 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon used this phrase, “suffer his people.” In the 1837 publication, while Joseph Smith was still alive and almost certainly involved in the decision, the phrase was changed to “succor his people.” It has remained so in all publications since. In a detailed discussion of this word, Royal Skousen expressed his opinion as follows: “The earliest reading (‘how to **suffer** his people according to their infirmities’) does not make much sense, especially in context. The most reasonable emendation is *succor*.” See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, pt. 3, *Mosiah 14-Alma 17* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2014), 1721; <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/atv/p3/>; emphasis in original. Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines succor as, “Literally, to run to, or run to support; hence, to help or relieve when in difficulty, want or distress; to assist and deliver from suffering.” “Succor,” Webster’s Dictionary 1828, American Dictionary of the English Language, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Succor>. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “To succor means to ‘run to.’ I testify that in my fears and in my infirmities the Savior has surely run to me.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “He Hath Filled the Hungry with Good Things,” *Ensign* 27, no. 11 (November 1997), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1997/11/he-hath-filled-the-hungry-with-good-things>.

- 7 Gerald N. Lund, “Knowest Thou the Condescension of God?,” in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon: The 1991 Sperry Symposium*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 89.
- 8 Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 224.
- 9 The scriptures call it the “bands of death,” but many writers, including President Gordon B. Hinckley, call it the “bonds of death.” See Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Victory over Death,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1985/05/the-victory-over-death>. The Book of Mormon refers to “bands” fourteen times with two of those usages being to “bands of death” (Alma 7:12 and Alma 11:42). (It also refers to “bands of iniquity” one time — Mosiah 23:12). However, it refers

to “bonds” nine times with no references to “bonds of death” (but five references to “bonds of iniquity” — Mosiah 23:13 and 7:29; Alma 41:11; Mormon 8:31; and Moroni 8:14). Are bands and bonds synonyms or is there a subtle nuance of meaning?

- 10 Interestingly, some of the many materials discussing Alma 7 cite only verses 11 and 12, leaving out verse 13, even though verse 13 seems to obviously be a part of this comforting triad. An example of seeing a message in 11–12 but skipping 13 can be seen in H. Clay Gorton, *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1997), 187. Perhaps verse 13 is seen by some as a mere redundancy. It is not, as I will explain later in this paper. Another example is the *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121–122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 182–183, which discusses verses 11–12 as a single unit, excluding verse 13.
- 11 These terms were taken from Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, “Truth or Cherry Picking: A Statistical Approach to Chiastic Intentionality,” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John Welch and Donald Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 311–17. See, also, Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, “Does Chiasmus Appear in the Book of Mormon by Chance?,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2004): 103–30. It is acknowledged that some enthusiastic and well-intentioned scholars have imagined Hebrew parallelisms where they do not exist. For that reason, a recent effort has been to determine whether a proposed chiastic unit possesses a sufficiently “high value of chiasticity” to be accepted as the intent of the original ancient writer. The term “chiasticity” was used by Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), xii, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/61>.
- 12 Alan C. Miner, *Step by Step Through the Book of Mormon: A Covenant Record of Christ’s People, Vol. 4a: Text* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central and Cedar Fort, 2017), 102, <https://stepbystep.alancminer.com/alma7>, updated Jan 2021. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 241. Note that when viewed as a chiasm, verse 13 is revealed to be an essential part of the overall structure.
- 13 See “What Did Alma Reveal about the Savior’s Mission?,” KnowWhys, Book of Mormon Central, June 7, 2017,

<https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/what-did-alma-reveal-about-the-saviors-mission>.

- 14 Another problem with Parry's positioning of the phrase along with "infirmities" is that it seems to make this important phrase of the "Spirit knoweth all things" into an unrelated after-thought. Further, it disrupts the symmetry of the D steps, which pair human infirmities.
- 15 See "What Did Alma Reveal," Book of Mormon Central.
- 16 Neal Rappleye, "Chiasmus Criteria in Review" in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John Welch and Donald Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 289–309.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., 292.
- 19 Ibid., 293.
- 20 Ibid., 295.
- 21 Ibid., 301.
- 22 R. Val Johnson, "The Purpose of Life," *Ensign* 24, no. 4 (April 1993), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/04/the-purpose-of-life>.
- 23 Henry B. Eyring, "Education for Real Life," *Ensign* 32, no. 10 (October 2002), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/10/education-for-real-life>.
- 24 Russell M. Nelson, "Education: A Religious Responsibility," Devotionals, Brigham Young University-Idaho, January 26, 2010, [www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2010\\_01\\_26\\_Nelson.htm](http://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2010_01_26_Nelson.htm).
- 25 Robert L. Millet, "The Regeneration of Fallen Man" in *Nurturing Faith Through the Book of Mormon: The 24th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 120–21, 124.
- 26 This concept is widely known and repeated but recent scholarship calls this into question (see, for example, Lana Burgess, "What Percentage of Our Brain Do We Use?," *Medical News Today*, Red Ventures, February 27, 2018, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/321060#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20survey%20from,brain%20is%20almost%20always%20active>).

- 27 Hugh Nibley made this point very clearly in Hugh W. Nibley, “Zeal Without Knowledge” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 263.
- 28 Calling the divine Christ a *brother* has been debated in the Church. Some find it a logical extension of our shared relationship through having the same Heavenly Parents. They point to a few New Testament verses that hint at that relationship (for example, Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:11, and Mark 3:34). The term *brother* has been increasingly used in General Conference and elsewhere. For example, Elder McConkie called him “...our Elder Brother in the spirit.” Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 462. President Gordon B. Hinckley called him “our Elder Brother.” Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 324. Similarly, Tad Callister writes, “Our Lord is a personal, loving, caring God who is our friend, our brother, our advocate, and our Savior.” Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 207. Terryl Givens writes, “Jesus is the firstborn in the world of spirits, and thus elder brother as well as savior to the human family.” Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 268. However, others find the term to be diminutive, even bordering on disrespectful. Joseph Smith never used the title and church leaders only began expressing that he was our “elder brother” slowly over the years. In a lecture dated February 17, 1989, Robert Matthews taught, “In the Book of Mormon, Christ is God. He is not simply a mortal, a great teacher, a Friend of Mankind. He is God. ...he isn’t so much man’s brother, he is man’s God.” Robert Matthews, *Some Thoughts on the Atonement* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 17. For a history of the use of this title, see Corbin Volluz, “Jesus Christ as Elder Brother,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2006): 141–58.
- 29 D&C 93:13–14 teaches that Jesus “received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first.” The “first” can be read two ways: premortal

- or early mortal. The first supports the argument, the second does not.
- 30 John Claybaugh, “Come, Follow Me – Study and Teaching Helps Lesson 22, June 1–7, Alma 5–7,” The Interpreter Foundation, May 26, 2020, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/cfm-study-and-teaching-helps-bom-lesson-22>, emphasis added.
  - 31 Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 417.
  - 32 Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1985/04/willing-to-submit>.
  - 33 Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 223–24.
  - 34 Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, 209.
  - 35 Russell M. Nelson, “The Correct Name of the Church,” *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2019), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/the-correct-name-of-the-church>, emphasis original.
  - 36 Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, 83.
  - 37 See Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign* 47, no. 5 (May 2017), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2017/04/drawing-the-power-of-jesus-christ-into-our-lives>.
  - 38 Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, 140. Note that in attempting to understand, I am acutely aware of the danger pointed out by Truman Madsen, who wrote, “Any theology which teaches that there were some thing[s] he did *not* suffer is [a] falsification of his life. He knew them all.” I am absolutely *not* suggesting that there were conditions that Christ did not experience; I am only trying to understand the mechanism by which he may have accomplished this incomprehensible task. (Truman Madsen quoted in Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, 209).
  - 39 See, also, Russell M. Nelson, “With God Nothing Shall be Impossible,” *Ensign* 18, no. 5 (May 1988), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1988/04/with-god-nothing-shall-be-impossible>.
  - 40 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13 (Liverpool, England: Stationers’ Hall, reprinted 1966, orig. 1869): 140.

- 41 James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977), 220.
- 42 According to the version in the JST, Jesus actually said to “go with him a mile.” That would still be complying with the law. For a discussion of the difference between the KJV and the JST versions, see Daniel K Judd, “Success and the Second Mile,” in *Moral Foundations: Standing Firm in a World of Shifting Values*, ed. Douglas E. Brinley, Perry W. Carter, and James K. Archibald (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University), 143–56, <https://rsc.byu.edu/moral-foundations-standing-firm-world-shifting-values/success-second-mile>.
- 43 McConkie addresses an academic controversy among some Christians as to whether Christ, as a divine being, was peccable (able to sin) or impeccable (unable to sin) and debunks it, concluding that “Our Lord, as a mortal was subject to the same laws of trial and testing that govern all mortals.” (See McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 405–406). Elder Howard W. Hunter agreed, teaching that “it is important to remember that Jesus was capable of sinning, that he could have succumbed, that the plan of life and salvation could have been foiled, but that he remained true. Had there been no possibility of his yielding to the enticement of Satan, there would have been no real test, no genuine victory in the result. If he had been stripped of the faculty to sin, he would have been stripped of his very agency.” See Howard W. Hunter, “The Temptations of Christ,” *Ensign* 6, no. 11 (November 1976), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/11/the-temptations-of-christ>.
- 44 McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 417–18, emphasis added.
- 45 The number 40 is generally accepted as a symbolic number and is usually used in a metaphorical sense in scripture. It occurs around 150 times in the Bible alone. Alonzo Gaskill demonstrates that the number 40 “represents a period of trial, testing, probation, or mourning,” so its appropriateness as a description of a period of temptation for Christ is a perfect fit. See Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 137. Though the number 40 is a symbolic number, it almost always corresponds either closely or exactly with its literal counterpart. For example, Christ’s mortal body lay in the tomb for

- 3 days (another symbolic number) and the number 40 would not be used for that description of time; the account would not read that he lay in the tomb 40 days. Thus, we can be confident that if Jesus's fast in the desert was not exactly 40 days, it was at least significantly longer than a human could go without food or water.
- 46 McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 411.
- 47 Ancient Hebrew had no punctuation. Although the translators of the King James version of Isaiah 9:6 placed a comma between the words “wonderful” and “counselor,” other versions correctly omit the comma. An examination of this verse shows that the term “wonderful counselor” was but one of a string of nouns accompanied by an adjective. He was a “mighty God,” an “everlasting Father, and a peaceful Prince (“Prince of Peace”) as well as a “wonderful counselor.” That he was *wonderful* is a given, but “wonderful” is not one of the names of Christ, it is one of his attributes, and it is an adjective. That errant comma was cemented in place by Handel's famous 1741 oratorio, “Messiah,” which created an incorrect title for Christ in the minds of tens of millions of music lovers.
- 48 David O. McKay, “General Conference,” *Conference Reports* (October 1911), 59, <https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1911sa/page/n61/mode/2up>, emphases in the original.
- 49 “The Meaning of *min* in the Hebrew Old Testament,” BioLogos, July 21, 2012, <https://biologos.org/articles/the-meaning-of-min-in-the-hebrew-old-testament/>. Note that the match with Alma 7:11 is not perfect since BioLogos points out that *min*, at least in the Old Testament, is “applied only to living creatures as described in the Bible. It is never applied to people, abstract concepts, or nonliving objects.” It is not clear if that is some kind of rule or merely an observation of usage. In Alma 7:11, of course, the reference is to a divine but temporarily mortal “person” of Christ and to the abstract concepts of afflictions and suffering.
- 50 Examples of these include Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), which was made into a popular movie, and Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text That Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary the Magdalene* (New York: Pegasus, 2014).



- 51 Christopher James Blythe, “Was Jesus Married?,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2021): 75. Also see “Mormonism and the Question of Whether or Not Jesus Christ was Married,” FAIR Answers Wiki, Faithful Answers, Informed Response (FAIR), [https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Jesus\\_Christ/Was\\_Jesus\\_married](https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Jesus_Christ/Was_Jesus_married).
- 52 Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 208, emphasis in original.
- 53 This was specifically proscribed by prophecy (see John 19:32–36).
- 54 Joseph Smith taught as much when he declared in the King Follett discourse, “You have got to learn how to be gods yourselves ... by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one.” Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 346–47. Apostle B. H. Roberts stated, “There is a longer time — eternity — in which to arrive at the result; and ... bring to pass the necessary development.” B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God: Volume 1 – Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1911), 459, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/evidence-divine-inspiration-joseph-smith-derived-prophet%E2%80%99s-teaching-regard-extent-universe>. Brigham Young presented similar ideas on several occasions: “There is an eternity of mystery to be unfolded to us; and when we have lived millions of years in the presence of God and angels ... shall we then cease learning? No, or eternity ceases. There is no end.” Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6 (Liverpool, England: Stationers’ Hall, reprinted 1966, orig. 1859): 344. He further taught: “When they have passed the veil, they will then understand that they have but just commenced to learn. ... We had been but children thus far, babies just commencing to learn the things which pertain to the eternities of the Gods. We might ask, when shall we cease to learn? I will give you my opinion about it: never, never.” John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 249.
- 55 McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 417.
- 56 Robert L. Millet, “Foreword,” in Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, ix.
- 57 Earlier, I stressed the seriousness of the Lord’s three temptations in the desert and opined that we sometimes overlook those

temptations in discussions of Christ's suffering. Note that the chiasm in Alma 7:11–13 does not overlook that aspect; it is referenced in step A<sub>1</sub> (Alma 7:11).

- 58 For an intense but graphic description of the scourging, see William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (March 1986). They write that "pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. ... Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical." Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, "Physical Death of Jesus Christ," 1457–58.
- 59 As medical practitioners, Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer are qualified to determine that "the actual cause of Jesus' death ... may have been multifactorial and related primarily to hypovolemic shock, exhaustion asphyxia, and perhaps acute heart failure. ... Thus, it remains unsettled whether Jesus died of cardiac rupture or of cardiorespiratory failure. ... Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side ... perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart." *Ibid.*, 1463. A different diagnosis was offered by Reid Litchfield, an LDS endocrinologist, who examined and refuted several competing theories and built a convincing case that death resulted from cardiac arrhythmia, specifically of ventricular fibrillation. W. Reid Litchfield, "The Search for the Physical Cause of Jesus Christ's Death," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1997): 93–109. It was the opinion of Elder James Talmage that "the Lord Jesus died of a broken heart." He added that the evidence pointed to "a physical rupture of the heart as the direct cause of death." James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 668–69. It is important to note, though, that while these physical conditions may have been the *physical mechanisms* by which his mortal body died, none of them would have been sufficient to kill Jesus unless he had allowed it. He had power given to him to lay down his life — no man took it from him (John 10:18).
- 60 John Hilton III, *Considering the Cross: How Calvary Connects Us with Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 85.

- 61 For an example of a lay-oriented and story-illustrated discussion, see Brad Wilcox, *The Continuous Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009). For a doctrinal-rich explanation, the modern classic is Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*. For a book that re-emphasizes the role of Golgotha or Calvary, see Hilton, *Considering the Cross*. For a book that focuses on Christ as a Healer, see Givens and Givens, *The Christ who Heals*.
- 62 A similar teaching to Alma 7:11–13 is briefly mentioned by the Apostle Paul when he writes, “For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). In the same epistle, Paul adds, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the *feeling* of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15, emphasis added).
- 63 Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 113, emphasis added.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 223, emphasis added.
- 65 Boyd K. Packer, “The Touch of the Master’s Hand,” *Ensign* 31, no. 5 (May 2001), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2001/04/the-touch-of-the-masters-hand>.
- 66 John W. Welch, *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 567–68. Alma may have known better than most just what it felt to be rescued from such things when he was “harrowed up” (plowed up and turned over) under the pains he endured (Alma 36:12).
- 67 Millet, “Regeneration of Fallen Man,” p. 135.
- 68 See also Ephesians 3:9; Moses 2:1; Mosiah 3:8; Abraham 3:24; and others.
- 69 Boyd K. Packer, “The Savior’s Selfless and Sacred Sacrifice,” *Ensign* 45, no. 4 (April 2015), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/04/the-saviors-selfless-and-sacred-sacrifice>.
- 70 Hinckley, *Teachings*, 330.
- 71 Richard G. Scott, “The Atonement Can Secure Your Peace and Happiness,” *Ensign* 36, no. 11 (November 2006), emphasis added, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2006/11/the-atonement-can-secure-your-peace-and-happiness.html?lang=eng#title1>.
- 72 See also Isaiah 55:1 and James E. Faust, “The Supernal Gift of the Atonement,” *Ensign* 18, no. 11 (November 1988),

- <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/11/the-supernal-gift-of-the-atonement>.
- 73 Susan Easton Black makes the point that “he is a living God, a God who possesses a body. . . . The reason God was seen in the form of a man is that he is a man. . . . References to God’s having body parts occur 283 times in the Book of Mormon.” Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 52.
- 74 Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign* 25, no. 11 (November 1995), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/11/perfection-pending>.
- 75 An important caveat is that pre-mortal Christ (Jehovah) could have known how humankind felt through inspiration and revelation. This concept was taught by President Henry B. Eyring in a Conference address in 2009. He explained that “He knows, from experience, how to heal and help us. . . . He could have known how to succor us simply by revelation, but He chose to learn by His own personal experience.” Henry B. Eyring, “Adversity,” *Ensign* 39, no. 5 (May 2009), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2009/05/adversity>. John Welch reiterated that point when he wrote that “Christ could have received this knowledge of suffering by revelation, because we know we can know things by the spirit. However, he *chose* to suffer. To me, this is the Savior going the second mile. Alma emphasized that Jesus would know all this, not only by the Spirit, but also ‘according to the flesh’ (7:12, 13). To make that choice, Jesus wanted to know exactly how it would feel, not just an impression of the spirit, what it would be like, and how we too, in a mortal state, would feel.” Welch, *Notes*, 569.
- 76 McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 417, emphasis added.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 454–56, emphasis added.
- 78 Millet, “Regeneration of Fallen Man,” 122.
- 79 Merrill J. Bateman, “A Pattern for All,” *Ensign* 35, no. 11 (November 2005), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2005/11/a-pattern-for-all>.
- 80 Hilton, *Considering the Cross*, 82.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 83, emphasis added.

- 82 John Hilton III and Joshua P. Barringer, “The Use of *Gethsemane* by Church Leaders, 1859–2018,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 74.
- 83 Jean B. Bingham, “That Your Joy Might be Full,” *Ensign* 47, no. 11 (November 2017), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2017/11/contents>.
- 84 In fact, Hilton points out, “The phrase ‘go forth’ suggests not a one-time event but a continual suffering throughout life.” Hilton, *Considering the Cross*, 81n18.
- 85 Richard C. Edgley, “The Condescension of God,” *Ensign* 31, no. 12 (December 2001), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2001/12/the-condescension-of-god>.
- 86 1 Nephi 11:16–17. Lund writes, “One could expect that all mankind would hail him; that kings, potentates, and rulers from every country would come to pay him homage; that they would bring him gifts of wealth, power, prestige, and national alliances. . . . But instead he was born in a tiny village in the hill country of Judea. Only shepherds, a few wise men, and an old man and woman at the temple were chosen to herald his birth. The only political ruler who did take note of the birth ordered him killed.” Lund, “Knowest Thou the Condescension,” 84–85.
- 87 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 88 Miner, *Step by Step*, 4a:100 and Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 241–42. H. Clay Gorton attempts to make a complete chiasm out of just verse 14 (see Gorton, *A New Witness*, 187).
- 89 Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* (November 2020), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/11/46nelson>. This is the essence of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is the same as the New and Everlasting Covenant: We choose Him to be our God and to serve only him; he will choose us to be his chosen people and pour blessings out upon us.
- 90 For two simple examples of this rigid separation, see Claybaugh, “Come, Follow Me Alma 5–7” and Church of Jesus Christ, *Book of Mormon Student Manual*, 183.
- 91 Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 113.
- 92 Welch, *Notes*,” 569. There may be other sources that discuss a relationship, but I am currently not aware of them.

- 93 That 7:11–15 comprised two chiasmic parallelisms was also recognized by Donald Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, 241–42.
- 94 Callister, *The Infinite Atonement*, 206–207.
- 95 Neal A. Maxwell, “Sharing Insights from My Life,” Speeches, Brigham Young University, January 12, 1999, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/Neal-A-Maxwell/sharing-insights-life/>.
- 96 Matthew L. Bowen, “‘My People Are Willing’: The Mention of Aminadab in the Narrative Context of Helaman 5–6,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 83–107.
- 97 As a related point, no unlearned 24-year-old New York farm boy could possibly have guessed the association of Aminadab with the “willingness” in Helaman 6:36. In Hugh Nibley’s words, “the coincidences begin to pile up in a spectacular manner.” See “I Have a Question: What, Exactly, Is the Purpose and Significance of the Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham?,” *Ensign* 6, no. 3 (March 1976), <https://abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1976/03/i-have-a-question/i-have-a-question>.
- 98 1 Nephi 17:45; Ephesians 4:19; Moroni 9:20.
- 99 Alan Miner calls this section, “Alma’s Commendation and Final Charge to the Covenant People of Gideon.” Miner, *Step by Step*, 4a:100.
- 100 For a discussion of the three paths mentioned by Alma in this verse — the “path of righteousness,” “the path which leads to the kingdom of God,” and the path that is “straight” — see “Why Does Alma Mention Three Kinds of Paths in One Verse?,” KnoWhys, Book of Mormon Central, June 3, 2016, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-does-alma-mention-three-kinds-of-paths-in-one-verse>.
- 101 Alonzo Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 157.
- 102 Russell M. Nelson, “Is It Necessary to Take the Sacrament with One’s Right Hand? Does It Really Make Any Difference Which Hand Is Used?,” *Ensign* 13, no. 3 (March 1983); [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1983/03/i-have-a-question/is-it-necessary-to-take-the-sacrament-with-ones-right-hand](https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1983/03/i-have-a-question/is-it-necessary-to-take-the-sacrament-with-ones-right-hand).

- 103 Note that the thoughts of the Lord not having a shadow of “turning from the right to the left” or “from that which is right to that which is wrong” was recognized as a parallel concept by Alan Miner (Miner, *Step by Step*, 4a:102). If correct, that implicitly associates “right” with “right” and “left” with “wrong.” The 1828 dictionary in use at the time of Joseph Smith offers one definition of “right” as, “In morals and religion, just; equitable; accordant to the standard of truth and justice or the will of God.” “Right,” Webster’s Dictionary 1828, American Dictionary of the English Language, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Right>.
- 104 Mankind’s breaking of sacred covenants permeates the scriptures from the Old Testament’s continual abandonment of God by the House of Israel, through the developing apostasy in the New Testament, to the pride cycle of the Book of Mormon. Many of the key Restoration figures also fell by the wayside and left the Church after abandoning their covenants. Perhaps that is best illustrated in the Doctrine and Covenants by the case of James Covell, who withdrew from his covenant after just one day. About Covell, the Lord revealed, “He broke my covenant, and it remaineth with me to do with him as seemeth me good. Amen” (D&C 40:3).
- 105 D&C 1:31; see also Alma 45:16.
- 106 Hugh Nibley emphasizes that the items in this list “aren’t acts [behaviors and works]; these are states of mind.” Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1993), 299.
- 107 See, for example, Claybaugh, “Come, Follow Me Alma 5–7,” and “What Did Alma Reveal,” Book of Mormon Central.
- 108 Michael John U. Teh, “Our Personal Savior,” *Liahona* (May 2021), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2021/05/48teh>. This is similar to David A. Bednar’s powerful sermon “If Ye Had Known Me,” *Ensign* 46, no. 11 (November 2016), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2016/11/sunday-afternoon-session/if-ye-had-known-me.html?lang=eng#title1>.