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The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

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Abstract: Nineteen papers on a variety of topics related to the largest book in the Book of Mormon, Alma, make up this volume. These topics include the relevance of the book of Alma to our modern situation, classic discourses of Alma the Younger, the doctrinal and spiritual understanding afforded by Alma's counsel to his son Corianton, and an enlightening look at the anti-Christ Korihor. The missionary experiences of the sons of Mosiah and Captain Moroni are also discussed. The conclusions drawn in these papers reflect the authors' testimony of what Alma himself knew to be true: that God's word has—and always will have—"a great tendency to lead the people to do that which [is] just."



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The Book of Mormon:

*ALMA,
The Testimony
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The Word*

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The Book of Mormon:

*ALMA,
The Testimony
Of
The Word*

Papers from the Sixth Annual Book of Mormon Symposium, 1991

Edited by
Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.



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Brigham Young University
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Likening the Scriptures unto Us

1

Elder Dean L. Larsen

I have been advised that this fireside concludes a series of activities that have focused attention on the Book of Mormon, with particular emphasis on the book of Alma. In many ways Alma could qualify as an independent scripture. It is by far the largest book in the Book of Mormon, with almost twice as many chapters as 2 Nephi, the second largest book. Its recounting of the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites is one of the most remarkable missionary stories of all time. Alma's great treatise on faith and the power of God's word in chapter 32 is a classic. Amulek's explanation of the Atonement in chapter 34 is as straightforward and clear as any treatment of this subject to be found in the scriptures. Alma's admonitions to his son Corianton merit the closest study, particularly his exposition on mercy, justice, and judgment in chapter 42. And there is so much more.

As I have studied the Book of Mormon, I have become convinced that, in addition to its being another powerful witness for Jesus Christ and his gospel plan, it has unusual value for us by virtue of what we can learn from the experiences of the people whose record it is. In some respects, our review of the historical events in the book permits us to see a reflection of ourselves. As we compare circumstances and conditions in our own time with those we see in relevant segments of the Book of Mormon history, we may be able to predict with some degree

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of accuracy the consequences of human behavior in our day. We can also gain vital insight into how we may continue to merit the Lord's blessings and thus avoid the calamities that so often befell these ancient people. The book of Alma is as useful in this kind of review as any of the scriptures we possess. With your indulgence, I am going to look beyond the significant doctrinal teachings that make Alma such a rich treasury and invite you to look with me at the lives of the people from this part of the record and compare them with conditions and events in our present day. In doing so, I intend to draw upon other relevant sources, some from the Book of Mormon, and some from other documents that may help us to see ourselves in the continuing historic panorama of God's dealings with his earthly children.

"And Thus They Did Dwindle in Unbelief"

As the book of Mosiah concludes, the people of Nephi have been established under a government of elected judges. Alma, the son of Alma, has been named as the "first and chief judge." He is also the presiding officer of the Church.

It is a good time. The great love felt by the people for King Mosiah has laid a strong foundation for the new government. The Church is well established, and the people rejoice "because of the liberty which had been granted unto them" (Mosiah 29:39).

Challenges soon confront the leaders in this new system. Alma is faced with a seditious movement against the government as well as against the Church. Gideon, one of the most loved and respected of the senior citizens, is murdered. Nehor, who has instigated the insurrection, and who is personally guilty of Gideon's murder, is summarily tried and executed for his crime. But his apostate influence has taken root among the people, for, as the record says, "there were many who loved the vain things of the world," and "the hearts of many were hardened" (Alma 1:16, 24).

By the time five years have passed, the Nephite nation is torn by civil war, and there are many defections from the Church. In the midst of these difficulties, the Nephites are invaded by Lamanite armies. In the ensuing battles, so many Nephites are slain that they are “not numbered, because of the greatness of their number” (Alma 3:1). It is a time of great remorse among the Nephites.

And so great were their afflictions that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty. And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon and were joined to the church of God. (Alma 4:3-4)

In this resurgence of faith the Nephites prosper again. Peace returns. Remarkably, it does not last for long. Within a period of three years, defection and apostasy begin to manifest themselves within the Church.

And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes. (Alma 4:6)

The dissension spreads rapidly. Alma, perplexed by the drift of his people toward another tragedy, resigns from his position as chief judge and turns his full energy and attention to the collapsing Church.

And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. (Alma 4:19)

Alma then goes to the major cities of the land to accomplish his purpose—to Zarahemla, Gideon, Melek, Ammonihah, Sidom, among the Zoramites, and eventually to Jershon. Much of Alma's record is composed of the great doctrinal discourses preached by Alma and his companions in their efforts to reclaim this people. It is a labor of many years and demands the utmost of Alma's faith and perseverance.

In the course of these events, we can observe the manner in which the Lord tests and tries his people. We note, as well, the afflictions that he permits them to bring upon themselves in order to humble them and keep them from falling completely away from the course he has marked out for them. The warfare and suffering described in the latter chapters of Alma are grim reminders of the tragedies that people can bring upon themselves when they drift away from the Lord's standard.

In each dispensation of the gospel prior to the one in which we live, there has come a time when the people of God have succumbed to the worldly influences that have encompassed them. Periods of spiritual darkness have followed as the earth's inhabitants have turned themselves away from God and have suffered the consequences of their folly. The saddest recorded accounts in the scriptural and historical records are those of once-favored people who drift into apostasy.

Following the Savior's visit to the Nephites and Lamanites here in the Americas, the people who responded to his ministry enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity and happiness. In 4 Nephi we find this description of them:

And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, in-somuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned. . . . And . . . the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightful people. . . . And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; . . . And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. (4 Nephi 1:7, 10, 13, 16)

For almost 200 years the people lived in these favored circumstances. Then, almost inconceivably, they left the pattern of life that had brought them such great blessings.

Mormon's commentary on the spiritual decline of this people is worthy of careful, thoughtful review:

And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ. And now, . . . there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride. . . . And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them. And they began to be divided into classes. . . . And . . . there were many . . . which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel. . . . The people did harden their hearts, for they were led . . . to do all manner of iniquity. . . . And thus they did dwindle in unbelief and wickedness, from year to year. (4 Nephi 1:23–27, 34)

But wickedness did prevail upon the face of the whole land, insomuch that the Lord did take away his beloved disciples, and the work of miracles and of healing did cease because of the iniquity of the people. And there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief. . . . For behold they had wilfully rebelled against their God. (Mormon 1:13–14, 16)

Similar Challenges in Our Time

We have been assured that in this last dispensation of the fulness of times, there will be no universal apostasy. When the Lord appears again in his glory, he will find a people who will have remained faithful and who will be ready to receive him and join with him in the completion of his work.

But the fact that there will not be a complete apostasy in this last dispensation does not mean all who have received the gospel and become members of the Church will remain faithful. Prophetic references to our own day, in fact, seem to indicate that there will be many who have known the truth and have tasted of the Lord's goodness that will then allow themselves to be tempted away from the course the Lord has marked out for them.

In the October general conference of 1965, Elder Harold B. Lee spoke of the test that would come, and in his remarks he cited the words of President Heber C. Kimball, who said:

We think we are secure here in the chambers of the everlasting hills, . . . but I want to say to you, . . . the time is coming when we will be mixed up in these now peaceful valleys to that extent that it will be difficult to tell the face of a Saint from the face of an enemy to the people of God. Then, brethren, look out for the great sieve, for there will be a great sifting time, and many will fall; for I say unto you there is a test, a TEST, a TEST coming, and who will be able to stand? (Whitney 446; qtd in Lee 1152)

In Lehi's vision of the tree of life, he describes those who would be tempted away from the path of eternal happiness, even after they have followed the rod of iron to the tree and tasted of its fruit. This is Lehi's description of what he saw:

And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.

And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those who were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. (1 Nephi 8:23–28)

Nephi later declared, "And it came to pass that I saw and bear record, that the great and spacious building was the pride of the world" (1 Nephi 11:36).

In reference to the calamities that will come upon the disobedient in the last days, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith:

Nevertheless, Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her.

But if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her according to all her works, with sore affliction, with pestilence, with plague, with sword, with vengeance, with devouring fire. (D&C 97:25–26)

Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord.

And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord;

First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord. (D&C 112:24–26)

Behold, I tell you these things, even as I also told the people of the destruction of Jerusalem; and my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified. (D&C 5:20)

With these direful warnings and predictions the Lord combines remarkable promises to those who will remain faithful and who will not yield to the temptations the world offers. But these are conditional promises. The Lord will not be mocked in these last days by those who make covenants of obedience and then violate them with a sense of impunity or with the deceitful intent of one day repenting and coming back into line after purposeful excursions into forbidden paths.

Nephi was allowed to see our time in vision, and he knew of the efforts the adversary would make to delude and confuse the members of the Church as well as others of God's children. Nephi said:

For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:20–21)

We live in a time of rapid Church growth. Large numbers are being baptized throughout the world. Many countries that have not been accessible to the missionary effort are now

opening their doors. In many respects Zion is prospering, and things seem to be going well.

In the midst of this apparent general prosperity of the Church, it is well for us to look carefully and honestly into our own lives to see if some of the evidences of spiritual infirmity are beginning to reappear, particularly in light of the warnings the Lord has given to us.

Maintaining Centers of Spiritual Strength

Historically, the drifting away from the course of life marked out by the Lord has occurred as individuals begin to make compromises with the Lord's standard. This is particularly true when the transgression is willful and no repentance occurs. Remember Mormon's description of those who turned away from the true path in his day. They did not sin in ignorance. They willfully rebelled against God. It did not occur as a universal movement. It began as individual members of the Church knowingly began to make compromises with the Lord's standard. They sought justification for their diversions in the knowledge that others were compromising as well. Those who willfully sin soon seek to establish a standard of their own with which they can feel more comfortable and which justifies their misconduct. They also seek the association of those who are willing to drift with them along this path of self-delusion.

As the number of drifting individuals increases, their influence becomes more powerful. It might be described as the "great and spacious building syndrome." The drifting is the more dangerous when its adherents continue to overtly identify with and participate with the group that conforms to the Lord's way. Values and standards that were once clear become clouded and uncertain. The norm of behavior begins to reflect this beclouding of true principles. Conduct that would once have caused revulsion and alarm now becomes somewhat commonplace.

Alma was faced with this challenge as he began his efforts to reestablish the order of the Church among his people. To them he said:

All you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous. . . . For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him. And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; . . . and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed. (Alma 5:57, 59–60)

Alma's father, you will recall, had been faced with this problem in the days of King Mosiah. He consulted with the king, and it was determined that the matter should be dealt with within the Church. Alma, therefore, went to the Lord to learn what should be done. The Lord's response is of great significance.

Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also. . . . Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward. (Mosiah 26:29, 32)

Zeezrom's story in the book of Alma is an excellent example of the effectiveness of repentance. Zeezrom, who once taunted and defied Alma, made a dramatic change in his life and became one of the stalwarts in the effort to strengthen the Church and reconvert his people. He was one of the few who became companions with Alma in his missionary labors, obviously deserving of the complete trust and confidence of his priesthood leader.

The safe course to follow is to adhere strictly to the standards set by the Lord, without compromise. Those who do so give support to one another in righteousness and faith. They

have compassion for the sinner, but an intolerance for sin. They deal with the unrepentant sinner in such a way that that person cannot persist in working any evil, insidious influence among them.

Such was the case with the people of Enoch. Time will not permit a review of the circumstances in Enoch's day, but a careful study of that episode may give some insight into the manner in which the Lord will preserve a righteous people in our time in a world that is ripening in iniquity as it was before the flood.

Within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior has provided a refuge from the evils of the world. Wherever a congregation or community of Saints is found, there should be the sustaining influence of the gospel and the assurance that those who identify themselves as Saints are applying themselves to gospel principles.

As in the days of Enoch, the Lord makes promises to the faithful of this dispensation who will maintain such centers of spiritual strength.

And the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it, and it shall be called Zion. And it shall come to pass among the wicked, that every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety. And there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven. (D&C 45:67-69)

And the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say: Surely Zion . . . cannot fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there, and the hand of the Lord is there; And he hath sworn by the power of his might to be her salvation and her high tower. Therefore, verily, thus saith the Lord, let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion—THE PURE IN HEART. (D&C 97:19-21)

In conforming to the instruction given by the Lord to Alma, leaders have an obligation to exercise the judicial processes essential to preserving a refining gospel environment, free from the corrupting influences that otherwise intrude within the group and threaten its spiritual base.

In establishing the code of honor here at Brigham Young University, Church leaders have attempted to foster an institu-

tion of higher learning that can offer those who come here as faculty or students the assurance of a place where academic studies can be pursued in a gospel environment uncontaminated by the influences that are destructive to faith and spiritual well-being.

All who enroll here at BYU make a pledge to which they affix their signatures as an affidavit that they will abide by the code of honor or be subject to dismissal.

You will know, individually, whether you have integrity to that pledge. I think you will have some sense, collectively, as to whether this code of honor is being upheld by the student body of BYU. May I give it as my strong personal conviction that to the degree you, individually, violate this code, you invite into this campus community a spirit of dissent that will inevitably have its effect upon you as well as upon this institution.

May I express profound admiration and gratitude to those of you who retain your commitment to this code of honor as well as to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your integrity will not go unnoticed by a just and loving Father in Heaven. You represent a moral strength that is greatly needed today. You continue to contribute to the perpetuation of a condition here on this campus that will bless many lives.

It should not surprise us, in light of the counsel we have been given, that we occasionally observe some of the things Alma saw among the members of the Church for whom he had concern and to whom he made this appeal:

Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd. And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? . . . For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil. . . . And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err. (Alma 5:38–40, 43)

At the conclusion of his record in the Book of Mormon, Enos speaks of the struggle that was necessary to keep the

people of his day from falling into disobedience and despair. He says:

And there was nothing save it was exceeding harshness, preaching and prophesying of wars, and contentions, and destructions, and continually reminding them of death, and the duration of eternity, and the judgments and the power of God, and all these things—stirring them up continually to keep them in the fear of the Lord. I say there was nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from going down speedily to destruction. (Enos 1:23)

I do not believe conditions among the members of the Church today are as severe as they were in Enos' time. However, I believe it is a time for great plainness in speech. Against the backdrop of conditions in Alma's day and the prophecies the Lord has given pertaining to our own time, I have tried to speak to you in plainness and forthrightness about the conditions in which we live and the reasons for feeling some concern about whether we are fully qualifying for the blessings the Lord has promised. I have hoped to confirm two things with you that the Lord has made clear in his revelations. One is that, while the Lord has made it clear that he will not permit apostate influences to engulf his Church in this dispensation, he may, from time to time, require a purging of those who fail to withstand the tests, in a manner that he has described in unmistakable terms. Such purging, if it is required in our day, will be as painful and devastating as any experienced by God's children at anytime on the earth. The suffering of the disobedient in the time of Alma gives us some idea today of the terrible circumstances that a wayward people can bring upon themselves.

The second thing I wish to confirm with you is that if we will be faithful to the gospel plan of life, if we will keep the commandments of God without compromise, without attempting to willfully, purposefully cheat against that which we know to be right and pure and good, we will have the preserving, protecting power of the Lord to be with us, regardless of the course the world may take and its inevitable consequences.

We have a solemn obligation to the Lord, to ourselves, to our posterity, and to the many good people in the world who are looking for the right way to preserve a community of Saints whom the Lord can bless and who can serve as a beacon and a sanctuary to all who love the Lord and seek to do his will. May we be wise enough and honest enough with ourselves to learn from the scriptural examples preserved for us and avoid the tempting of the adversary, who desires to cheat our souls and lead us carefully down to his depths of despair and misery. May we be fervent enough in our faith and love of the Lord and his work that we will be more than passive camp followers in our Church membership. May we be assertive and aggressive in standing for all that is right and pure and good, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Dealing with Opposition to the Church 2

Rex C. Reeve, Jr.

About 120 BC, king Mosiah gathered the people of Zarahemla together to hear accounts of the afflictions and bondage suffered by the people of Limhi and the people of Alma in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 25:1–6). Those hearing the stories wept because of the suffering of their brethren, but were filled with joy and thanksgiving when they learned that deliverance from bondage came through the power and goodness of God (Mosiah 25:7–10).

From the time of his conversion, Alma the Elder labored faithfully to reestablish the Church among his followers in the land of Nephi and in the city of Helam for more than 25 years. After Alma's arrival in Zarahemla, Mosiah, who was both king and prophet, gave Alma authority to ordain priests and teachers and to administer the true church of God throughout the land. Under Alma's able leadership and with an outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord, the Church grew and prospered, eventually having seven churches in the land of Zarahemla. We might call them wards, or even stakes, but they were all part of the true church of God (Mosiah 25:19–24).

When doctrinal and procedural questions arose in the Church, Alma the Elder received guidance through revelation. From time to time, the members were admonished to have faith in Christ, to properly repent of their sins, and to become clean and pure before the Lord (see Alma 5:15, 21, 32–33).

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In Alma 1–4, the Church, then under the leadership of Alma the Younger, faced new internal and external problems. These problems eventually caused Alma to resign from his position as chief judge, allowing him time to administer the affairs of the Church and to travel among all the people of Nephi, bearing testimony against the wicked (Alma 4:16–19). The purpose of this paper is to identify both the internal and external problems faced by the Church; to see how Alma the Younger instructed Church members to deal with both problems; and to see how Church members today should react to similar problems.

External Opposition to the Church

In Alma 1:2–33, a large and powerful man named Nehor established a church of his own. In sharp contrast to the true doctrines of Christ, he taught “that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people. And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day . . . for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:3–4). Through his powerful teaching of these false doctrines, Nehor gained many followers who gave him money and who no longer felt obligated to follow the strict commandments of God.

Under Nephite religious law, all people were free to believe whatever they desired (see Alma 1:17). The law protected the right of personal belief and even allowed individuals to teach those beliefs as long as others were not forced or injured. An important teaching of the Church was and always will be to eliminate religious intolerance and bigotry. The true saints of God respected Nehor’s right to believe and teach as he pleased, but they armed themselves with the word of God so they would not be deceived.

In Nephite society, all were required to obey the civil laws of the land or face the prescribed punishment. Nehor violated the civil law by killing Gideon, an old and greatly respected

man of God (Alma 1:9). In his position as chief judge, Alma was required to judge Nehor according to the crimes he had committed. The law required those guilty of murder to be put to death. In the process of judgment, Alma said, “Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction” (Alma 1:12).

Many years earlier, Nephi had warned his people against the evils of priestcraft, which he defined as “men preach[ing] and set[ting] themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (2 Nephi 26:29). In our day, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has amplified this definition:

Priesthood and priestcraft are two opposites; one is of God, the other of the devil. When ministers claim but do not possess the priesthood; when they set themselves up as lights to their congregations, but do not preach the pure and full gospel; when their interest is in gaining personal popularity and financial gain, rather than in caring for the poor and ministering to the wants and needs of their fellow men—they are engaged, in a greater or lesser degree, in the practice of priestcrafts. (593)

Nehor was put to death for his crimes, but this did not end priestcraft. Many people became worldly and, following Nehor’s example, preached false doctrines for riches and honor (Alma 1:16). Those who did not belong to the Church began to persecute the members of the Church of God (Alma 1:19). This external persecution was a war of ridicule against church doctrines and beliefs: “Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price” (Alma 1:20).

External persecution was either a blessing or a curse, depending on how members responded to it. When members followed the laws of the Church and the counsel of their leaders,

they became stronger in the faith and were blessed both individually and as a church. When members refused to follow this counsel, they brought many trials and afflictions upon themselves and the whole Church. If they did not repent, their membership was taken away.

The leaders' counsel for reacting to this opposition was simple, yet when followed, had a profound influence for good: "Now there was a strict law among the people of the Church, that there should not any man, belonging to the Church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the Church" (Alma 1:21). The members were expected to turn the other cheek, or to return good for evil. They were expected to be living examples of the teachings of Christ and to love their enemies. When some members violated this instruction and fought openly with their enemies, even with their fists, it caused much affliction and trial for the Church. Guilty members who would not repent and leave nonmembers alone were removed from the Church (Alma 1:23–24).

In addition, members were to be united and show love and respect for each other. They were to forgive and support one another, especially in times of persecution. The "strict law among the people of the Church" included the stipulation that "there should be no persecution among themselves" (Alma 1:21).

These members who stood fast in the faith remained "immovable in keeping the commandments of God" (Alma 1:25). They were true followers of Christ at all times, in all places and in all things (see Mosiah 18:9). The humble, sincere, and obedient individuals were living examples of the truthfulness of the gospel, which withstood all persecution.

Faithful members meekly suffered the persecutions heaped upon them (Alma 1:25). They had faith in their leaders and in the Lord. They did not take matters into their own hands; if wrongs needed to be corrected, the leaders took appropriate action. They saw persecution as an opportunity to grow and a challenging time to apply the teachings of Christ.

Still, members took time to sustain one another. When the priests left their labors to teach the word of God, the people would come listen to their words. When the priests had completed teaching, all would return to their work (Alma 1:26). Even in times of persecution, members were to continue in their daily labors and their family duties, along with attending meetings and doing the work of the Church.

The priest would not elevate himself, understanding that the teacher was no better than the learner. All were considered equal; all labored according to their strength (Alma 1:26). All imparted of their substance, according to that which they had, to those in need. The people were instructed to be neat and clean in their dress, yet they were not to wear costly apparel in order to appear better than others (Alma 1:27).

Members were basically taught not to react to the persecution, but to focus on being good members of the Church: keeping the commandments, attending to their church duties and continuing to care for the needy. If further action did need to be taken the Church leaders would be responsible to see that it was done, such as Alma dealing with Nehor. Being patient and Christlike in a difficult situation would be an example to others and would open the eyes of some nonmembers who were sincerely seeking after truth.

External Opposition to the Modern Church

Since 1830, the modern Church has faced various types of external persecution, and the counsel to church members has been exactly the same as in the time of Alma. And when members have followed this counsel, they have been individually blessed and the Church itself has grown and prospered.

During the past few years, there has been a widespread effort by groups outside of the Church to criticize the doctrines and ordinances of the Church. One example of this is the film *The Godmakers*, which has been shown in many places around the world. In a letter dated 1 December 1983, the First Presidency carefully taught members of the Church how to respond to

external opposition. Their instructions have a familiar sound and are in harmony with Alma's instructions to his people in similar circumstances.

We are pleased that in recent months there has been a growing interest in the Church on the part of the media. . . . Much of what has been presented has been accurate and favorable to the Church.

However, some of it has been inaccurate and parts of it highly critical of the Church. These include films which pretend to represent the position of the Church on matters of doctrine and belittle the ordinances of the gospel, including the most sacred temple ordinances.

We wish to point out that this opposition may be in itself an opportunity. . . . These criticisms create . . . an interest in the Church. . . . We have evidence to indicate that in areas where opposition has been particularly intense, the growth of the Church has actually been hastened rather than retarded.

The First Presidency continued and recommended the following:

1. Do not "challenge" or "enter into debates" with those who criticize the Church. Meet every situation "without resentment and without malice."

2. Prepare with "prayer" and "humility," be guided by inspiration, and take every opportunity to explain the doctrines and practices of the Church in a "positive" Christian-like manner.

3. In the proper forum, "point out the high standards expected of members of the Church." Stress positive values such as "temperance . . . morality . . . fidelity in marriage [and] . . . worthy citizenship." Discuss the "dedication and faithfulness of members . . . taking care of [members] who are in need, in service to others, in missionary work, in the payment of tithes [and] in keeping their covenants and obligations."

4. "Above all . . . bear testimony of the restoration of the gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father. And that 'There is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved.'"

5. Even if opposition seems hard, members should "renew . . . faithfulness to the principles of the gospel . . . take

upon [them]selves the armor of righteousness” and the Church will be blessed and prosper (First Presidency letter 1 December 1983).

In summary, members both in Book of Mormon times and today are taught to react positively to persecution, to look at it as a blessing and an opportunity to demonstrate and to teach the doctrine and blessings of the gospel. They are counseled to seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost and to increase in faith and obedience to the commandments of the Lord. The assurance is given that when the members do their part in facing persecution, the kingdom of the Lord will continue to roll forth until it fills the whole earth.

Internal Opposition to the Church

By following the counsel of their leaders and humbly serving one another, the Church in Alma’s day enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity, despite the persecutions the members suffered. Because of the steadiness of the Church, they accumulated flocks, herds, grain, gold, silver, “fine-twined linen,” and “precious things” (Alma 1:29). Though they were prosperous, they were generous to all and did not lust after riches, but took care of the poor and the needy—whether they were members of the Church or not (Alma 1:30). Because of this, “they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church. For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife . . . and all manner of wickedness” (Alma 1:31–32). For the people of Alma, it was a time of prosperity and happiness in the midst of a world of wickedness and sorrow (Alma 1:28–33).

As is typical in the Book of Mormon, the members of the Church were not able to keep the commandments of God for long in the face of such prosperity. The paradox lies in their becoming prosperous because of righteousness, industry, hard

work, and generosity, and then permitting that same prosperity to lead them to pride, contentions, and other serious sins. A cycle can be seen:

1. They followed their leaders and kept the commandments of God.

2. Because of their obedience and industry they were blessed with prosperity and many riches (Alma 1:29; 4:6).

3. Some began to be proud because of their riches even to wearing very costly apparel and thinking they were better than others (Alma 4:6).

4. Some began to set their hearts on riches and the vain things of the world (Alma 4:8).

5. Some began to be scornful toward one another (Alma 4:8).

6. Some began to persecute those who did not believe as they believed (Alma 4:8).

7. There began to be envyings, strife, malice, persecutions and great contentions among the members of the Church (Alma 4:9).

8. Many members of the Church became more prideful than those who did not belong to the Church of God (Alma 4:9).

9. Many members of the Church turned their backs and would not help the needy, the naked, the sick, and the afflicted (Alma 4:12).

10. Those members of the Church who remained faithful and who continued to be humble followers of God had to endure greater and greater afflictions and persecution from both members and nonmembers of the Church (Alma 4:15).

Wickedness from within creates many serious problems for the Church. When members are contentious and do not keep the commandments of the Lord, the Holy Ghost withdraws and leaves them without guidance. They do not accomplish the mission of the Church to perfect the saints, nor do they proclaim the gospel; therefore, the Church does not grow and prosper. In Alma's time, the contention and wickedness within the Church was most likely a great stumbling block for nonmembers who

were seeking for truth and would have liked to be baptized. Alma was concerned because he knew that wickedness both in and out of the Church would soon bring destruction to all the people (Alma 4:10–11).

In combatting internal wickedness, Alma the Younger could look to an experience his father had dealing with the same problem. When Alma the Elder was the leader of the Church, many of the younger generation did not believe the traditions of their fathers and would not become members of the Church. This was a serious problem, but the greater problem was that many of the Church members followed the nonmembers in committing many serious sins (Mosiah 26:1–6). To solve the problem, the Lord instructed Alma the Elder in the following points:

1. When there was sin in the Church it was necessary, even required, that the leaders of the Church admonish, instruct or confront the guilty members. Leaders could not just ignore the sin. It was imperative that they do something about the problem (Mosiah 26:6).

2. Alma the Elder had been a priest of king Noah in his young life, and from his own experience learned that repentance works. Repentance cleansed his sin so that he was now worthy of eternal life (Mosiah 26: 15–20). This same repentance was available to each member.

3. Alma the Elder was taught that it was Christ who would perform the Atonement and take upon himself the sins of the world. Christ would freely forgive the sins of any person who was received into the Church by faith, repentance, and proper baptism (Mosiah 26:22–23).

4. Alma the Elder was told that those who sincerely sought forgiveness must confess their sins before Church leaders and before the Lord (Mosiah 26:29).

5. If they expected to be forgiven of their own sins, members must forgive their neighbors' trespasses, especially when their neighbors say they have repented (Mosiah 26:31).

6. Those who would properly repent could be forgiven and could still be numbered among the Church of God (Mosiah 26:35).

7. Those who would not repent were excommunicated from the Church and their names were blotted out (Mosiah 26:36).

Alma the Younger knew that the basic solution to the problem of sin within the Church was for the members to either sincerely repent or to be removed from the Church. In either case, the Church would become clean again. He also knew that bringing people to repentance would require all his time and effort, so he resigned as chief judge to devote himself to the duties of the high priesthood. The only way to stir the people up to repentance was to bear “pure testimony” against them according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy (Alma 4:19–20). Alma spent the rest of his life laboring to bring people to repentance and regulating the affairs of the Church.

Internal Opposition in the Modern Church

In our day the Lord has established his Church. He is desirous that there be no iniquity in the Church and that the members be clean and pure before him. He said this is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually—For I, the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:30–31). On another occasion he said, “Purge ye out the iniquity which is among you; sanctify yourselves before me” (D&C 43:11). He said, “Behold, I, the Lord, have looked upon you, and have seen abominations in the Church that profess my name. But blessed are they who are faithful and endure” (D&C 50:4–5). His command is, “Wherefore, let the Church repent of their sins, and I the Lord, will own them; otherwise they shall be cut off” (D&C 63:63).

Certain officers in the Church have the responsibility to be judges in the Church. They are to see that there is no iniquity in

the church. They are to counsel members and use church discipline when serious transgressions have occurred. Just as in Book of Mormon times, there are still only two ways to cleanse the Church: (1) Members can sincerely repent, or (2) they can be excommunicated. Either way the Church will become clean before the Lord.

Conclusion

Simple principles govern how members should deal with outside and inside opposition to the Church. The principles taught and used in the Book of Mormon still govern what is taught and used in our day. When the Church is being attacked by those outside the Church who would destroy its doctrines and beliefs, members should not retaliate. Members should live good lives, be steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments, and be patient in their afflictions. They should take opportunities to positively teach the doctrines of the Church. When the Church is attacked internally by sins in the lives of its members, there are two ways to restore the Church to an acceptable and clean condition. The members guilty of sin can sincerely repent and live in harmony with Church standards. If they will not repent on their own, Church leaders are expected to continue to teach with the spirit and encourage them to repent. Members who will not respond and who continue to commit serious sins must be removed from the Church.

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C. Max Caldwell

Introduction

In a recent stake conference I attended, the General Authority Visitor counseled members to be more than “Cosmetic Mormons.” He suggested that membership in the Church must mean much more than church attendance.

In April 1951, President Spencer W. Kimball declared, “There are many people in this Church today who think they live, but they are dead to the spiritual things. And I believe even many who are making pretenses of being active are also spiritually dead. Their service is much of the letter and less of the spirit” (“Be Valiant” 432–34). President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded us of the Lord’s definition of Church membership: “Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church” (D&C 10:67). And he has taught that an “important principle for us to understand if we would be true members of the Church is that repentance involves not just a change of actions, but a change of heart” (“Mighty Change” 2).

In this chapter I will use as my primary text Alma’s great discourse to the citizens of Zarahemla found in the fifth chapter of the Book of Alma. Excluding the Savior’s teachings, I consider Alma’s sermon on the need for a change of heart as one of the greatest recorded in all holy writ. The change involved is a conversion from one state of being to another and has been variously described by latter-day Apostles. Notice how each of the following emphasizes the change that takes place.

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For instance, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

In the full gospel sense, however, *conversion* is more—far more—than merely changing one's belief from that which is false to that which is true; it is more than the acceptance of the verity of gospel truths, than the acquirement of a testimony. To convert is to *change* from one status to another, and gospel conversion consists in the transformation of man from his fallen and carnal state to a state of saintliness. A convert is one who . . . has been born again: where once he was spiritually dead, he has been regenerated to a state of spiritual life. . . . He *changes* his whole way of life, and the nature and structure of his very being is quickened and *changed* by the power of the Holy Ghost. (*Mormon Doctrine* 162; emphasis added)

The rebirth process was described by Elder Mark E. Petersen as follows:

That birth of the spirit means something more than most of us normally realize. Through proper teaching, a conviction is born in our soul. Faith develops. Through it we see how important it is to become like Christ. We see ourselves as we are in contrast to a Christ-like soul. A desire for a *change-over* is born within us. The change-over begins. We call it repentance. Through our faith and as part of our conversion or change from one state to another, we begin to see sin in its true light. . . . We strive with all our souls to become like the Savior. (11 July 1956; emphasis added)

President David O. McKay declared:

No man can sincerely resolve to apply in his daily life the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth without sensing a change in his own nature. The phrase "born again" has a deeper significance than many people attach to it. This *changed feeling* may be indescribable, but it is real. Happy the person who has truly sensed the uplifting, transforming power that comes from this nearness to the Savior, this kinship with the Living Christ. ("Divine Church" 7; emphasis added)

And from Elder Marion G. Romney, we learn the following:

As used in the scriptures, "converted" generally implies not merely mental acceptance of Jesus and his teachings but also a motivating faith in him and in his gospel—a faith which works a transformation, an actual *change* in one's understanding of life's meaning and in his allegiance to God—in interest, in thought, and in conduct. While conversion may be accomplished in stages, one is not really converted in the full sense of the term unless and until he is at heart a

new person. "Born again" is the scriptural term. (23; emphasis added)

An Ancient Prophet Speaks

The Problem

In the century before the coming of Christ, Alma observed a spiritual deterioration among the Nephite members of the Church. The Book of Mormon records that they "began to wax proud"; there "began to be great contentions among the people of the church"; the "wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block"; and "the church began to fail in its progress" (Alma 4:6, 9-10). The seriousness of this condition caused Alma such great concern that he gave up his office as chief judge over the Nephites that he might go among them to "stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, *by the word of God*, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people" (Alma 4:19; emphasis added).

The Solution

Alma could see there was "no way that he might reclaim [his people] save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:19). Knowing the need for the Church members to experience a change of heart, he delivered powerful sermons throughout the land, beginning with the people of Zarahemla. He was true to his original intent as he identified his teachings as the word of God, not his opinion, with noticeable frequency throughout his discourses.

Using the techniques of a master teacher, Alma began his sermon by selecting familiar incidents of the past. He noted how the Lord had delivered His people from bondage on previous occasions, emphasizing that this freedom was not obtained through the wisdom or cunning of men, but rather came as the result of divine intervention and "by the power of his word" (Alma 5:5).

A Prophet Inquires

Alma then asked the Church members three questions (Alma 5:6), each of which dealt with an increasingly important point of emphasis. First, he asked if they recalled the captivity of their fathers. Next, he asked if they remembered that their deliverance was much more than just a deliverance from physical bondage—they had been in spiritual bondage, and the Lord had extended his mercy and long-suffering in their behalf. The real issue was that the Lord had provided them with a freedom from sin. Alma then intensified his point with a third question, asking if they realized that the Lord had actually provided His people with the deliverance of their souls from hell.

Each of the three questions contained the phrase, "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance?" It was not a matter of having intellectual recall of historical events. The people may have been capable of rehearsing the factual details, but the question went further: Have you sufficiently remembered? Alma seems to have been asking if their awareness of information included an understanding of its application and value to them. That he had asked seems to imply that he felt they had missed the message.

Scriptural usage of the word *remembrance* often suggests more than recall of memory. The Lord has directed us to "always remember him" (D&C 20:77), though he surely would not expect a constant mental focus on him to the exclusion of all other subjects or thoughts. Rather, we should remember never to deviate from the teachings and influences of the Lord and his spirit. Thus, remembering him would show in how our lives reflect the Lord's standards and teachings.

Alma's inquiries about a "sufficient remembrance" imply that *sufficient* means not only an adequate amount, but also a quality level of awareness of the Lord's blessings. Alma had undoubtedly learned the need for "remembering" from the angel who appeared to him while he was still mired in sin. He was told, "Go, and *remember* the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and *remember* how

great things [the Lord] has done for them” (Mosiah 27:16; emphasis added). That message triggered a chain of events that resulted in a mighty change occurring in Alma’s soul. Is it any wonder that Alma often chose a similar method of instructing the Saints (see Alma 9:9-10; 29:11; 37:29)?

Progenitors Experienced Change

After emphasizing the need for the people to remember the events of the past, Alma declared that the Lord had changed the hearts of their forebears. He had awakened them from a deep spiritual sleep by the light of the word of God. Though they were unaware, they had been facing everlasting destruction because their real bondage was spiritual—caused by the binding power of the “chains of hell” (Alma 5:7).

And what are the chains of hell? To the rebellious Church members in Ammonihah, Alma warned of these chains in the following way: “And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). From his prison in Liberty, Missouri, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote of the Satanic spirit that had “so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion . . . and is now the very mainspring of all corruption” (D&C 123:7). He further referred to this Satanic influence as “an iron yoke, a strong band, handcuffs, chains and shackles, and fetters of hell” (D&C 123:8) In other words, Satan uses false ideas to bind people in a state of spiritual bondage which can only be overcome by an awareness and acceptance of the word of God.

Centuries before Alma, Lehi also pleaded with his sons to “awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe”

(2 Nephi 1:13). He challenged them to awaken and “put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound” (2 Nephi 1:23). From a latter-day revelation we note that the “armor of righteousness” that would release them from the chains of hell includes the sword of the Lord which is his word (see D&C 27:18; 33:1). Where do we find this valuable piece of armor, this word of the Lord?

Sources of “The Word”

Though the Lord is the ultimate source of all truth, he uses at least three means to make the word of truth available to us. The word may come to us through (1) scriptural records, (2) the teachings of living prophets, and (3) the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or any combination of these three. Jacob declared, “We search the prophets [scripture], and we have many revelations [living prophets] and the spirit of prophecy [testimony of Jesus provided by the Holy Ghost]” (Jacob 4:6; see also D&C 52:9, 36). We are not only instructed in the ways of the Lord, but we are also protected from being deceived by having an understanding of absolute truth. Any opinion or philosophical declaration that is out of harmony with the word of God is unacceptable and should be discarded in favor of the truth. Thus, the word of the Lord is a sword, a weapon of righteousness that cuts through the spiritually binding powers of the chains of hell.

Those who lay hold of the word of truth and trace it to its original source come to Christ (see Moroni 7:19). Gospel truths are as the spokes of a wheel, all emanating from Christ who is the hub. Anyone who would accept and lay hold on these truths is automatically led to their author, Jesus Christ. This experience is depicted in Lehi’s dream as holding on to the iron rod, or word of Christ which leads people to him. In reality, people are led to partake of the fruit of Christ—the fruit of the tree (see Alma 5:34)—which is his atonement. Thus, the center, the hub of life needs to be not just Christ, but rather what he did. Thus, when we come unto Christ, what we really do is come to

partake of his atonement and thus our hearts are changed as certainly as was Lehi's.

Alma finished his historical review of the spiritual transformation of the fathers by declaring that the chains of hell were loosed from them and they were saved.

Conditions of Hope for Salvation

Still speaking in the context of that experience, Alma asked his congregation to consider the basis upon which salvation had been promised. He asked, "what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?" (Alma 5:10). Answering his own questions, Alma then noted four conditions that had to exist for them to obtain a hope for salvation.

1. Follow the living prophet. They had to believe in the words of the prophet Abinadi when he spoke "the words of God" (Alma 5:11). Likewise they had to follow the prophet Alma as he taught and led them through their periods of bondage. They did so with "patience and faith," (see Mosiah 23:21; 24:16). Consistently, the Church in our own dispensation has been commanded to "give heed unto all [the prophet's] words and commandments . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all *patience and faith*" (D&C 21:4-5; emphasis added). Why are patience and faith needed? Sometimes the prophet teaches or counsels on subjects or in ways not acceptable to some of the people. They may not see the reason to follow his instructions. But the Lord said to have patience, for in time the reason for such obedience will be manifest to all. In the meantime, the people have been commanded to have enough faith to act according to heavenly counsel based on the vision and understanding of a prophet and seer. If people wait to act until they see the reason, they may wait too long. To those who faithfully follow the Lord's living prophet comes the promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" (D&C 21:6). We remember that the entire Book of Mormon scenario began with the story of Lehi listening to and following the counsel of living prophets.

2. Have a mighty change wrought in the heart. Throughout scripture, the heart is mentioned symbolically as the repository of our feelings. After his masterful and inspired sermon, king Benjamin asked his people if they believed the words he had spoken. Their unanimous response was, "Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought *a mighty change in us, or in our hearts*, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2; emphasis added). They continued by saying, "And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things" (Mosiah 5:5). Any previous inclination to sin or be unfaithful to covenants had been replaced with the change of their very nature. Their feelings or desires had been changed as they had partaken of the fruit of the Atonement. People who are changed internally manifest that transition through a change in behavior externally. What we are determines what we do. Outward motions are predicated upon inward emotions, or feelings.

We cannot bring about such a change in ourselves or others. It only comes from an internal conversion through the workings of the Spirit of the Lord. President Benson has said, "The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature" ("Born of God" 6).

King Benjamin was pleased with the response of his people and identified the source and nature of the change as follows: "And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore,

ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).

This spiritual rebirth is actually a third birth. The first took place in the premortal world where all were born as spirit children of heavenly parents. We were called the sons and daughters of God, and spoke to and of him as our Father. Next, we came into mortality. All of us were born as physical children of earthly parents and subsequently forgot our previous residence, associations, and parentage. We received the name of our earthly fathers, and learned to speak to and of them as our father. Finally, being born again, or experiencing a spiritual rebirth, is to receive the redeeming powers of the Atonement, to be cleansed in the spirit and become innocent again, as we were at the time of our first and second births. With this rebirth comes the spirit of the Holy Ghost and the power and responsibility to remember a previously forgotten Father. We also become eventual heirs of another physical or resurrected body; therefore, we take the name of Christ in the rebirth experience, since he is the father of both processes. We then are called the sons and daughters of Christ.

When Alma experienced his own spiritual rebirth, he learned from the Lord that the requirement for spiritual rebirth pertains to all mortals:

Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 27:25–26)

Such a spiritual, internal transformation is truly described as a “mighty change.”

3. Trust in the true and living God. Trust in God is the fruit of faith. Unless we have an awareness of and confidence in God’s knowledge and power, we will not adhere to or obey his laws and commandments. Without faith in an unseen yet living Lord, we mortals lack reason to act in accordance with revealed

law. This is especially true when divine directives cause discomfort or inconvenience or require sacrifice.

Who would go through the uncomfortable process of repentance without a love for God and a conviction that following the Savior's way is essential to happiness and salvation? Would many of us sacrifice time and resources in giving service in the kingdom, without the spiritual assurance that such provides us hope and blesses others? How many would attend to temple ordinances without a personal witness that work done in those holy houses is eternal? Trust in God is essential before anyone can hope for salvation.

Perhaps the condition opposite to trusting in the Lord is setting our hearts upon the things of the world. Such things can be seen as the means of providing immediate satisfaction and reward for temporal labor. Alma warned against following this philosophy in a sermon he preached to the citizens of Gideon, when he said, "I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that you do not worship idols, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith, which is to come" (Alma 7:6).

Placing our trust in *things* rather than in a living God is idolatry. President Spencer W. Kimball identified the practice of idolatry as "among the most serious of sins" and described its object as "anything which is earthly in any form. It would include both tangible and intangible things, and everything which entices a person away from duty, loyalty, and love for and service to God" (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 40). Whereas things are neither living nor true, God is.

4. Endure to the end. In our dispensation, the Lord declared, "He only is saved who endureth unto the end" (D&C 53:7). It is not enough to forsake the world by coming unto Christ in the covenant-making process of baptism. We must continue in the struggle to overcome the world by keeping the conditions of that covenant. Yielding to the enticings of Satan at any time after coming unto Christ takes personal purity and

spiritual power away from us. Even though we may live a significant portion of our lives in righteousness, we cannot prevent subsequent sin from destroying the fruits of previous spiritual living. King Benjamin taught his people that they had not only to *obtain* a forgiveness for sin, but to *retain* it as well:

As ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, . . . and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come. . . . And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins. (Mosiah 4:11–12)

Giving way to subsequent sins brings the return of former sins and their consequences (see D&C 82:7). Being steadfast in righteousness is an ongoing requirement of all who hope for salvation. Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared, “All the faithful Saints, all of those who have *endured to the end*, depart this life with the absolute guarantee of eternal life” (“Dead Who Die in the Lord” 107; emphasis added).

Personal Application of Principles

After summarizing the conditions upon which the fathers had obtained their hope for salvation, Alma put the value of knowledge gleaned from the past into true perspective, giving it a personal and present application. Unapplied history is of little value.

Alma asked his listeners, “And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14). Knowing how others attained a hope for salvation is useful only when we follow that same eternal pattern and experience for ourselves the spiritual rebirth and the mighty change of heart.

I once discussed with my wife what Alma might have meant when he referred twice to having God's image in our countenances. Specifically I asked her, "What is God's 'image'?" Her answer was, "It is a reflection of perfection." Many people assume that attaining perfection is reserved for some future life and most certainly is not possible to attain in this one. Yet the Savior commanded us mortals to become perfect. President Kimball explained that "being perfect means to triumph over sin. This is a mandate from the Lord. He is just and wise and kind. He would never require anything from his children which was not for their benefit and which was not attainable. Perfection therefore is an achievable goal" (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 209). Moroni closed the Book of Mormon record with this challenge:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be *perfected in him*, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be *perfect in Christ*; and if by the grace of God ye are *perfect in Christ*, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are *perfect in Christ*, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33; emphasis added)

Though we may lack many qualities of perfection, yet through Christ we can be as free from sin as he is. We can be perfect in this manner in this life through repentance. We can have the image of God in our countenances now.

Personal Future Expectations

Alma continued his teaching with questions. They form a kind of checklist that determines if we really do have God's image in our countenances. He asked the Church members to look forward to the time of their judgment when everyone will stand before the Lord in one of three conditions:

1. The blessed. These individuals have repented and have been faithful to the conditions of salvation. Their "works have

been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

2. The liars. These people are unrepentant, but think they can lie and misrepresent their works as having been righteous. They think such prevarication can obtain for them a hope of salvation (Alma 5:17).

3. The guilty. These people are also unrepentant, but they make no pretense of prevarication. They will find their souls “filled with guilt and remorse, having a . . . perfect remembrance of all [their] wickedness, yea, a remembrance that [they] have set at defiance the commandments of God” (Alma 5:18). Such persons cannot have hope for salvation.

As if to summarize what he had taught, Alma asked the all-encompassing question: “I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?” (Alma 5:19). His question is a reminder that our souls are both physical and spiritual (see D&C 88:15) and that both need to be free from sin. David of old posed a similar question when he asked, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer? “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Ps 24:3–4).

We are all responsible for controlling our physical bodies and behaving in accordance with standards of righteousness. In the waters of baptism, we establish covenants that conform to the example of Jesus Christ and His baptismal commitments. “But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, *according to the flesh* he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7; emphasis added). He promised to make his flesh obedient and his hands clean. His baptismal commitment “showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them” (2 Nephi 31:9). In almost unbelievable contrast, some think and express the idea that they are powerless

to change the innate desires of their flesh. They say, "The Lord made me this way and I can not help myself." Somehow, this rationalization is supposed to justify their yielding to fits of anger or succumbing to lusts of the flesh. Another contrast is provided by those who feel that they have been thrust into an evil world of sinful influences and thus cannot be expected to rise above their environment. But the Lord's injunction to Adam and Eve has never been repealed. "God blessed them, and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, *and subdue it, and have dominion*" (Moses 2:28; emphasis added). The Lord expects all of us to subdue our environment and control its effect upon our souls. Lehi taught that the Messiah would "redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to *act for themselves and not to be acted upon*" (2 Nephi 2:26; emphasis added). We are to act; we are responsible for our actions. The covenant people are required to subdue their flesh and thus have "clean hands."

Clean hands reflect pure thoughts and internal conditions, and are symbolized by the phrase *pure of heart*. No act was ever performed that did not originate as a thought in the mind. If we control our minds, we will control our bodies. What we do is predicated upon what we are. Our influence upon others is dependent upon our internal makeup. President David O. McKay said,

Every man and every person who lives in this world wields an influence, whether for good or for evil. It is not what he says alone; it is not alone what he does. It is what he is. Every man, every person radiates what he or she really is. ("Radiation" 373)

People with clean hands and pure hearts are those who have the "image of God engraven upon [their] countenances" (Alma 5:19).

Current Personal Condition

Alma's next inquiry was directed to those who may have previously experienced the mighty change of conversion, but who may have lost that powerful influence in their current condition. He said, "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). It is not enough to know or experience the gospel once. There must be an ongoing, constant feeding of the spirit, or the feelings that were once so predominantly a force within will die.

Further Inquiries

Perhaps to provide a verification of worthiness, or to take inventory of current spiritual conditions, Alma asked some additional searching questions of his listeners. First, he asked about maintaining a state of blamelessness before God. In other words, have old habits crept back into our lifestyles, or have previously uncontrolled thoughts reestablished themselves and created inappropriate behavior? If so, our hands would not still be clean and our hearts would no longer be pure.

Next, he asked about humility and wondered if they had been stripped of pride. C. S. Lewis declared that "as long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you" (96). President Benson said that,

Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. It looks sideways to man and argues who is right. . . . Pride is characterized by "What do I want out of life?" rather than by "What would God have me do with my life?" It is self-will as opposed to God's will. . . . Humility responds to God's will—to the fear of His judgments and the needs of those around us. To the proud, the applause of the world rings in their ears; to the humble, the applause of heaven warms their hearts. ("Cleansing the Inner Vessel" 6–7)

Pride is a stumbling block in the path of Christ's followers. As Alma said, "such an one hath not eternal life" (Alma 5:28).

Alma then asks about envy, which is mostly associated with worldly things. To set our minds on worldly things preempts having them on spiritual things. David Whitmer was chastised and Emma Smith was counseled on that subject (see D&C 30:2; 25:10). Worldly things cannot cleanse or save the soul. A mind saturated with or focused upon worldliness denies access to the Spirit and needs to be refocused on thoughts of virtue.

Finally, Alma inquired about those who mock their brother or persecute him. Professor Gary L. Bunker writes,

To mock is to humiliate, ridicule, insult, revile, make fun of, deride, sneer at, scorn, or hold in contempt. . . . Occasions for mockery usually occur in the context of real or imagined differences. Differences in beliefs, wealth, learning, social position, physical characteristics, group membership, and behavior may be used as pretexts for the justification of mockery. . . . Mockery costs our brother or sister severe physical and/or psychological pain. It also jeopardizes our hope of eternal life. Moreover, it is especially debilitating to those who have been called to serve. We cannot serve those for whom we have contempt. (36, 37, 41)

Personal Challenge

Just before Alma reminded his listeners that he was speaking to Church members by way of commandment and to non-Church members by way of invitation (see Alma 5:62), he provided another insight. In addition to his battery of deeply personal and spiritually searching questions, Alma asked one more significant question, "And my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings?" (Alma 5:53). To withstand them now is to stand without them forever. A mighty change is needed.

From President Benson has come the following challenge to change:

Can human hearts be changed? Why, of course! It happens every day in the great missionary work of the Church. It is one of the most

widespread of Christ's modern miracles. If it hasn't happened to you—it should. . . .

In addition to the physical ordinance of baptism and the laying on of hands, one must be spiritually born again to gain exaltation and eternal life. . . .

Would not the progress of the Church increase dramatically today with an increasing number of those who are spiritually reborn? Can you imagine what would happen in our homes? Can you imagine what would happen with an increasing number of copies of the Book of Mormon in the hands of an increasing number of missionaries who know how to use it and who have been born of God? When this happens, we will get the bounteous harvest of souls that the Lord promised. It was the "born of God" Alma who as a missionary was so able to impart the word that many others were also born of God. (See Alma 36:23–26). . . .

"Human nature *can* be changed, here and now," said President McKay, and then he quoted the following: "'You can change human nature. No man who has felt in him the Spirit of Christ even for half a minute can deny this truth. . . . You do change human nature, your own human nature, if you surrender it to Christ. Human nature has been changed in the past. Human nature must be changed on an enormous scale in the future, unless the world is to be drowned in its own blood. And only Christ can change it. Twelve men did quite a lot to change the world [nineteen hundred] years ago. Twelve simple men.'" (Quoting Beverly Nichols, in *Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life* 23, 127)

Yes, Christ changes men, and changed men can change the world. Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. Like Paul they will be asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) Peter stated they will "follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21) John said they will "walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6)

Finally, men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ. To paraphrase President Harold B. Lee, they set fire in others because they are on fire. (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* 192)

Their will is swallowed up in his will. (See John 5:30) They do always those things that please the Lord. (See John 8:29) Not only would they die for the Lord, but more important they want to live for Him. . . .

President David O. McKay tells of a singular event that happened to him. After falling asleep, he said he "beheld in vision something

infinitely sublime." He saw a beautiful city, a great concourse of people dressed in white, and the Savior.

"The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness.

"But who were they?

"As if the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words:

"These Are They Who Have Overcome the World—Who Have Truly Been Born Again!"

"When I awoke, it was breaking day." (*Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay* 59–60)

When we awake and are born of God, a new day will break and Zion will be redeemed.

May we be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, choose to follow Him, be changed for Him, captained by Him, consumed in Him, and born again. (*Witness* 62–66)

Summary And Conclusion

We have spoken of a mighty change that occurred in our forebears, but the problems we face are now. We, too, need to go among the people, proclaim the word, and bear down in pure testimony. We, too, need to place hearts and hands in contact with iron rods of gospel truths.

The mighty change is the result of the process that starts with hearing the word of God. Every bearer of the higher priesthood is under a divine mandate to preach the gospel, which Paul said is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16). Jesus asked the elders of the Church, "Unto what were ye ordained?" In answer to his own question, he said, "To preach my gospel by the Spirit" (D&C 50:13–14). Unless parents, priesthood, and auxiliary leaders see to it that the word of the Lord is taught in and to families, members and non-members, there is no chance for them to experience the spiritual

rebirth. They will not have the power of God in their souls. They may be baptized and active, yet not be born again or responsive to the spiritual power. External motions may not reflect internal spiritual emotions.

We all must experience this mighty change of heart if we are to be more than “Cosmetic Mormons.” Our very countenances should reflect the image and perfection of God from an internalized spiritual rebirth. We must be spiritually alive here before we can hope to have salvation and eternal life hereafter.

My witness to you is that no one really understands the mighty change unless and until he or she has experienced it. It is not just a principle of the gospel, it is an experience with the gospel and each of us can have it. There is a power associated with it. The spirit within is real and it changes hearts and lives. I know it. I bear witness of Him from whom it comes. He lives.

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The Probationary Nature of Mortality

4

Robert J. Matthews

Alma chapter 12 is part of a lengthy discourse delivered by Alma to the people of Ammonihah, while he and Amulek were engaged in a special mission. In this portion of the discourse, Alma emphasizes the doctrine of life as a probationary state, a time of imperfect knowledge, when we learn the gospel by degrees and show our commitment to it by righteous living. Only by keeping the commandments, Alma explains, can we free ourselves from the sins of this world and enter into “the rest of the Lord.”

The people of Ammonihah, being in a state of apostasy, were told by Alma and Amulek that “they were a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people . . . a lost and a fallen people” (Alma 9:31–32), and that unless they repented they would “be visited with utter destruction” as a judgment from God (Alma 10:20–23). Alma, who was the high priest over the Church, and Amulek, a righteous resident of Ammonihah, spoke alternately, declaring that the Son of God would soon come to earth, and that they (the two brethren) were sent by revelation from God to deliver a warning message and teach the people how to repent. The Ammonihahites were angered by their words.

By inspiration, Amulek publicly exposed a devil-inspired plot of Zeezrom, one of the lawyers among the Ammonihahites who foremost opposed Amulek and Alma, which was calculated to embarrass the brethren. Amulek then delivered a

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pointed discourse on the doctrine of the Resurrection and also of the day in which every person will be required to give an account before the judgment bar in the presence of God. Although the entire audience was astonished at the doctrine Amulek taught them, Zeezrom was particularly fearful about the prospect of standing before God to answer for his conduct, and began to tremble “under a consciousness of his guilt” (Alma 11:21–46; 12:1).

Alma’s Discourse

The Mysteries of God

When Zeezrom wanted to know more about the Resurrection and the Judgment, Alma explained the basis on which the gospel is taught to the human family, showing that the mysteries of God are made clear only to the faithful. Here are Alma’s words:

It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell. (Alma 12:9–11)

Alma’s words explain a principle that determines the extent to which the gospel is taught at any one time to any individual or group. It is a matter of readiness based upon the personal desires and preferences of the receivers. The scriptures contain many examples of this principle in operation. You will remember Jacob’s saying to the Nephites: “If ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but as ye are not holy, . . . it must needs be expedient that I teach you the consequences of sin”

(2 Nephi 9:48). The unspiritual condition and lack of readiness of the people determined what the Lord inspired Jacob to teach them.

Jesus used parables for this same reason. The very nature of a parable veils the deeper spiritual meaning from those who do not seek and inquire. Although it is a popular notion that Jesus taught with parables to make his points clear and easy to understand, it just isn't so. In the first place, Jesus did not use parables to instruct his believers, but rather to teach those who did not yet accept him. Jesus himself explained why he used parables. We read in Matthew chapter 13 that after he had spoken the parable of the sower to the multitude at the seaside in Galilee, "the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them [the multitude] in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you [disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt 13:10–11). Jesus then explained: "For whosoever receiveth, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; But whosoever continueth not to receive, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (JST Matt 13:10–11; compare KJV Matt 13:12; D&C 1:33). Jesus explained further, "Therefore speak I to them [the multitude] in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt 13:13). He then said that the people were as Isaiah had prophesied they would be, having hearts that are gross, ears that "are dull of hearing," and eyes that are closed (Matt 13:14–15). To such a people the Savior did not reveal the mysteries and sacred truths of heaven.

The book of Mark illustrates this point more explicitly. We read there that after Jesus had delivered the parable of the sower to the multitude, and "was alone with the twelve, and they that believed in him," they asked him the meaning of the parable. He replied, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (JST Mark 4:9–10). "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them [the multitude], as they

were able to bear. . . . And when they were alone, he expounded all things unto his disciples” (JST Mark 4:26–27). Late in his ministry, while engaged in fierce conversation with the Jewish rulers who opposed him, Jesus said, “And, again, hear another parable; for unto you that believe not, I speak in parables; that your unrighteousness may be rewarded unto you” (JST Matt 21:34).

Make no mistake about it, Jesus used parables to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom from the unworthy and the spiritually careless. Parables were so effective at concealing the message that Jesus often had to explain the meaning afterward even to the disciples.

Evidence of selective teaching is seen in Jesus’ directions to the Twelve in the Sermon on the Mount. We read from the Joseph Smith Translation:

Go ye into the world, saying unto all, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come nigh unto you. And the mysteries of the kingdom ye shall keep within yourselves; for it is not meet to give that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls unto swine, lest they trample them under their feet. For the world cannot receive that which ye, yourselves, are not able to bear; wherefore ye shall not give your pearls unto them, lest they turn again and rend you. (JST Matt 7:9–11)

The deliberate withholding of spiritual information from those who do not believe is well-established in scripture. There may be a merciful purpose to this, since they cannot reject what they haven’t been taught. But mercy is not the only factor. There is justice also. The Lord withholds the greater spiritual truths from the proud and worldly-wise because they do not want to know, and do not value gospel truth enough to seek, ask, knock, or sacrifice anything to gain that knowledge. However, they cannot be saved in their willful ignorance, and thus “their unrighteousness is rewarded unto them” as Jesus said.

The Book of Mormon gives repeated examples of gospel truths being withheld until the person or the community is made ready by obedience. The prophet Mormon carefully explains

why he did not write more of the resurrected Savior's teachings to the people in ancient America:

And now there cannot be written in this book even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people; But behold the plates of Nephi do contain the more part of the things which he taught the people. And these things have I written which are a lesser part of the things which he taught the people; and I have written them to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them. And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people. (3 Nephi 26:6–11)

The prophet Moroni explained that the Lord will reveal to those who have faith like the brother of Jared the very things which the brother of Jared saw, “even to the unfolding unto them all my revelations, saith Jesus Christ. . . . And he that shall deny these [lesser] things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I show no greater things, saith Jesus Christ. . . . Come unto me, . . . and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief” (Ether 4:7–13).

Even to the faithful and obedient the Lord does not reveal all things at once, but reveals line upon line, precept upon precept, as they are able to receive it (see Isa 28:10; D&C 98:12). Joseph Smith said: “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 149).

Alma said these words:

I know that [God] granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. . . . For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations . . . all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the

Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.
(Alma 29:4, 8)

Thus, if we do not have the deeper concepts of the gospel, it may be that we ourselves are to blame for our lack of desire and our unpreparedness. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., dealt with this theme in October general conference in 1948: “The American Prophet has spoken; American prophets are speaking. . . . America does not need a [new] prophet; America needs a listening ear. And more than all, we who are here, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we need a listening ear” (685). Commenting on President Clark’s words thirty-one years later, President Spencer W. Kimball said:

While addressing the Saints from this pulpit in 1948, the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., spoke concerning having a prophet and a listening ear. He had read a pamphlet stating, “We need a prophet.” In answer he said, “No, we have had modern-day prophets for more than a hundred years, and they have given us the word of the Lord.” He continued, “The trouble with the world is they do not want a prophet teaching righteousness. They want a prophet that will tell them that what they are doing is right, no matter how wrong it may be.” A prophet has spoken—the prophet is speaking. We do not need another prophet. What we need is a listening ear. (6)

The Chains of Hell

Alma uses the phrase “chains of hell” twice in this discourse; once in 12:11 and once in 13:30. This very descriptive term is apparently one that Alma liked, for he used it three times in an earlier sermon to the people of Zarahemla (Alma 5:7, 9, 10). It occurs one other time in the Book of Mormon, in Ammon’s jubilant recounting of missionary success in which the Lord loosed many persons from “the chains of hell” (Alma 26:14). The term also occurs in Doctrine and Covenants 138:23, stating that the righteous in the spirit world rejoiced that the Son of God had delivered them from the “chains of hell.” The exact phrase does not occur in the Bible or the Pearl of Great Price, although Peter speaks of those who are in “chains of darkness” (2 Peter 2:4).

As defined by Alma, the “chains of hell” are the limitations people place upon themselves because of unbelief. As a result of unbelief, the greater manifestations of the Spirit and the greater gifts of spiritual knowledge are withheld, which leaves individuals unsaved and unaware of eternal things. Alma says that in such a state people are led by the devil down to destruction (Alma 12:11). Such unbelievers are actually in a spiritual deep-freeze and are in danger of freezing to death, but don’t even know that they are cold. Unless they are awakened and aroused and made to exercise, they will die spiritually. The devil slips his chains around them so subtly and carefully that he snares and binds them almost before they realize it. In the words of Nephi, the devil “leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord [ie, a soft cord], until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever” (2 Nephi 26:22). Nephi also describes the devil’s chains as “awful chains” (2 Nephi 28:22) and “everlasting chains” (2 Nephi 28:19). Alma called them the “everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18). Chains are so much more meaningful than ropes, for they are heavier and stronger, and they clank.

Jacob Marley, in Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, came to know why many are bound by chains. When he appeared as a ghost, he wore a long chain, and Scrooge asked him why he was thus fettered: “‘I wear the chain I forged in life,’ replied the Ghost. ‘I made it link by link, and yard by yard.’” Marley then warned Scrooge that he had already formed “a ponderous chain” of his own, though he was unaware of it (100).

In a vision, the prophet Enoch saw a representation of the power of the devil, the master of hell, who “had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and [the devil] looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced” (Moses 7:26). The veil of darkness signified by the chain is the veil of unbelief and spiritual darkness clouding the minds of human beings all over the earth—a condition which pleases the devil.

The Reality of the Judgment

At the request and inquiry of Zeezrom, Alma reinforces Amulek's teaching about the literal resurrection of the body and the vivid reality of a day of judgment and accountability to God "according to our works" (Alma 12:12). Alma's colorful description of the plight of the unworthy is as follows:

Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned. For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence. But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance. (Alma 12:13–15)

The Second Death

Alma and Amulek carefully explain that every person shall rise from the dead, immortal—the spirit and body being reunited—never to be separated or to die again. However, at the time of the Final Judgment, after the Resurrection, the wicked will suffer a second death—not a death of the body, but a death as to righteousness—a spiritual death, meaning they will be banished from God's presence, and from his joy and happiness, forever.

Alma's words are as follows:

And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness. Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; and then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them

according to his will. Then, I say unto you, they shall be as though there had been no redemption made; for they cannot be redeemed according to God's justice; and they cannot die, seeing there is no more corruption. (Alma 12:16–18)

From other passages we learn more fully why this banishment is called a second death. The doctrine is this: At the time of creation, Adam and Eve were in the presence of God. The Fall brought upon them and their posterity two deaths: (1) a temporal death, which is the physical death—the cemetery death; and (2) a spiritual death in which they were shut out from the presence of the Lord. Spiritual death does not mean the death of one's spirit, but means to be out of God's presence and to be dead as to righteousness. Every person born into the world suffers these two deaths. There are no exceptions. All of us have been shut out of the presence of God, and all of us shall experience physical death.

The atonement of Jesus Christ ransoms and rescues all mankind, without exception, from both deaths brought by the Fall of Adam. This means that every person will die physically and every person will be resurrected physically from the grave and be given everlasting life. In like manner, every person, regardless of worthiness or unworthiness, will also be reclaimed from the spiritual death and will be brought back into the presence of God for the Final Judgment. No matter how wicked or unrepentant, every person will, after the Resurrection, be brought back into the presence of God for judgment. Thus all will be reclaimed from the two deaths that resulted from the fall of Adam. Those who are righteous will remain in his presence. Those who are still unclean and filthy at the time of judgment will be sent away from his presence a second time, and thus they die a second spiritual death. Only the sons of perdition suffer the complete second death. This is clearly detailed by Samuel the Lamanite in Helaman 14:15–18, by Moroni in Mormon 9:12–13, and by the Lord in D&C 29:40–44 and 76:37–38.

*Cherubim and a Flaming Sword:
Our Need for a Probationary State*

We are familiar with the account in Genesis telling that after Adam and Eve had fallen and become mortal the Lord placed cherubim “and a flaming sword which turned every way” as a barrier to prevent them from eating of the fruit of the tree of life and living forever in their sins (Gen 3:22–24). However, in neither Genesis nor the book of Moses are the implications of this situation clearly defined. We can be grateful to Alma for an explanation.

Alma’s discourse on this subject was prompted by a question from one Antionah, a chief ruler among the Ammonihahites who doubted the doctrine of the Resurrection because he had interpreted the account of the flaming sword to mean that since Adam and Eve were prevented from eating of the fruit of the tree of life, “there was no possible chance that they should live forever” (Alma 12:20–21).

Alma’s explanation points out that the reason for preventing Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of life was to give them a period of time in which to repent. Had they eaten of the tree of life immediately, they would have lived forever in their sins. Thus God prevented that and gave them time to repent. Here are Alma’s words:

There was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. . . . And now behold, if it were possible that our first parents could have gone forth and partaken of the tree of life they would have been forever miserable, having no preparatory state; and thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated, and the word of God would have been void, taking none effect. (Alma 12:24, 26)

As seen by Alma’s explanation, eating of the fruit of the tree of life brings about the same condition that is brought about by the Resurrection. By postponing mankind’s immortality with an interval for repentance, followed by death and resurrection, the Lord made mortal life a temporary probation, a time

to prepare for eternity. Therefore, if a person “wasteth the days of his probation, . . . awful is his state” (2 Nephi 9:27), for he is in the same condition that would have prevailed if Adam and Eve had partaken of the tree of life immediately and continued forever in their sins, shut out from the presence of God, and thus in a state of misery. Those who waste the days of their probation are as though there were no plan of redemption and no atonement, except for the resurrection from the grave.

The Rest of the Lord

In discoursing upon the responsibilities of mankind during the mortal probationary state, Alma draws upon an Old Testament concept from the days of the children of Israel in the wilderness and their entering into the promised land of Palestine. The Lord promised the Israelites that if they would keep his commandments he would lead them out of Egypt, through the terrible wilderness, and into the promised land where he would give them rest. They would find rest from their enemies, rest from their travels, and rest from all their sorrows and tribulations. The promise was that the presence of the Lord would be with them as they traveled—if they would obey the commandments (see Ex 33:14).

However, due to fears, doubts, transgression, and the failure of the Israelites to believe in his promised protection and divine nurturing, the Lord withdrew his presence and swore in his wrath that they would not enter into his rest while in the wilderness. This is recounted in Psalm 95:7–11:

To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

In this part of his discourse Alma speaks of two types of commandments. “The first commandments” were given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which, when broken,

brought them knowledge of good and evil, placing them in a position to act “according to their wills . . . whether to do evil or to do good” (Alma 12:31). The penalty for breaking these commandments was death. After they were mortal and in a condition to act, the Lord then gave Adam and Eve another set of commandments, making known to them the plan of salvation and commanding “that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power” (Alma 12:32).

Alma compares mankind’s spiritual journey through life to the physical journey of Israel through the wilderness. Here are his words:

But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.

And now, my brethren, behold I say unto you, that if ye will harden your hearts ye shall not enter into the rest of the Lord; therefore your iniquity provoketh him that he sendeth down his wrath upon you as in the first provocation, yea, according to his word in the last provocation as well as the first, to the everlasting destruction of your souls; therefore, according to his word, unto the last death, as well as the first.

And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts, that we provoke not the Lord our God to pull down his wrath upon us in these his second commandments which he has given unto us; but let us enter into the rest of God, which is prepared according to his word. (Alma 12:33–37)

According to Alma’s explanation, the first commandment given to Adam and Eve on this earth was that they not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the penalty being death. Because they transgressed and were shut out of God’s presence, suffering death as a consequence, God gave them and their children the second commandments, otherwise known as the

gospel of Jesus Christ or plan of redemption. The penalty for breaking these commandments is the second death, an everlasting spiritual death. The “first provocation” was in the Garden of Eden; God kept his word and brought death as a consequence. The second provocation was with the children of Israel in the wilderness. Again, God kept his word and withdrew his presence. He did not allow those who came out of Egypt to enter the promised land, but caused them to die in the wilderness without finding rest, neither rest for their bodies nor for their spirits.

Alma warns that since God was true to his word in earlier provocations, we have reason to believe that he will be equally true to his word, if we provoke him by our disobedience. This concept was clearly expressed by Elder Orson Pratt in speaking of the penalty for breaking the second commandments:

What is the penalty? Second death. . . . “If you cease not to do evil, you shall be punished with everlasting destruction from my presence, and from the glory of my power,” saith the Lord.

“But,” says one, “He is so merciful, that He would not inflict such a penalty upon us.” Have you ever seen a man who has escaped from the first death? or who had any prospect of it? No; you cannot find a remedy to hinder him from going down to his grave. Has there been any escape for any individual for 6000 years past? Now, if the Lord has been punctual to make every man, woman, and child, suffer the penalty of the first transgression, why should you suppose that you can stand in His presence, and behold the glory of His power, and have everlasting life and happiness, when He has told you that you should be banished therefrom, that the second death should be inflicted upon you? For the first provocation, He has fulfilled to the very letter the penalty of the law; so will He in the second, and there is no escape. Says one, “Is there no escape?” No; not so far as you are able to provide. But I will tell you that there is redemption for man from [meaning “to prevent”] this second death or penalty, and the Lord remains a perfect, just Being, His justice being magnified.

There is a way of escape from the effects of your own individual transgressions, but it is different from the redemption from the original sin of Adam. The redemption from that sin was universal without works, but the redemption from your own personal sins is universal with works on the part of the creature—universal in its nature, because it is free to all, but not received by all. The salvation, or redemption from your own sins, is not by free grace alone, it requires a little work. But what are the works? Jesus Christ, through his death and sufferings, has answered the

penalty, on condition that you believe in him, and repent of your sins, and be baptized for the remission of them, and receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of hands, and continue humble, and meek, and prayerful, until you go down to your graves. (*Journal of Discourses* 1:288–89)

It is evident that Elder Pratt was paraphrasing Alma's speech in Alma chapter 12.

Phrases similar to "enter into the rest of the Lord" appear in the Old Testament, in the Book of Mormon, as well as in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, and in D&C 84:24. As noted, "the rest of the Lord" can refer both to physical rest and to spiritual rest. In Doctrine and Covenants 84:24, *rest* is defined as the fulness of God's glory. The word can also mean *remainder*. Since God gives us only according to our readiness and diligence, what the faithful receive is "the rest of the Lord," meaning they shall receive the remainder, the rest of the knowledge and blessings God bestows upon his faithful children.

As Alma has taught us, this life is the probationary time wherein we must prepare ourselves to receive that rest.

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To the wayward people of Ammonihah, Amulek had delivered a poignant testimony of Christ as God, had borne witness of the necessity of repentance, and had held out the hope of redemption from sin and death through the merits and mercy of the coming Messiah (see Alma 11:26–46). Alma then delivered a companion and confirming witness of the reality of the Savior and the manner in which men and women can, through faith, pass from death unto eternal life. “Therefore,” he said, quoting the Lord to the ancients, “whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.” Alma then pleaded: “And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts, . . . but let us enter into the rest of God, which is prepared according to his word” (Alma 12:34, 37). It is in the context of Alma’s discussion of how the Saints can, through applying the atoning blood of Christ, enter into the rest of God, that Alma begins a discussion of the holy order of God. His discussion is a deep and ponderous and insightful prophetic declaration as to how, through the blessings of the priesthood—those called and prepared from the foundation of the world—the people of God may be sanctified from sin and enjoy the “words of eternal life” in this mortal sphere, all in preparation for eternal life with God and holy beings hereafter (see Moses 6:59).

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The Priesthood Among the Nephites

Before we undertake a serious consideration of Alma 13, let us turn our attention to the matter of priesthood among the Nephites. From the days of Adam to the time of Moses, the High Priesthood was administered through what we know as the Patriarchal Order, a patriarchal theocracy whereby the will of God in heaven was made known to the inhabitants of earth through worthy high priests who governed their families in both civil and ecclesiastical matters (see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines* 3:104; *Way to Perfection* 72–73; *Answers* 2:174; McConkie, *New Witness* 35, 657–58). When the children of Israel proved unworthy and unwilling to receive the highest blessings of the gospel, including the fulness of the priesthood and the privilege of seeing the face of God, Jehovah took from the midst of Israel the fulness of the High Priesthood; he also took Moses, the man on earth who held its keys or right of presidency (see JST, Ex 34:1–2; JST, Deut 10:1–2; D&C 84:19–27). There were men among the people of the covenant who held the Melchizedek Priesthood after Moses was translated—including the sons of Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel—but they had probably been ordained to the same previously. President Joseph Fielding Smith stated that after this time in Israel,

the common people, the people generally, did not exercise the functions of priesthood in its fulness, but were confined in their labors and ministrations very largely to the Aaronic Priesthood. The withdrawal of the higher priesthood was from the people as a body, but the Lord still left among them men holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, with power to officiate in all its ordinances, so far as he determined that these ordinances should be granted unto the people. Therefore, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Elijah, and others of the prophets held the Melchizedek Priesthood. (*Doctrines* 3:85)

Because there were no Levites in the colony of Lehi (the Nephites and Mulekites were of the tribes of Joseph and Judah, respectively), we assume that the Aaronic Priesthood was not

among the Nephites, at least not until the coming of Jesus to the Americas. The titles *priests* and *teachers* (2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:17–18; Alma 45:22) thus appear to describe ministerial duties in the higher priesthood rather than offices in the Aaronic Priesthood (Smith, *Doctrines* 3:87; *Answers* 1:123–26; McConkie, *Promised Messiah* 427; *A New Witness* 311). In seeking to understand the nature of authority among the Nephite branch of Israel, we turn to a capsule statement by Joseph Smith: “All Priesthood is Melchizedek but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels remained.” The latter-day Seer then added this important detail: “*All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself*” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 180–81; hereafter *TPJS*; emphasis added). Lehi was a prophet. Nephi and Jacob were prophets. Mosiah, Benjamin, Alma, Samuel, Mormon, and Moroni all wore the prophetic mantle and held the Melchizedek Priesthood. Surely what the Lord said to Nephi, son of Helaman, was true in regard to others of the Nephite oracles who held the keys of power: “Behold, I give unto you power, that whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; and thus shall ye have power among this people” (Helaman 10:7; compare D&C 132:39). To what degree all male persons among the Nephites held the priesthood, how and under what circumstances it was conferred, and the nature of priesthood organization between 600 B.C. and 34 A.D. are not clear from the account in the Book of Mormon.

The Nephites were neither primitives nor Jews. They were Christians. They were Former-day Saints who enjoyed transcendent spiritual blessings. They had the veil parted and saw the visions of heaven. They knew the Lord, enjoyed his ministrations, and received from him the assurance of eternal life. They built temples (see 2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 1:17; 2:2; 11; Mosiah 1:18; Alma 10:2; 16:13; 26:29; 3 Nephi 11:1), not to

perform work for the dead, for such was not done until the ministry of Christ to the world of spirits, but to receive the covenants and ordinances of exaltation. During the Nephite “mini-millennium,” and we would suppose during those prior periods of Nephite history when the people qualified themselves for such, “they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed *according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them*” (4 Nephi 1:11, emphasis added). These were the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promise of the gospel, the priesthood, and eternal life (see D&C 2; Abraham 1:2–3; 2:8–11).

The Calling of High Priests Anciently

In beginning his discussion of foreordination to the priesthood, Alma said: “And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children” (Alma 13:1). His use of the word *forward* is unusual, especially in light of the fact that he will speak of people in the past; we would normally say *backwards*. But actually forward can also mean toward the beginning, toward the front, “[n]ear or at the forepart” (*Webster’s*). The commandments mentioned here seem to be those referred to in Alma 12. Alma had stated, “Wherefore, [God] gave commandments unto men” after Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, “after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness.” (Alma 12:31, 32).

Alma noted, “that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people” (13:1). Presumably he is speaking here of those who held the priesthood in its fulness from Adam to Moses, whom this prophet could have learned of through the brass plates, by independent revelation, and through the traditions and group memory of this branch of American Hebrews.

“All of the ancient patriarchs were high priests,” Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “but the direction of the Church in those days was by patriarchs” (*Doctrines* 3:104). In those early ages, the presiding high priest was “God’s chief representative on earth, the one who holds the highest spiritual position in [the Lord’s] kingdom in any age. . . . This special designation of the chief spiritual officer of the Church has reference to the administrative position which he holds rather than to the office to which he is ordained in the priesthood” (McConkie, *Mormon* 355–56).

Continuing from the Nephite text: “And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” (13:2). The preeminent responsibility of prophets is to bear witness of the Savior, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). Those who preceded the Lord of Light spoke of the redemption and reconciliation that would come through Jesus Christ. They thus pointed toward and anticipated his coming. The messianic age would indeed be the apex, the midpoint, truly the meridian of time. At the same time, all prophets are types and shadows of the Savior. He was called and prepared from before the foundations of this world. So were they. He speaks the truth. So do they. He offers the words of life. So do they. He preaches as one having authority. So do they. He offers his life as a final testament. Such also is required on occasion of those who stand in the prophetic office. Thus the ancient prophets were living Messianic prophecies.

Foreordination to the Priesthood

One cannot fully comprehend the boundless and eternal implications of priesthood by examining its purposes and powers as pertaining to this life alone. Priesthood is God’s almighty power. Men are not called and ordained to the priesthood in this life without appropriate readiness and preparation,

and no person receives the higher priesthood in this second estate who was not called, prepared, and foreordained for the same in the first estate. Joseph Smith declared: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council” (*TPJS* 365). In referring to this statement by the Prophet, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr. said: “I do not know whether we have a right to interpret the Prophet’s statement. . . , but I like to think that it does include those of us of lesser calling and lesser stature. . . . I like to think that perhaps in that grand council something at least was said to us indicating what would be expected of us, and empowering us, subject to the re-confirmation here, to do certain things in building up the kingdom of God on earth” (170–71). In that same spirit, Wilford Woodruff had remarked some seventy years earlier:

Joseph Smith was ordained before he came here, the same as Jeremiah was. Said the Lord unto him, ‘Before you were begotten I knew you,’ etc. So do I believe with regard to this people, so do I believe with regard to the apostles, the high priests, seventies and the elders of Israel bearing the holy priesthood, I believe they were ordained before they came here; and I believe the God of Israel has raised them up, and has watched over them from their youth, and has carried them through all the scenes of life both seen and unseen, and has prepared them as instruments in his hands to take this kingdom and bear it off. If this be so, what manner of men ought we to be? If anything under the heavens should humble men before the Lord and before one another, it should be the fact that we have been called of God. (*Journal of Discourses* 21:317; hereafter *JD*).

Alma’s discourse on priesthood continued: “And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (13:3). We are prone to say in the Church that in the premortal existence we walked by sight but now we walk by faith. This is only partly true. Though in that pristine sphere we saw the Gods and surely conversed with them; though we

had the plan of salvation, the Gospel of God the Father, presented to us and heard the noble and great ones attest to its veracity; though we walked by knowledge in that estate, still *faith* was required to be obedient and thereby to qualify for the blessings of the Father. There was a gradation of faithfulness among the spirits. There were many who were “noble and great” (Abraham 3:22), implying that there were those spirits who were less great and less noble, perhaps some even ignoble. Those men who demonstrated “exceeding faith and good works” that Alma discusses were ordained there to receive the priesthood here. This is the doctrine of foreordination. It is based upon a man’s faithfulness in premortality and God’s foreknowledge, that is, God’s infinite capacity to have the past, present, and future before him as “one eternal ‘now’” (see *TPJS* 220). Joseph Fielding Smith observed: “In regard to the holding of the priesthood in pre-existence, I will say that there was an organization there just as well as an organization here, and men there held authority. *Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit world held priesthood*” (*Doctrines* 3:81; emphasis added).

Alma noted that individuals were called with a holy calling “on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place”—that is, in the premortal world—“being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling” (13:3). The question arises at this point: Does this call to the priesthood refer to righteousness and subsequent ordination in premortality or mortality? We cannot tell for sure from the context. Alma in fact moves back and forth between the past and the present, and we simply do not always know when he has changed perspectives. The fact is, the principle is true in regard to both spheres: men are called to serve because of faith and obedience—there and here. The faithful “are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such” (13:3). Men are called to the priesthood to assist in the redemption of souls. They are called to preach and make available what Paul described as “the

ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). They are called to bless lives—to lighten burdens, to strengthen the feeble knees and lift up the hands that hang down—just as their Master, the great High Priest, is called upon to do. Priesthood bearers who lived before and after Christ are and have been involved in the work of His ministry; their work is preparatory. They, like the preeminent forerunner, John the Baptist, prepare the way of the Lord. Those prophets and priests who labored before the meridian of time sought to prepare the people for the coming of the Redeemer. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “They could preach redemption; they could foretell its coming; but their work was preparatory only. Redemption itself would come through the ministry of Him of whom they were but types and shadows” (*Promised* 451). Those who have lived since that time seek to instruct and warn and exhort the people—all in preparation for his second advent, that final redemption of the earth and its inhabitants.

Alma then offered prophetic insight into this doctrine, insight which readily distinguishes foreordination from the false concept of predestination: “And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren. Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren . . .” (13:4–5). The simple truth is that men and women may fall from grace and depart from the living God through sin; in short, many live beneath their privileges. They qualify in the first estate for transcendent earthly blessings, but then come into this life, fail to hearken to the voice of the Spirit, and thus traverse the broad roads of the world as natural beings, existing in an uninspired and unregenerated state. Nephi had spoken centuries earlier of those who harden their hearts. These are they who say in regard to further light and knowledge: “We have received, and we need no more! . . . We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have

enough!” (2 Nephi 28:27, 29). Alma had similarly spoken: “It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God,” but, on the other hand, those that harden their hearts, “the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word” until “they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:9–11). President Harold B. Lee suggested:

Despite that calling which is spoken of in the scriptures as ‘foreordination,’ we have another inspired declaration: ‘Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. . . .’ (D&C 121:34). This suggests that even though we have our free agency here, there are many who were foreordained before the world was, to a greater state than they have prepared themselves for here. Even though they might have been among the noble and great, from among whom the Father declared he would make his chosen leaders, they may fail of that calling here in mortality (7).

Alma explained that those who fail to live up to their privileges had been “in the first place” on the “same standing with their brethren” (Alma 13:3, 5). That is, even though no two persons were exactly alike in premortality; even though gifts and talents, abilities and capacities varied infinitely from person to person in this pre-existence, still all had the opportunity to choose the right, to love the truth, and to exercise exceedingly great faith.

This description in the Book of Mormon of foreordination may be the first reference in modern scripture to the doctrine of the premortal existence. Once we grasp this fundamental verity, once our minds have been enlightened to understand the eternal nature of humanity, then we recognize these teachings in Alma 13 (or later in Ether 3 with the appearance of the premortal Christ) without difficulties. It may be, however, that few of the Saints in the early years of the Restored Church turned initially to the Book of Mormon as a scriptural source for the doctrine of pre-existence. Elder Orson Pratt explained: “I do not think that I should have ever discerned it in [the Book of Mormon], had it not been for the new translation of the Scriptures”—

specifically, what we would call the book of Moses—“that throwing so much light and information on the subject, I searched the Book of Mormon to see if there were indications in it that related to the pre-existence of man” (*JD* 15:249).

From Eternity to All Eternity

Alma explained that “this high priesthood [was] after the order of [God’s] Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things” (*Alma* 13:7). Joseph Smith declared: “The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years” (*TPJS* 157). In the words of President George Q. Cannon, the priesthood “had no beginning; [it will have] no end. It is [as] eternal as our Father and God, and it extends into the eternities to come, and it is as endless as eternity is endless, and as our God is endless: for it is the power and authority by which our Father and God sits upon His throne and wields the power He does throughout the innumerable worlds over which He exercises dominion” (*JD* 26:245). The Holy Priesthood after the order of the Son of God is from eternity to eternity, from everlasting to everlasting, meaning from one existence to the next. It was in operation in the first estate, it blesses lives and seals souls to eternal life in mortality, and it will continue into the world of spirits and beyond, on into the kingdoms of glory wherein dwell kings and queens, priests and priestesses.

The loss of plain and precious truths from the Old and New Testaments had led many to believe that Melchizedek, the great high priest of antiquity, rather than the priesthood, was himself without “beginning of days [or] end of life” (*Heb* 7:3). We learn, however, from the Joseph Smith Translation (*JST*, *Hebrews* 7:3) and from the Book of Mormon (*Alma* 13:8) that it was the order of the priesthood to which Melchizedek was ordained that

is endless. “The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right from the eternal God,” Joseph Smith clarified, “and not by descent from father and mother; and that priesthood is as eternal as God Himself, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (TPJS 323). Indeed, as Alma pointed out, the priesthood of the Son of God is as eternal as the Son of God. Persons “thus . . . became high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen” (Alma 13:9).

Entering the Rest of God

It is often the case that the scriptures may be understood on many levels. Words and phrases and doctrinal concepts may mean a number of things, depending upon the context, the audience, and the need at the time. For this reason, it is seldom wise to be overly zealous about exclusive definitions, singular interpretations, formulas, steps, etc. when it comes to comprehending holy writ. We have this principle illustrated in Moroni’s recitation to Joseph Smith of the prophecy of Malachi concerning the coming of Elijah. In the midst of quoting numerous passages from the Old and New Testaments, Moroni quoted Malachi 4:5–6 quite differently from how it appears in the KJV. Did this new rendition invalidate the old one? Are the renditions in our present Bibles inaccurate, or does Moroni’s account simply represent another dimension of the prophecy? Knowing full well what Moroni had said in 1823, Joseph the Prophet, in an epistle to the Church in 1842, quoted the Malachi passage directly from the King James Version. “I might have rendered a plainer translation to this,” he said, “but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands” (D&C 128:18). In discussing this specific example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “Moroni gave an *improved* rendering. All this does is establish that there is more than one way to render a passage, and that the version that the people receive depends upon the

spiritual maturity they possess. . . . Thus, we have two versions, both of which accurately portray and give a doctrine of the kingdom. One of them gives it in a way that is intended to open our eyes to something over and beyond and above that, shall we say, the generality of mankind who are not so spiritually endowed are entitled to receive” (“The Promises Made to the Fathers” 50–51).

Alma 13 teaches us to appreciate that men were foreordained to the priesthood and that we all should walk in the light to live worthy of premortal promises. This is an important realization. It is true, and it is what is intended. At the same time, there appear to be additional messages presenting themselves to us as we read and search and compare. We will illustrate the principle in this and the next section, through a consideration of two main concepts: (1) entering the rest of the Lord, and (2) being received into the holy order of God.

In reading Alma 13 in context—as a part of a larger sermon—we begin to see that the idea of entering the rest of the Lord is a central theme. The word *rest* is mentioned in each of the final four verses of the preceding chapter. It is mentioned five times in chapter 13. It would appear that Alma is trying to point out that it is through the atoning blood of Christ and by the power of the holy priesthood that individuals and congregations are prepared and made ready to enter the rest of God. In one sense, a person enters the rest of God when he or she gains a testimony of the gospel, and is brought out of worldly confusion into the peace and security that comes only from God. In this sense, the rest of God is “the spiritual rest and peace which are born from a settled conviction of the truth in the minds of [individuals].” (Smith, *Gospel* 126; see also 58). It is to know the peace of the Spirit, to enjoy the blessing of the Comforter. It is what Jesus promised to disciples when he said: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). Second, spirits enter the rest of God when they enter paradise, the home of the righteous in the postmortal spirit world at the time of death (Alma 40:11–12; 60:13). A third

dimension of the rest of the Lord is that which follows the resurrection and judgment, as we enter the celestial kingdom and receive exaltation. It is interesting that Mormon, speaking to the members of the Church in his day, uses *rest* in at least two ways. “Wherefore,” he said, “I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord,”—meaning here in mortality—“from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3).

There is yet another sense in which the word *rest* is used in scripture, particularly in the Book of Mormon. This is also the sense in which a modern revelation uses the word:

And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;

For without this [the power of godliness] no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

Now this Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, *which rest is the fulness of his glory*.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also. (D&C 84:19–25; emphasis added)

This is a significant scriptural statement, especially as we consider Alma’s remarks to the people in Ammonihah. His invitation for them to enter into the rest of the Lord is built upon the notion that ancient Israel provoked God and proved unworthy of this blessing (see Alma 12:36–37). Moses desired to make available the highest privilege of the priesthood to Israel—the privilege of seeing the face of God, of coming

directly into the divine presence. Of the Israelites, Jehovah said: “I have sworn in my wrath, that *they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest*, in the days of their pilgrimage” (JST, Ex 34:2; emphasis added). Here the rest of the Lord is equated with being in the personal presence of the Lord while the recipients are still mortal.

It appears that the concept of the “rest of the Lord” is used occasionally in terms of what other scriptures call the *Church of the Firstborn* (see Heb 12:23; D&C 76:54). The Church of the Firstborn is the church of the exalted, an organization of saved souls, a body of believers who have passed the tests of mortality and received the approval of God. They qualify for life in the celestial kingdom, and because they have been true to all their trusts, are worthy to be joint heirs with Christ, co-inheritors with him to all of the blessings of the firstborn (see Smith, *Doctrines* 2:42; *Man* 272; *The Way* 208; McConkie, *Mormon* 139–40; *The Promised* 47). The phrase “Church of the Firstborn” is not found in the Book of Mormon, but it may be that to enter the rest of the Lord is to enter the Church of the Firstborn. In speaking of the ancient worthies, Alma said: “They were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (13:11–12). From one point of view we can grasp and apply this vital lesson from the past: those of us who magnify our callings in the priesthood are sanctified—made pure and holy—by the renovating powers of the Spirit (see D&C 84:33). We come in time to hate sin and to love and cherish righteousness. We are at peace in a troubled and turbulent world. We enter the rest of the Lord. From another perspective, these qualify, through the atonement of Christ, for the highest of priesthood blessings spoken of in the revelations. “These are they who have come to an innumerable company of

angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn.” Further, “They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn” (D&C 76:67, 94). Indeed, the ultimate privileges of God’s holy authority are spoken of as follows: “The power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church—to have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (D&C 107:18–19).

The Holy Order of God

Related to this doctrine is the second topic which might be viewed from more than one perspective—being received into the holy order of God. We have generally understood that we enter into the holy order of God through receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood, inasmuch as the full name of this sacred authority is “*the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God*” (D&C 107:3). At another level, we encounter the holy order of God through receiving the ordinances of the temple, through receiving the endowment and the blessings of eternal marriage.

I would suggest the possibility that the scriptures speak of an additional and ultimate way of entering the holy order—through receiving the promise and seal of eternal life, through receiving what the scriptures and the prophets call the “fulness of the priesthood” (see D&C 124:28). In the book of Moses, the Prophet Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the early chapters of Genesis, he recorded the revelation of the gospel to Adam. We read there of Adam’s baptism and spiritual rebirth. “And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying: Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. This is the record of the Father, and the Son, from henceforth and forever.” And now

note the language of the scripture: “*And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity. Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons. Amen*” (Moses 6:66–68; emphasis added). Adam was born again and became through adoption a son of Christ. But there was more. He became, through the powers of the holy priesthood and the ordinances associated therewith, a son of God, meaning the Father. Of this matter Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

As men [and women] pursue the goal of eternal life, they first enter in at the gate of repentance and baptism, thereby taking upon themselves the name of Christ. They then gain power to become his sons and daughters, to be adopted into his family, to be brethren and sisters in his kingdom. Baptism standing alone does not transform them into family members, but it opens the door to such a blessed relationship; and if men so live as to obtain the Spirit and are in fact born again, then they become members of the Holy Family.

Then, if they press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, keeping the commandments and living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, they qualify for celestial marriage, and this gives them power to become the sons [and daughters] of God, meaning the Father. They thus become joint-heirs with Christ who is his natural heir. Those who become sons [and daughters] of God in this sense are the ones who become gods in the world to come (D&C 76:54–60). They have exaltation and godhood because the family unit continues in eternity (D&C 132:19–24). (*Doctrinal* 2:474)

Again, in referring to the experience of our first parent, President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “To Adam, after he was driven from the Garden of Eden, the plan of salvation was revealed, and upon him the *fulness* of the priesthood was conferred.” (*Doctrines* 3:81; emphasis in original). President Ezra Taft Benson, in an address delivered at the Logan Temple Centennial in May of 1984, spoke the following about this order of God:

The temple is a sacred place, and the ordinances in the temple are of a sacred character. Because of its sacredness we are sometimes reluctant to say anything about the temple to our children and grandchildren.

As a consequence, many do not develop a real desire to go to the temple, or when they go there, they do so without much background to prepare them for the obligations and covenants they enter into.

I believe a proper understanding or background will immeasurably help prepare our youth for the temple. This understanding, I believe, will foster within them a desire to seek their priesthood blessings just as Abraham sought his.

When our Heavenly Father placed Adam and Eve on this earth, He did so with the purpose in mind of teaching them how to regain His presence. Our Father promised a Savior to redeem them from their fallen condition. He gave to them the plan of salvation and told them to teach their children faith in Jesus Christ and repentance. Further, Adam and his posterity were commanded by God to be baptized, to receive the Holy Ghost, and *to enter into the order of the Son of God.*

To enter into the order of the Son of God is the equivalent today of entering into the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, which is only received in the house of the Lord.

Because Adam and Eve had complied with these requirements, God said to them, "Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity" (Moses 6:67) (8).

The Prophet Joseph Smith stated in June 1843: "If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord" (TPJS 308). In the latter part of August in that same year, he said: "Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings" (TPJS 323).

Thus it may be that in the ultimate sense we enter the holy order of God when we enter that ultimate rest of the Lord, when we receive the fulness of the priesthood, when we gain membership in the Church of the Firstborn. Such a blessing may come here or hereafter, for as the Lord declared in a modern revelation: "blessed are they who are faithful and endure, *whether in life or in death*, for they shall inherit eternal life" (D&C 50:5; emphasis added). It is in this light that the meaning of a number of related scriptures begins to surface. For example, the order into which Enoch and his people were received (and that which was later conferred upon Melchizedek) is described

as follows: “For God having sworn unto Enoch and his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; . . . to stand in the presence of God.” Then, in some cases, people were even taken from the earth because of their righteousness: “And men having this faith, *coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven*” (JST, Genesis 14:30–32; emphasis added). After the children of Israel rejected their spiritual privileges at the base of Sinai and after Moses had broken the first set of tablets, Jehovah said to the Lawgiver: “Hew thee two other tables of stone, like unto the first, and I will write upon them also, the words of the law, according as they were written at the first on the tables which thou brakest; but it shall not be according to the first, for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore *my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them*; for my presence shall not go up in their midst, lest I destroy them.” (JST, Exodus 34:1; emphasis added). In speaking of this “last law,” the higher priesthood privilege which Israel lost, Joseph Smith observed: “God cursed the children of Israel because they would not receive the last law from Moses.” Or, stated another way, “The law revealed to Moses in Horeb never was revealed to the children of Israel as a nation” (TPJS 322, 323). Similarly, the group of 144,000 seen by John the Revelator in vision—those who in a future day will have the seal of God in their foreheads (see Revelation 7:4–8; D&C 133:18)—“are high priests, *ordained unto the holy order of God . . . who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn*” (D&C 77:11; emphasis added).

And so what does all of the above have to do with Alma 13? I feel it to be no stretch of the imagination, no wresting of the scriptures, to suppose that many of the descendants of Lehi were possessors of great knowledge and power, that they sought

for and received the mysteries of the kingdom, and thus that many of the Nephite Saints proved worthy of all of the blessings of the house of the Lord. They did so, even as those about whom they read. They built and used temples. President Brigham Young said simply: “The ordinances of the house of God are expressly for the Church of the Firstborn.” (*JD* 8:154.) Thus, in the words of Alma, “there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (13:12). Alma’s appeal to the attainments of the faithful of the past serves as a model and a pattern for his own people, and, by extension, as a guide and incentive for modern readers.

Melchizedek: The Scriptural Prototype

Alma’s discussion of the ancients who entered the rest of the Lord narrows at this point as he chooses Melchizedek to illustrate his doctrine. “And now, my brethren,” he said, “I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order [the holy order of God] which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever” (13:13–14). Melchizedek is one of the most enigmatic figures in Judaeo-Christian history. Legends about Melchizedek abound in Jewish traditions, in Christian literature and art, and among the writings of the Qumran sectaries (see John W. Welch, “The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19,” in *By Study and Also By Faith*, 2:238–72). In some Jewish and Christian writings he is identified as Shem, the son of Noah, while later traditions hold that he was a descendant of Shem. Others suggest that he was named Melchizedek by God when the priesthood was bestowed upon him (see Ginzberg 1:233; 5:225–26). Josephus explained that the city of Salem, over which Melchizedek reigned, later became known as Jerusalem. (“The Antiquities” 1.10.3.) In writing of Jerusalem, Josephus observed: “He who

first built it was a potent man among the Canaanites and is in our tongue called [Melchizedek] the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there] the first priest of God, and *first built a temple* [there], and called the city Jerusalem, which was formerly called Salem.” (“The Wars” 6.10.1; emphasis added). And, most important for our study, the legends attest that Melchizedek was both king and priest in Salem (Heb 7:1; Ginzberg 1:233).

As Latter-day Saints, we know a great deal about Melchizedek as a result of these verses in Alma, from Joseph Smith’s translation of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis and the fifth and seventh chapters of Hebrews, and from the Prophet’s sermons on the priesthood. Alma tells us that Melchizedek reigned under or in the stead of his father, whose name is not given; that he received tithes from Abraham; that he was king over the land of Salem, initially a people steeped in wickedness; and that through the exercise of mighty faith and through his preaching ministry as a high priest of the holy order, he helped to establish peace and righteousness among his people (13:15–18). The scriptures also make clear that Melchizedek is a marvelous type of Christ. His name comes from two Hebrew roots, *melekh* (king), and *tzdek* (righteousness), Melchi-tzedek meaning literally “king of righteousness” or “my king is righteousness.” We know from modern revelation that to honor him as a great high priest and to avoid the too frequent repetition of the sacred name of Deity, the church in ancient days called the priesthood after his name (D&C 107:3–4). His was a single-minded existence, a life of devotion to duty, a life which pointed people toward the great High Priest, *the Prince of Peace*. From the Joseph Smith Translation we learn:

Now Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire.

And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch,

It being after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God;

And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name. (JST, Genesis 14:26–29)

In writing his epistle to the Hebrews, Paul spoke of Christ who “glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:5–6).

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. (Heb 5:7–8)

Most of us have heard these verses quoted scores of times, particularly verse eight, in reference to the place of obedience and suffering in the process of the Son of God becoming perfect. There is, however, a fascinating note at this point on the manuscript page in the Joseph Smith Translation; it states that verses seven and eight “are a parenthesis alluding to Melchizedek and not to Christ” (see footnote a to Heb 5:7 in the LDS Bible). That is to say, Melchizedek, though a son, learned obedience by the things which he suffered. But is such not true of Christ? Certainly. As Elder McConkie has suggested, it is true of both.

The fact is verses 7 and 8 apply to both Melchizedek and to Christ, because Melchizedek was a prototype of Christ and that prophet’s ministry typified and foreshadowed that of our Lord in the same sense that the ministry of Moses did. . . . Thus, though the words of these verses, and particularly those in the 7th verse, had original application to Melchizedek, they apply with equal and perhaps even greater force to the life and ministry of him through whom all the promises made to Melchizedek were fulfilled. (*Doctrinal* 3:157; see also *Promised* 450–51)

And what of the relationship of Melchizedek to Abraham? Alma mentions simply that Abraham paid tithing to him

(13:15). An old tradition among the Jews states that “Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, priest of God Most High, and king of Jerusalem, came forth to meet [Abraham],” as Abraham was returning from the war “with bread and wine. And *this high priest instructed Abraham in the laws of the priesthood and in the Torah*” (Ginzberg 1:233; emphasis added). More specifically, a modern revelation informs us that “Esaias . . . lived in the days of Abraham, and was blessed of him—which Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah” (D&C 84:13–14). It appears that Abraham sought for the same power and authority as Melchizedek, the power to administer endless lives, the fulness of the powers of the priesthood. We read the following from the book of Abraham:

And finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers. (Abraham 1:2)

On 27 August 1843, Joseph Smith offered prophetic commentary on the seventh chapter of Hebrews, Paul’s discussion of the place and power of the Melchizedek Priesthood. According to James Burgess, the Prophet said:

Paul is here treating of three different priesthoods, namely, the priesthood of Aaron, Abraham, and Melchizedek. Abraham’s priesthood was of greater power than Levi’s, and *Melchizedek’s was of greater power than that of Abraham*. . . . I ask: was there any sealing power attending this [Levitical] Priesthood that would admit a man into the presence of God? Oh no, but Abraham’s was a more exalted power or priesthood. He could talk and walk with God. And yet consider how great this man [Melchizedek] was when even this patriarch Abraham gave a tenth part of all his spoils and then *received a blessing under the hands of Melchizedek—even the last law or a fulness of the law or priesthood, which constituted him a king and priest after the order of Melchizedek or an endless life*. (*Words of*

Joseph Smith 245–46, spelling and punctuation corrected; emphasis added.)

According to Elder Franklin D. Richards, the Prophet explained that the power of Melchizedek was “not the power of a prophet, nor apostle, nor patriarch only, but of a king and priest to God, to open the windows of heaven and pour out the peace and law of endless life to man. And no man can attain to the joint heirship with Jesus Christ without being administered to by one having the same power and authority of Melchizedek” (*Words of Joseph Smith 245; spelling and punctuation corrected*). In summary, Joseph the Prophet explained, “Abraham says to Melchizedek, I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, Now I have a priesthood” (*TPJS 322–23*).

As we have noted already, Alma taught that the people of Salem “did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace” (13:18). More specifically, we are told elsewhere that Melchizedek and his people established Zion and attained a level of transcendent righteousness, even as Enoch. That is, he “obtained peace in Salem, and was called the Prince of peace. And *his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch* which God had before taken. . . . And this Melchizedek, having thus established righteousness, was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace” (*JST, Genesis 14:33–34, 36; emphasis added*). We can thus understand why Alma would close his discussion of Melchizedek in the spirit of tribute: “Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention” (13:19).

And so Melchizedek is the prototype, the example, the scriptural illustration. He received the priesthood, magnified callings in the priesthood, and chose to work righteousness; he

made it possible for himself and his people to enter into the rest of the Lord through applying the atoning blood of Christ and by virtue of the sealing powers of the priesthood. Paul likewise stressed the importance and example of this faithful soul: “For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually” (JST, Heb 7:3). It is in this context, then, that we see the ultimate reward of faithful service in the priesthood, a reward “according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood” (D&C 84:39). Those who abide by the *covenant* of the priesthood, magnify their callings therein, and live by every word of God, eventually receive what Enoch and Melchizedek received: God swears unto them with an *oath*, by his own voice, that the fulness of eternal reward will be theirs (see D&C 84:33–40).

Conclusion

I have believed for some time that at certain periods in their history the Nephites were a spiritually sensitive and accomplished people, that they knew their God and enjoyed fellowship with him. In addition, for some time I have wrestled to understand the nature of the condemnation, the scourge and judgment that rest upon the Church because of our near neglect of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 84:54–60). I have come to feel that the key to having the condemnation lifted is not simply to read the Book of Mormon, though that is a necessary and appropriate beginning. The Lord has indicated that we are not only to say—read or quote or discuss—what is in the book; we are to *do* what is written (D&C 84:57). That is, we are not just to read the Nephite record; we are to *live* it. The Book of Mormon is not just another book about religion; it *is* religion! It is as though the Nephite prophets were crying out to us: “We had the fulness of the gospel. We sought for the Lord. We found

him. We enjoyed unspeakable blessings at his hand. We feel to sing the song of redeeming love. And now, O reader, go and do thou likewise!" In short, I have a witness that the Book of Mormon is intended to do more than present valuable doctrines and principles and precepts, though it would be worth its weight in gold if it did that alone. In addition, the narrative details and encourages encounters with the divine. From Nephi to Moroni we see and hear the steady witness that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever—that he constantly and consistently reveals himself to those who seek him and strive to do his will. In that sense, Alma 13 is more, much more, than a theological exercise; it is the blessed ideal, the goal to which the Saints of the Most High aspire.

Alma is a master teacher. As is so typical of the great prophetic spokesmen of the ages, he warns, instructs, points toward the divine goal and blessings which follow from faithfulness, and gives specific and simple counsel. How are people to qualify to enter into the rest of the Lord in this life and ultimately rest with God hereafter? They are to live their lives with watchfulness and carefulness. Alma encouraged his people to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man, a divine directive that is equally applicable for the Latter-day Saints. Note the timeliness of his counsel, given some eighty years before the birth of Jesus: "And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice" (Alma 13:25). Like all of the Lord's mouthpieces, he warned against procrastination. He testified that safety from Satan is to be had through vigilance: "Humble yourselves before the Lord and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering" (28).

How are we to qualify to enter the rest of the Lord? It is not through conducting spiritual marathons, not through excessive

zeal, not through attempting to run faster than our file leaders. It is “by a godly walk and conversation” (D&C 20:69), by a quiet but steadfast commitment to the Lord, his gospel, and his anointed servants. It is through applying the blood of Christ, putting off the natural man, becoming free from the taints and stains of the world, by enjoying the gifts and fruit of the Spirit. In the words of Alma, it is through “Having *faith* on the Lord; having a *hope* that ye shall receive eternal life; having the *love* of God always in your hearts, *that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest*” (13:29; emphasis added). Alma later declared to his son Helaman “that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). And so it is in regard to the highest of spiritual blessings and the grandest of priesthood privileges—we gain them, in process of time, through acquiring and exemplifying faith, hope, and charity. Only by abiding by principles of righteousness thereby is anyone entitled to the rights of the priesthood, the powers of heaven (D&C 121:36).

The Book of Mormon is a vital window to the past. It is, in conjunction with the words of living oracles, a standard against which our present beliefs and practices may be measured. In addition, it is an invitation to come unto Christ and partake of his love and life hereafter. Though this sacred volume is not intended as a procedural handbook—it is Christ-centered more than church-centered—it makes known precious and profound truths relative to the holy order of God and the manner in which the ancients were sanctified, sealed, and saved. This is not just a lesson in history, for as the revelation declares: “Now this same Priesthood, which was in the beginning, shall be in the end of the world also” (Moses 6:7). What was true for the Former-day Saints is true for the Latter-day Saints. What inspired and motivated them can and should entice us to continued fidelity and devotion. In the words of a modern Apostle: “This is the priesthood which we hold. It will bless us as it blessed Melchizedek and Abraham. The priesthood of Almighty God is here” (McConkie, “Ten Blessings of Priesthood” 35).

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Instruments in the Hands of God: The Message of Alma 17–27

6

Clyde J. Williams

The approach one takes when reading the Book of Mormon can make a significant difference in the information gained or the principles learned from it. It is my view that the greatest benefit from the Book of Mormon comes when we apply what we read to our lives and to our time. In emphasizing the importance of this principle President Ezra Taft Benson declared, “The Book of Mormon was written for us today. . . . God, who knows the end from the beginning, told [Mormon] what to include in his abridgement that we would need for our day” (“Book of Mormon” 63). In approaching the missionary experiences of Ammon and his brothers, one of the most important lessons for us to learn is how they are relevant to our time.

The Mission Approach

Prior to their missions, the sons of Mosiah, along with Alma, had made a mighty change in their lives, turning from persecuting the Church to building it up. Ammon and his brothers had a compelling desire to take the gospel to the Lamanites, who at this time were still mortal enemies of the Nephites. As recorded in Mosiah 28:3, “they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very

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thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.” When they asked their father, king Mosiah, for permission to go and preach the gospel to the Lamanites (Mosiah 28:5), it must have seemed to him that it would be certain death to send his sons among the Lamanites. It would be like sending our sons on a mission to Iraq during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. They would have to go without visas, and their arrival in that country would be unannounced. Perhaps in this light, we can better appreciate the deep concerns Mosiah must have felt.

The approach which Mosiah took to ask of the Lord for assurance that his sons’ planned mission was appropriate, has significant application for parents today whose sons or daughters are called to mission areas where there may be risks. Certainly all parents, as well as missionaries, are entitled, as was Mosiah, to receive a confirmation from the Lord that, despite the risks, the mission call is right (see Mosiah 28:6–8).

Mosiah’s sons demonstrated the kind of courage and commitment that is essential for successful missionaries. Not only were they willing to risk their lives and go to a difficult mission area, but they were also willing to give up their right to their father’s throne (Alma 17:6). This willingness to sacrifice worldly power, positions, and possessions is a virtue to be sought by all who desire to serve the Lord.

Instruments in the Hands of God

Ammon and his brothers desired “that they might be an instrument in the hands of God” to teach the Lamanites the gospel (Alma 17:9). The Lord emphasized the concept of being an instrument in his hands when he declared, “Wherefore, I call upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thrash the nations by the power of my spirit; And their arm shall be my arm” (D&C 35:13–14). Perhaps the following examples will illustrate the significance of being proper instruments in the Lord’s hands.

Some years ago I was building a shed next to my home. I had some three-inch screws which I was using to build a frame for some shelving. I asked my son to go over to the neighbors and borrow a power drill so that “turning the screws in” would not be such a tedious job. He returned with a rechargeable power drill. I thought, this will be great, no cord to worry about or step on. However, I found that as I tried to put in the screws the drill would take them in about half-way and then the power would give out. The battery powered drill did not have sufficient power for the difficult task. I told my son to take the drill back and ask the neighbor for his other drill because the rechargeable one did not have enough power for the job I was doing. When he returned with the other drill, we plugged it into the outlet in our home. I found that I now had more than enough power to drive the screws all the way into the wood. Both power drills were instruments in my hands; however, only one was able to perform the task that I needed done.

As missionaries and servants of the Lord we might ask ourselves, Am I like the rechargeable drill trying to get by on spirituality stored up from past experiences, or am I striving to be in tune continually so I am like a power drill that is plugged into the source of all power? Ammon and his brothers understood this principle and thus, because of their preparation, they were like fine precision tools in the hands of the Lord. They were continually “plugged in” to the eternal source of power.

Characteristics of Successful Missionaries

To be a powerful precision instrument in the hands of the Lord should be the desire of all faithful members of the Church. The story of the mission of the sons of Mosiah among the Lamanites is full of principles that will help missionaries and members be more successful in their work of sharing the gospel.

Scriptural Knowledge

From the time of their spiritual awakening, the sons of Mosiah recognized the importance of the scriptures in under-

standing the gospel and bringing others to a knowledge of the truth. As they went about seeking to repair the spiritual damage they had done, they were involved in diligently “explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them” (Mosiah 27:35).

The scriptural knowledge that these young men had acquired helped them throughout their mission among the Lamanites. It was Ammon’s ability to rehearse and lay before king Lamoni “the records and the holy scriptures” and to “expound . . . the plan of redemption,” which led to the king’s conversion (Alma 18:36,39–42). Aaron was able to lead Lamoni’s father past his doubts of God’s existence by “expound[ing] unto him the scriptures . . . and also the plan of redemption” (Alma 22:13).

In each case where the scriptures are mentioned during this Lamanite mission, specific reference is made to Christ, his coming into the world, his atonement, and his resurrection (see Alma 18:39; 21:9; 22:13–14). Then, as today, the main focus of the missionary message is helping people to “come unto Christ.”

Alma’s description of the sons of Mosiah following their fourteen-year mission shows their love of the scriptures: “They had waxed strong in the knowledge of truth; for they were men of sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (Alma 17:2). The success of today’s missionaries will certainly be influenced by the degree of scriptural knowledge and understanding they possess. It should be noted that the depth of understanding attributed to the sons of Mosiah came over a period of several years of “diligent,” not casual, searching of the scriptures. The Lord has instructed missionaries in this dispensation to “first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongues be loosed” (D&C 11:21–22).

Fasting and Prayer

Recognizing the need to have the Lord help in their righteous endeavor to take the gospel to the Lamanites, Ammon and his brothers engaged in much fasting and prayer. They understood that prayer is the primary means for us humans to communicate with our Heavenly Father and that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”(James 5:16). It is likely that they also understood that it was their fasting and prayers that would enable them to have the Spirit of the Lord help them be more effective instruments in the hands of the Lord (Alma 17:9). As the Spirit came upon them, they were given comfort and the strength they needed to face the significant challenges they were to experience as missionaries (Alma 17:10). The same is true in missionary work today: the more we are worthy of the Spirit the better we can function as effective instruments for the Lord.

Patience and Overcoming Discouragement

As Ammon and his brethren prepared to leave on their missions to the Lamanites, many of the Nephites laughed at them and ridiculed them for thinking that they could convert the sin-hardened Lamanites to the gospel. They suggested that it would be better to take up arms and seek to destroy the Lamanites (see Alma 26:23–25). Nevertheless, Ammon and his companions went forward on their mission. As they approached the land of the Lamanites, however, their hearts became depressed and they “were about to turn back”(Alma 26:27). Their discouragement occurred, perhaps, because of the ridicule and doubt expressed by some of the Nephite people, and because of the efforts of the Adversary.

At this critical time the Lord comforted these young missionaries and reminded them that they would need to be “patient in long-suffering and afflictions” (Alma 17:11). In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson, “There are times when you simply have to righteously hang on and outlast the devil

until his depressive spirit leaves you. . . . To press on in noble endeavors, even while surrounded by a cloud of depression, will eventually bring you out on top into the sunshine” (“Do Not Despair” 67). Even though Ammon and his companions were mocked, spat upon, stoned, and cast into prison during their fourteen-year mission, they followed the Lord’s council that if they would bear their afflictions patiently, “I will give unto you success”(see Alma 26:27–29).

While most missionaries today will not face imprisonment or stoning, they will nevertheless face discouragement and have their patience tried. A positive example of the power of patience was related to Elder L. Tom Perry by a mission president. This man remembered being a young nineteen-year-old called to serve a mission in Brazil. On this missionary’s very first day in the field, a minister called his small congregation out of a church to shout names at the missionaries as they walked by. Some of the group became more violent and began to throw rocks. Suddenly a rock hit this young man in the back. In anger the young missionary picked up a rock and wheeled around. Having been a baseball pitcher, his immediate desire was to throw the rock. However, he caught himself, and instead of throwing it at the crowd he threw the rock at a telephone pole some distance away, hitting it squarely in the middle. The crowd stopped, realizing that the telephone pole could have been any one of their heads. Their mood changed, and from then on, whenever the missionaries went down that street, they were challenged to a rock-throwing contest. “The rock-throwing contests led to discussions of the gospel, which led to conversions, which led to the establishment of a branch of the Church in that community” (Perry 3).

The patience of this young missionary ultimately prepared the way for the Lord’s Spirit to touch the hearts of the people. It took fourteen years of patience for Ammon and his brethren to see the full results of their labors.

Good Examples

Ammon and his companions were instructed to “show forth good examples” (Alma 17:11). To be a good example is to have Christ’s image in our countenances. Ammon and his friends were watched continually by the Lamanites, and their conduct had a tremendous impact on their success as missionaries. Ammon’s example of service to king Lamoni in defending his flocks and in defending him in front of his father opened the door to the missionary work which would occur at this time among the Lamanites.

Modern day members and missionaries cannot escape the fact that those around them are watching their behavior. In the words of President Gordon B. Hinckley:

This entire people have become as a city upon a hill which cannot be hid. Sometimes we take offense when one who is a member of the Church is involved in a crime and the public press is quick to say that he is a Mormon. We comment among ourselves that if he had been a member of any other church, no mention would have been made of it.

Yet, is not this very practice an indirect compliment to our people? The world expects something better of us and when one of our number falters, the press is quick to note it. (4)

For us to be effective instruments in the hands of the Lord requires that we seek to be a “light unto the world” (D&C 103:9). Had Ammon and his brothers failed to be a “light” to the Lamanites, they would have failed. The impact of failing to be a good example was brought home to me through reading about the experience of two missionaries who, while serving in a foreign land, found some old American rifles. After obtaining the rifles, they got up on top of the local chapel and began shooting at stray cats. The people throughout the neighborhood began to refer to the missionaries as the “Latter-day Cat Haters.” The result was that their ability to reach the people was destroyed, and they had to be transferred from the area (Jacobs 138–139).

Serve the People

After he and his brothers had separated, Ammon was captured by the Lamanites and taken before king Lamoni. Ammon explained to the king that it was his desire to live among the Lamanites “perhaps until the day I die” (Alma 17:23). Furthermore, he told king Lamoni that it was his desire to be his servant (see Alma 17:25). This must have impressed the king. It was his service in this role, caring for the king’s sheep and horses, that Ammon was able to begin to “open the hearts” of the Lamanites. We could say that it was Ammon’s service which opened Lamoni’s heart.

Service has always been a vital part of the gospel. The Savior’s life was one large service project for the benefit of mankind. For modern-day missionaries, service is still a significant part of missionary work.

An experience that demonstrates the power of service was related by Elder Robert E. Wells.

Two elders met and taught a professor with credentials from Heidelberg and the Sorbonne. His mind was not open to their message, but the man had to go to the hospital for surgery. While he was recuperating in the hospital, his yard and garden suffered. The two missionaries felt impressed to use their preparation day to mow his lawn, trim the hedge, and weed the flowers.

The wife told her husband what they had done. He sent for the elders to come to the hospital, and with tears in his eyes he said, “Never in my entire adult life has anyone ever gone out of his way to do anything for me.”

His demeanor changed. He listened to the missionary discussions. Previously skeptical, he now paid rapt attention and visibly became more meek and humble. He prayed for the first time since he was a child, and he received a testimony and was baptized. (28)

The power of service in changing and touching the hearts of men is inestimable. When properly rendered, service is an expression of love. It is the love of God and his children that motivated Ammon and his brethren and should motivate all who desire to be servants of the Lord.

Put the Lord and His Work First

When Ammon was first brought before king Lamoni, the king offered him one of his daughters for a wife (see Alma 17:23–25). Ammon declined this offer, stayed on his mission and put the Lord and His work first.

When Ammon was tending the king's sheep along with the other servants of the king, he rejoiced when the wicked Lamanites came and scattered the sheep. This was not because he enjoyed trouble or because he liked to fight his enemies. Rather, Ammon rejoiced because he knew that this confrontation would open the door for him to “show forth . . . unto these my fellow-servants . . . the power which is in me . . . that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to believe in my words” (Alma 17:29). Ammon was not concerned about his life or his status. He was concerned for the Lord and His work.

All who serve missions must realize that they are not there to find an eternal companion, to impress others with their number of baptisms, to learn how to be more organized or disciplined, or to master a foreign language so they can be more successful in life. While some of these may occur as a natural result of faithful service in the mission field, the primary purpose of serving a mission is to serve the Lord by helping to bring people unto him. Ammon understood this concept and was thereby enabled to find much success as a missionary.

Be Faithful

After Ammon had “disarmed” those who tried to kill him as he defended the king's flocks, the other servants reported this spectacular event to the king. As a “testimony” of what had happened, they also carried the arms of the men Ammon had wounded to the king (see Alma 17:39).

The king was amazed at the courage and power Ammon had displayed and began to wonder if Ammon were the “Great Spirit.” When he asked where Ammon was, he was told that Ammon was feeding the king's horses. King Lamoni's response

was “surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man” (Alma 18:10). Ammon was no ordinary servant. He had been extraordinarily faithful in carrying out every command that the king had given him. This faithfulness further served to open the king’s heart to Ammon’s message.

The application of this principle to members and missionaries today is that being effective servants in the kingdom requires faith. We must be faithful to the commandments, to the mission rules (if we are missionaries), to those presiding over us, to those we serve, and most of all, to our Heavenly Father and the trust he has in us.

The Power of Discernment

After caring for the king’s horses, Ammon came before king Lamoni. Awe-struck by Ammon’s power and ability, the king was fearful of speaking to him (see Alma 18:11–15). It was in this circumstance that Ammon relied on the Spirit to enable him to perceive king Lamoni’s thoughts (see Alma 18:16). Ammon could then determine how to respond to Lamoni and his unspoken concerns.

In a similar way, the Lord will help his modern-day servants perceive the thoughts or feelings of those they are teaching. This perception may not be as dramatic as in the case with king Lamoni, but the Lord “knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Alma 18:32). I remember many times as a young missionary when the Lord would help me perceive the lack of understanding, the questioning, or the rejection of our teachings on the part of those we were instructing. They did not have to say anything—we could discern it by the Spirit. The spirit of discernment can enable one to be a more effective teacher and servant of the Lord. Such was the case with Ammon.

Divine Protection

After Ammon had taught the plan of redemption to Lamoni and his family, they were all overcome by the Spirit in a

remarkable manner. It was in this situation with all, including Ammon, in a spiritual trance, that Ammon's life was threatened. Among those who had gathered to witness this unusual occurrence were some of those who had been scattering the king's sheep at the waters of Sebus. One of the men, whose brother had been slain by Ammon, stepped forward and attempted to kill Ammon as he lay unconscious on the ground. As he lifted up his sword, he was struck dead (see Alma 19:18–22). Mormon notes that this was in fulfillment of the promise the Lord made to king Mosiah concerning his sons: "I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites" (Mosiah 28:7).

This experience is not cited to imply that no harm will ever come to righteous servants of the Lord. As mentioned previously, Ammon and his brethren experienced many hardships including being beaten, stoned, and cast into prison (see Alma 26:29). The Lord has promised his servants in this dispensation that He would go before them and "be on [their] right hand and on [their] left" and preserve them as they seek to spread the gospel throughout the nations of the earth (see D&C 84:88; 35:13–15). Undoubtedly this promise holds true unless one is "appointed unto death" or, as in some cases, "the Lord suffereth the righteous to be slain that his justice and judgment may come upon the wicked" (see D&C 42:48; Alma 60:13).

Many missionaries today have received promises of divine protection during their settings-apart, in patriarchal blessings, or in their father's blessings. I am convinced that when the "mighty works of God" (D&C 88:109) are unfolded for this dispensation, we shall see countless examples of the hand of the Lord providing protection for his servants as they go about the work of spreading the gospel throughout the world.

The Lord Will Direct Your Path

Following the conversion of king Lamoni and his family and the establishment of the Church among his people, Lamoni requested that Ammon go with him to meet his father. However, the voice of the Lord warned Ammon not to go to the land where

Lamoni's father lived because his life would be in danger. The Spirit then instructed him to go and deliver his brother Aaron and his companions out of prison in the land of Middoni (see Alma 20:1–2). This experience demonstrates the principle that when the Lord's servants are about his work, the Spirit will direct them as to where they should go and whom they should see.

Nephi, son of Lehi, was "led by the spirit not knowing beforehand" what he should do as he returned the third time to attempt to get the plates of Laban (1 Nephi 4:6). Modern-day occurrences of the Lord's servants' being led by the Spirit are not infrequent.

One such example was related by Joseph Olschewski, a resident of Midvale, Utah. Two missionaries were driving early one morning down a road in the mountain countryside of eastern Oregon. The elder in the passenger seat turned to his companion and told him that he felt impressed to turn around and go up a little dead-end lane they had just passed. There was a home at the end of the lane, and so they went to the door and knocked. A man answered the door and after the missionaries had introduced themselves they were invited into the home.

The man went in and got his wife. He then explained that they had just brought their newborn daughter home from the hospital. The baby was suffering from a serious heart disease, for which the doctors had given up all hope of cure after numerous tests and various medications. (This experience occurred some years before the development of open heart surgery.) The doctors had told the couple that the child would not live for more than a few weeks and that they could leave her in the hospital, or take her home for the few weeks she would live.

The couple then asked the missionaries if they would pray for their baby. The missionaries explained the process of priesthood blessings and explained the Church's belief in the power of fasting and prayer. They invited the couple to fast with them for one day. The missionaries returned the next day and gave

the little girl a blessing. In the blessing they were inspired to promise that the child would be healed of the heart disease.

The couple continued to be taught the gospel and were eventually baptized. Upon examining the child a short time later, the doctors found that the heart disease had disappeared, a fact which they were at a loss to explain. The Lord is concerned about his work, and will direct his servants if they are worthy and listen for the promptings of the Spirit.

Love the People

As Ammon and Lamoni were headed for the land of Middoni to gain the release of Aaron and his companions, they unexpectedly met Lamoni's father. When Lamoni's father saw that his son had befriended a Nephite, he was full of anger. He commanded king Lamoni to kill Ammon, and when Lamoni would not, his father drew his sword to slay Lamoni. At this point Ammon intervened and defended Lamoni both in word and with the sword, withstanding the efforts of Lamoni's father. When Lamoni's father saw that Ammon could slay him, he began to plead for his life. As Ammon spoke, Lamoni's father was deeply impressed with the "great love [Ammon] had for his son Lamoni" (see Alma 20:8-27).

It is significant that it was not Ammon's strength or his ability to speak which had the greatest effect upon Lamoni's father. Rather, it was the great love Ammon showed for Lamoni, even being willing to defend him from physical harm, which so deeply affected Lamoni's father. Because of the love and example of Ammon, Lamoni's father was anxious to be taught about the gospel (see Alma 20:27; 22:3). Love has the effect of opening the hearts of individuals. In the Lord's instructions through the prophet Joseph Smith, we are taught that love is among those characteristics which qualify one for the work of teaching the gospel (see D&C 4:5). The more we allow love to permeate our service to the Lord the more successful our efforts will be.

Appropriately Dealing with Agnostics

After Ammon and Lamoni obtained the release of Aaron and his companions, they returned to the land of Ishmael to teach Lamoni's people. However, Aaron and his companions were led by the Spirit to go and teach Lamoni's father, who was the king over all the land (see Alma 22:1). Lamoni's father was anxious to learn about the message that had made such a change in his son's life. Aaron's discussion with Lamoni's father is a great example of how to teach an agnostic, one who lacks belief in God (see Alma 22:7–18). Aaron expounded the scriptures to the king, explaining the creation, the plan of redemption, and the coming of Christ. Lamoni's father was so impressed with the message of the gospel that he said to Aaron, "I will give up *all* that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 22:15; emphasis added). In contrast, when Lamoni's father was earlier faced with the fear of death, he promised Ammon up to "*half* of the kingdom" if he would spare him (Alma 20:23; emphasis added). It is interesting to note that the king's value of physical life was only half that of the value he placed on principles that would affect him eternally.

Aaron then outlined the steps that the king must take to obtain a testimony of God and His plan. These steps are recorded in Alma 22:16. First, one must have a desire to know about God and be born of him. Second, one must be willing to bow down and be humble before God. Third, there must be a willingness to repent of all one's sins. Fourth, one must call on the name of God and pray unto him. Fifth, the prayer must be offered with "faith, believing that ye shall receive." Sixth, the end result is the Lord's promise that those who follow these steps will receive the hope for eternal life which they desired.

King Lamoni's father's response demonstrates the humility and willing obedience that are required for one to come to a knowledge of God. His prayer found in Alma 22:18 is a fine example of a sincere prayer by an agnostic. Agnostics generally feel like hypocrites when asked to pray. They feel that

they cannot pray to someone whose existence they cannot prove. Consequently, Lamoni's father's words are very understandable. He said, "O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me" (Alma 22:18). His willingness to give up all his sins as well as all he possessed illustrates the depth of commitment that is necessary to come to know God.

How Great Shall Be Your Joy

After Ammon, his brothers, and their companions had completed their missions among the Lamanites, they were amazed at the success the Lord had granted them. Many thousands of Lamanites had joined the Church of God (see Alma 23:5; 26:13). Their depth of commitment and strength of testimony were exceptional. Seldom has there been a group of converts so willing to put everything "on the line"—including their own lives. This success caused Ammon and his brethren to "rejoice exceedingly" (Alma 25:17).

Ammon's expression of his joy caused Aaron to voice concern that perhaps Ammon was beginning to boast of his success (see Alma 26:10). However, through Ammon's reply we can discern the principles upon which true joy is founded. First, Ammon stated that he was not boasting of his own strength or wisdom (Alma 26:11–12). He recognized that by himself he was nothing and that his joy had nothing to do with his personal abilities. Second, Ammon affirmed that his joyful expressions glorified God and His omnipotent power (see Alma 26:12) because through the power of God they had been enabled to perform marvelous works and miracles that were beyond the comprehension of mortal men. Third, Ammon explained that as he saw the many thousands of the Lamanites who had been freed from the "pains of hell" and brought to "sing redeeming love," he had great cause to rejoice (see Alma 26:13).

The joy that Ammon experienced has to be the kind of joy that Lehi referred to when he said "Men are that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). This type of joy or happiness is, according

to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God” (Smith 255–56). Ammon and his brethren had been virtuous, faithful, holy, and obedient to the Lord’s commands. Thus, they experienced a great outpouring of joy. Divine joy is available to all who are willing to serve the Lord with the same degree of commitment as Ammon and his companions. In our own day, the Lord has promised “how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!” (D&C 18:16).

A Positive Reunion

To appreciate the joy that was felt when Alma and the sons of Mosiah were reunited once again, one must understand the events which preceded this reunion (see Alma 27:16–19). It was not merely a fourteen-year absence that caused them to rejoice. In the words of Alma, the greater joy came because “they were still his brethren in the Lord” (Alma 17:2). This was the case because they had done three things: 1) they had come to a sound understanding of the gospel, 2) they had searched the scriptures diligently, and 3) they had given themselves to much prayer and fasting (see Alma 17:2–3).

We have all experienced reunions of one kind or another in our lives, whether they be missionary reunions, family reunions, or reunions with old friends. The key to the degree of joy we feel is not just how long we have been apart, but how true have we remained to the principles of the gospel. The young missionaries of today will find that their future reunions with former companions will bring more joy if both have remained faithful to the principles of the gospel which they learned in the mission field. These earthly reunions are but a type for the greater reunion we will have one day with our Father in Heaven. Here too, the degree of joy experienced in that reunion will depend upon our ongoing faithfulness to the principles of the gospel during this life.

Conclusion

The unusual nature of the experiences the sons of Mosiah had—the fact that they served for fourteen years and the dramatic way in which those they taught were converted—may cause some to wonder whether these events are relevant to missionary work today. It is my feeling that these remarkable missionary experiences were not intended to present an unrealistic view of missionary work. It would seem highly unlikely that missionaries today can read these accounts and feel that their challenges are more ominous than those which Ammon and his brethren faced. Thus, they can know that the Lord will certainly help them in facing their challenges today.

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An Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon— The Face May Be Strange, but the Voice Is Familiar

7

Gerald N. Lund

Korihor and the Word of God — A “Foil” in the Book of Mormon

At what is very near the exact center of the Book of Mormon, we have what appears to be an anomaly in terms of scripture content. In several places the major writers of the Book of Mormon tell us that they are interested only in sharing the spiritual history of their peoples. They clearly state that their focus is on Christ and on the spiritual things of history. (For example, see 2 Nephi 5:32 where Nephi says he is only going to engrave those things which are pleasing to God.) Yet in the 30th chapter of Alma, we have a whole chapter on the doings of an anti-Christ, including a detailed summary of the false doctrine that he taught. Why would Mormon take time to do that? Do we really need a summary of the teachings of evil men? What is it about Korihor that was so compelling to Mormon that he felt justified to give it four pages of textual treatment? The purpose of this chapter is to explore those questions and assess the significance of the Korihor material.

One of the first things to note is that in this portion of the Book of Mormon, Korihor is a good example of a scriptural

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“foil.” One of Webster’s definitions of a foil is something that is used “to enhance by contrast.” For example, a jeweler places diamonds on black velvet to provide a contrasting backdrop, or foil, for the gems. There are numerous places in the standard works where the scriptural writers use that same technique, placing two contrasting principles or examples side by side to show even more clearly what they were trying to teach.

For example, it is interesting that the parable of the good Samaritan, one of the most powerful lessons on Christian service found in any of the standard works (see Luke 10:25–37), is followed immediately by the story of Mary and Martha (see Luke 10:38–42), which teaches another very different lesson about service. This is what we mean by “scriptural foils.”

Perhaps scriptural foils provide one answer to the question: Why would Mormon take time and space to tell us of a person who taught false and evil doctrine? The Korihor story is an obvious foil in one sense and a subtle, but perhaps even more significant foil, in another sense. The obvious one is that we find a story of an “evil missionary,” a man who seeks to preach false doctrine and proselytize people to his way of thinking, sandwiched right in between the account of the sons of Mosiah and their mission to the Lamanites, and Alma’s great mission to the Zoramites. Is that an accidental thing, this “missionary foil” that we find here?

But there is something more subtle than this. There is an interesting conceptual chain related to the “power of the word” that flows through this section of the Book of Mormon. As the account of the mission of the sons of Mosiah begins, Alma testifies that through personal preparation, including scripture study, fasting and prayer, these brethren were able to teach the word “with power and authority of God” (Alma 17:3). Then, in the very next verse, Mormon notes that they had great success in bringing the Lamanites to the gospel because of “*the power of their words*” (Alma 17:4; emphasis added). The next ten chapters show just how true that statement is.

But as we come to the end of their fourteen-year mission, what do we find again? In Alma 26, Ammon begins to review their tremendous successes. And what does he credit for this incredible conversion story? “*The power of [God’s] word which is in us*” (Alma 26:13; emphasis added).

Chapters 27 and 28 finish out the account of their mission, telling us how the Lamanites were settled among the Nephites and so on. But chapter 29 breaks off the historical narrative. At that point, Mormon chooses to insert a prayer of Alma’s. And what does he pray for? Note his words: “Oh that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and *speak* with the trump of God, *with a voice to shake the earth*, and *cry* repentance unto every people!” (Alma 29:1, emphasis added). In other words, Alma’s prayer is that he might have even greater *power* to preach *the word* than he has hitherto had.

This is what precedes the Korihor account. For a moment now, let’s skip Alma 30 and Korihor and see what immediately follows. In chapter 31, Alma learns that the Zoramites are in a state of apostasy—a situation that has grave political overtones because of their proximity to the Lamanites. So Alma decides to begin his own mission to an apostate people. Mormon is careful to note why Alma chooses this avenue of response.

And now, as *the preaching of the word* had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had *more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else*, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. (Alma 31:5; emphasis added)

Alma’s mission, however, is not the only thing to follow the story of Korihor. In chapter 32, when Alma begins to teach the Zoramite poor how to find God, he uses a powerful analogy of a seed. Often in the Church, we refer to Alma 32 as being a great chapter on faith. This is not incorrect; but the seed Alma refers to is not faith, it is *the word of God* (see Alma 32:28). After talking about the power of the word in Chapter 31, Alma

teaches the Zoramites how to take the word and bring it to the point where it has great power in our lives.

Thus we see in one place after another in this section of the Book of Mormon, beginning in Alma 17 and going through Alma 33, there is reference after reference to the *power of the word*. And what is placed right in the middle of this chain? Korihor! And therein lies the more subtle scriptural foil. Korihor himself is an example of the “power of the word,” only this time it is a negative example. Just as Ammon and his brothers and Alma lead many *into* the Church by preaching the word to the people, Korihor leads many people *away* from the Church by his *preaching his word*.

In light of that foil, let us now examine what Korihor taught and see if we can determine why Mormon would devote space on the plates to describe the doctrine of this anti-Christ.

The Korihor Philosophy—A New Face and Old Voice

If we could take a moment and talk in philosophical terms, there are three branches of philosophy which have a great deal to do with what a person believes, how they approach life and what constitutes their value system: metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology.

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of reality. It tries to answer the question, “What is real?” *Meta* is a Greek prefix meaning *after* or *beyond*, so metaphysics means literally, beyond physics. In other words, metaphysics asks whether there is something more than (beyond) the physical world that we see around us. Is there some reality higher than the natural world—literally, a *supernatural reality*?”

The second branch of philosophy that has much to do with our discussion is axiology. *Axi* comes from the Greek root which means “worth” or “value.” Axiology is the study of ethics and values. It wrestles with such questions as, “What is good?” and “What is right and wrong?”

The third branch of philosophy is epistemology. *Epistem* is a root meaning “knowledge.” (An “epistle,” which comes

from the same root, is a message—or knowledge—sent by writing.) Epistemology is the study of *how* we know what is real or what is true. Since epistemology is central to our discussion on Korihor, a brief review of some of the major epistemological systems will serve to illustrate better what is meant by the term.

Authoritarianism is the system wherein truth is derived from those viewed as authorities or experts in an area. The recent crisis in the Middle East has illustrated how often we turn to experts for truth and information. We have seen on television a wide range of experts on war, military logistics, Islam, politics, government, etc.

Rationalism is an epistemological system wherein truth is derived through logical processes such as deduction, induction, and so on. In rationalism we ask, “Does this make sense? Is it logical?”

Pragmatism is where truth is determined by whether or not something works. For example, the business world is very pragmatically oriented, constantly focusing on whether a new product or marketing strategy actually produces the projected results. If it does, it is true; if it doesn’t, it is rejected.

Empiricism is where knowledge is gained through observation or experience. The scientific method, wherein one conducts an experiment and observes the results, is based heavily on the empirical method. Empirical evidence is often what people mean when they talk about hard or measurable evidence.

If one were to ask which of the above epistemological systems Latter-day Saints subscribe to, we would probably agree that we accept all of them as valid means of gaining knowledge or truth. However, in our theology, there is yet one more system, and this takes priority over the others.

Revelation is where truth is gained through communication of God’s mind and will to man. In Latter-day Saint theology, revelation comes via the Spirit or through direct manifestations (such as visions) to man.

There are other epistemological systems, or ways of knowing truth, but these are the main ones and will serve our purpose

here. These three branches of philosophy—metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology—have a profound effect upon how people view life, what they value, and how they act in various situations.

This proves to be true in the case of Korihor as well. A careful reading of Korihor’s “doctrine” reveals three “linchpins,” or pivotal points, of his entire philosophy. Chart 1 illustrates how these three fundamental points target the very areas we have described above. To put it more simply, Korihor defines how people come to know truth (epistemology), he talks about what constitutes reality (metaphysics), and defines what is good and what is evil (axiology).

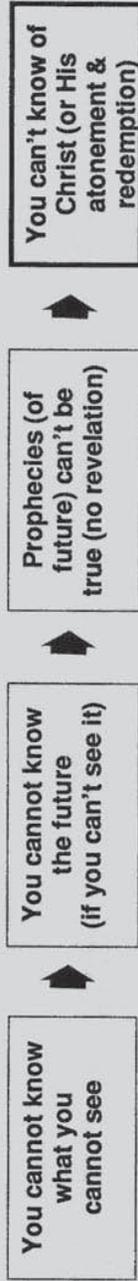
Looking at Korihor’s teachings carefully, we see that he starts with an epistemology based on strong empiricism. He states it very simply: “Ye cannot know of things which ye do not see [or we would say, experience]” (Alma 30:15). His metaphysics openly rejects any kind of supernatural explanation of reality. In Korihor’s doctrine, there is no other dimension of reality beyond the physical world—no God, no angels, no Spirit that brings revelation. From his metaphysics comes the natural conclusion that “when a man was dead, that was the end thereof” (Alma 30:18). From Korihor’s epistemology (the denial of revelation) and his metaphysics (there is only the natural world and man is the supreme reality in it), flows his axiology (the only good or bad is that which is decided by man himself). This is often the case. In other words, how we answer the questions, “How do we know what is true?” and “What constitutes reality?” often determines how we perceive what is good and bad, right and wrong.

This gets at the crux of the matter and explains why Satan would take such an interest in philosophy. Out of Korihor’s basic philosophy now flow two important corollaries. When Korihor was arrested and taken before the high priest, he boldly challenged the position of the religious leaders (see Alma 30:23–28). Giddonah demanded to know how Korihor ex-

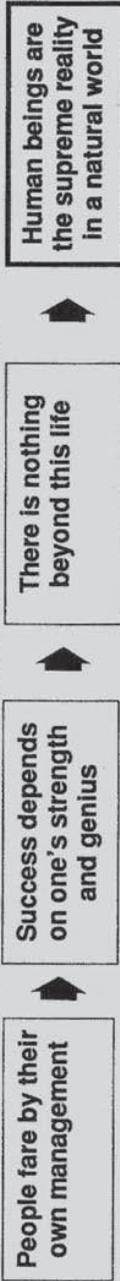
Chart 1

Korihor's Philosophical Foundations

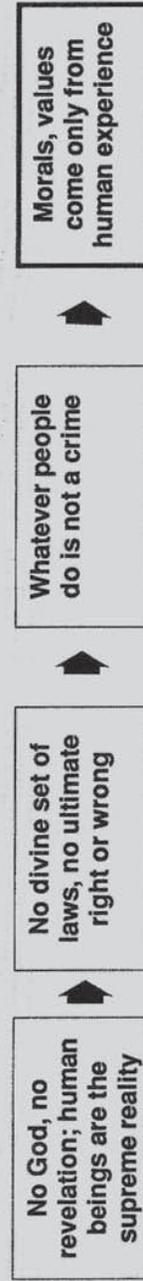
Epistemology, "How do you know things?": Empiricism & Rationalism (Alma 30:12-15)



Metaphysics, "What is real?": Humanism & Naturalism (Alma 30:17-18)



Axiology, "What is good? What is right?": Relativism, No Absolutes (Alma 30:17)



plained why the people were getting so much joy out of their religion if what Korihor said was true.

Korihor's first corollary answers that very neatly. Chart 2 diagrams his answer. There are two reasons people believe in these false ideas. The first is that they have been indoctrinated by their parents (the "foolish traditions" of their fathers) or that they have been deceived by false religious leaders who seek personal gain or power. This indoctrination leads to psychological abnormalities, a "frenzied mind" or "derangement" (see Alma 30:16).

Out of the first corollary flows a second. This is the final, practical conclusion of Korihor's philosophy. He states that there are no ultimate values set by religion or tradition which put us in jeopardy of some eternal punishment. Therefore, we can live as we please without fear of eternal consequences.

This is the heart of the matter. This is what it is all about. I don't believe for a moment Satan cares about philosophy as a mental game or academic exercise, only where it can take us. Now that can be most productive in terms of Satan's ultimate purposes. And Mormon clearly identifies that end result of deceiving philosophy: "And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, *causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness*, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms" (Alma 30:18, emphasis added).

What a victory, from Satan's point of view. This is not just wickedness, it is wickedness in which people take pride. They lift up their heads in it. And why shouldn't they? Korihor has provided the ultimate rationalization—there is no God; there is no ultimate right and wrong; man is the supreme being. All the guilt and shame people feel (psychological hang-ups) are simply the result of the foolish teachings of their parents or the designs of evil religious leaders.

Chart 2 Two Corollary Issues

How do you explain people who have faith?

You have been propagandized by:

- 1. The foolish traditions of your fathers
(religious upbringing)*
- 2. Religious leaders whose true motives are:
a. Gain
b. Power*



Which has resulted in psychological problems:

- 1. Frenzied minds*
- 2. Mental derangement*

So what does all this mean in practical terms?

You are not bound down to any imposed set of religious or traditional values.



You can live as you please without fear of eternal consequences.

The Age of Information but Not the Age of Truth

In recent years, numerous people have begun to note that society is going through a massive wave of change. It has been called by various titles—the technological revolution, the information age, the info/techo age. Alvin Toffler calls it *The Third Wave*. According to Toffler, the history of the world shows three great waves of change that have influenced the way we and all world societies live. The first massive wave of change was when man moved from hunting and gathering to an agricultural society. The second wave was when the world moved from an agricultural society to an industrial society. Now we are in the third wave, a wave that will take us from the industrial society to a new age based on technology and information.

John Naisbitt, in a best seller some years ago called *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, outlined ten of the great changes society would face in the last part of the twentieth century. One of those “megatrends” is the change to an “information” age. Naisbitt says:

In 1956, for the first time in American history, white-collar workers in technical, managerial, and clerical positions outnumbered blue-collar workers. Industrial America was giving way to a new society, where, for the first time in history, most of us worked with information rather than producing goods. (12)

Later he says, we have for the first time an economy based on a key resource that is not only renewable, but self-generating. Running out of it is not a problem, but *drowning in it is*. For example:

* Between 6,000 and 7,000 scientific articles are written each day.

* Scientific and technical information now increases 13 percent per year, which means it doubles every 5.5 years (24; emphasis added).

He had already noted:

Farmer, laborer, clerk—that is a brief history of the United States. . . . in fact today there are more people employed full-time in our universities than in agriculture. (14)

An interesting sidelight to note is that even some of our more popular games reflect this change to an information society. “Trivial Pursuit” and its numerous spin-offs are all based on the mastery of information. And the most popular television game show “Jeopardy” has the contestants vie to see who has the most information at their fingertips (or perhaps “mindtips”).

But even though we may live in the age of information, this does not necessarily mean we are living in the age of truth. Not all information is of the same value. Naisbitt, for example, suggests that “we are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.” For example he notes that scientists now say “it takes less time to do an experiment than to find out whether or not it has already been done” (24).

With this age of information has come an accompanying age of secularism. Rejection of traditional religious values is commonplace. In a talk given some years ago, Elder Neal A. Maxwell described the difference between an eternal and a secular outlook.

For the purpose of this brief discussion, eternalism is defined as that view of man and the universe which not only acknowledges, but exults in, the existence of a Heavenly Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, who have authored and implemented a redeeming plan for mankind. Secularism is herein defined as that view of man and the universe which is essentially irreligious with regard to the existence of God and cosmic purpose for man, but which is not necessarily irreverent with regard to man and his worth. (“Eternalism vs. Secularism” 69)

We are not only drowning in a sea of information, we are also drowning in a sea of secularism. In many ways we have reached the same point Ezekiel described around 600 BC, a condition, incidentally, which led to the destruction of the Jewish nation. Ezekiel said, “Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have *put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean*” (Ezekiel 22:26; emphasis added).

Our educational institutions, our media, our entertainment is permeated with philosophies that are similar to those taught by Korihor. For example, note the following excerpts from “Humanist Manifesto II,” a document stating the beliefs of those who call themselves humanists. I shall take the liberty to insert a few quotations from Korihor at appropriate places.

We believe . . . that *traditional* dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. . . . *Traditional* religions often offer *solace* to humans, but, as often, they *inhibit* humans from helping themselves or experiencing their full potentialities. . . . Too often *traditional* faiths encourage dependence rather than independence.

[“They are foolish traditions of your fathers. . . . It is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement . . . comes because of the traditions of your fathers” (Alma 30:14, 16).]

We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. . . . *No deity will save us*; we must save ourselves. Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.

[“There should be no Christ. . . . When a man was dead, that was the end thereof” (Alma 30:12, 18).]

Science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, *the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context.*

[“Every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength” (Alma 30:17).]

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous and situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human need and interest (“Humanist Manifesto II” 5–6; emphasis in text).

[“Whatsoever a man did was no crime” (Alma 30:17).]

This Manifesto was signed by 113 individuals when it was published. Signers include such notables as Isaac Asimov, the famous science fiction writer; B. F. Skinner, an influential

psychologist from Harvard University; Andrei Sakharov, the famous Russian scientist and dissident; and James Prescott, who at the time was the director of the National Institution for Child Help and Human Development. Of the total, over 50 were college professors, some 10 were authors, and 11 were listed as ministers. In other words more than half of the endorsers were people who are in positions of influence in the teaching of others. Not surprisingly then, these secular philosophies permeate much of our society today.

The final statement quoted above reveals the humanist view of ethics, declaring them to be “situational” and derived from “human experiences.” Again, we find some interesting parallels to Korihor in modern society.

There is a whole body of ethical thought today known as “situation ethics,” which states that there are no absolutes by which we determine what is right or wrong. Rather, the situation determines what is good or bad. Joseph Fletcher has given situational ethics its most articulate airing. Dr. Fletcher claims to be a Christian ethicist. In fact, he was a former Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in Cincinnati, and at the time he wrote his book, *Situation Ethics*, he was a professor of social ethics at the Episcopal Theology School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Fletcher argues that love is the highest good and what determines whether something is right or wrong is simply whether or not it is the “loving thing” to do. Here are some excerpts from his book *Situation Ethics: True or False?*

Love is the highest good and the first-order value, the primary consideration to which in every act . . . we should be prepared to sidetrack or subordinate other valued considerations of right and wrong. . . . Whether we ought to follow a moral principle or not *would always depend upon the situation.* . . . In some situations unmarried love could be infinitely more moral than married unlove. Lying could be more Christian than telling the truth. . . . stealing could be better than respecting private property. . . . *no action is good or right of itself.* It depends on whether it hurts or helps. . . . There are no normative moral principles whatsoever *which are intrinsically valid or universally obliging.* We may not absolutize the norms of human conduct. (back cover; emphasis added)

In the book itself he says,

if we are, as I would want to reason, obliged in conscience sometimes to tell white lies, as we often call them, then in conscience we might be obliged sometimes to engage in white thefts and white fornications and white killings and white breakings of promises and the like. (15)

Mormon noted that the end result of Korihor's philosophy was a breakdown of morality amongst the people. The end result of situation ethics leads to much the same result. In Dr. Fletcher's earlier book, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, he reasoned away any moral standard as we know it in terms of sexual morality:

What sex probably needs more than anything is a good airing. . . . People are learning that we can have sex without love, and love without sex; that baby-making can be (and often ought to be) separated from lovemaking. It is, indeed, for re-creation as well as for pro-creation. But *if people do not believe it is wrong to have sex relations outside marriage, it isn't*, unless they hurt themselves, their partners, or others. . . . All situationists would agree with Mrs. Patrick Campbell's remark that they can do what they want "as long as they don't do it in the street and frighten the horses." (140; emphasis added)

Remember, this teaching comes from a man who calls himself a Christian ethicist. In a debate with another Christian minister, Fletcher shared some of his feelings toward Christ. When the other minister cited a New Testament statement made by the Savior to support the point he was making, Fletcher retorted: "Jesus was a simple Jewish peasant. He had no more philosophical sophistication than a guinea pig, and I don't turn to Jesus for philosophical sophistication" (Fletcher and Montgomery 55).

It is not hard to see why Satan would rejoice in such philosophy. Mormon said Korihor taught the people to "lift up their heads in their wickedness" (Alma 30:18). Fletcher's philosophy provides a similar rationalization. As long as it is the "loving thing" to do, it is not sin.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell described the eventual results for a society that accepts ethics that are not based on absolute, God-given truths:

Relativism involves the denial of the existence of absolute truths and, therefore, of an absolute truthgiver, God. Relativism has sometimes been a small, satanic sea breeze, but now the winds of relativism have reached gale proportions. Over a period of several decades relativism has eroded ethics, public and personal, has worn down the will of many, has contributed to a slackening sense of duty, civic and personal. The old mountains of individual morality have been worn down. This erosion has left mankind in a sand-dune society, in a desert of disbelief where there are no landmarks, and no north, no east, no west, and no south! There is only the dust of despair. (“Some Thoughts” 74)

When we look at teachings that permeate our day, we begin to sense why Mormon felt it important to include Korihor’s philosophies in the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson specifically said this was one of the values of the Book of Mormon for our day.

The Book of Mormon exposes the enemies of Christ. *It confounds false doctrines* and lays down contention (see 1 Nephi 3:12). It fortifies the humble followers of Christ against the evil designs, strategies, and *doctrines of the devil* in our day. *The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon are similar to the type we have today.* God, with His infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time. (56; emphasis added)

A Prophet’s Answer to the Philosophies of Satan

We have now examined the teachings of Korihor in some detail, and also have seen how they parallel some of the common teachings of our day. If Mormon had included nothing but those teachings, they would have been of great value to us. But he did more than that. He also included Alma’s answer to Korihor. It is an interesting contrast, not only to Korihor’s teachings, but also to his whole situational philosophic approach.

The first thing to note is that Alma does not get into a philosophical debate with Korihor. He does not talk about metaphysics or axiology or epistemology. He does not allow himself to get pulled onto the ground that Korihor tries to define as the area of debate. There is a great lesson in that. Alma teaches that we should combat false philosophies with revelation and doctrine, not with academic debate.

This is not to imply that Alma dodges the issues; in fact, he confronts Korihor's criticism directly by proving that it is contradictory. Firstly, Alma points out that Korihor knows that the Church leaders "do not receive anything for [their] labors in the Church" except in receiving joy for teaching truth (Alma 30:35). Yet Korihor has claimed that the leaders "glut themselves" upon the labors of the people (Alma 30:27). Alma then concludes that since what Korihor knows to be true and what he says to be true clearly oppose one another, Korihor deliberately twists the truth.

In his second answer, Alma is absolutely brilliant. Let's follow that one for a moment to see what he is suggesting. Korihor has stated that people can believe only that which they can see, or prove to be true. Then he categorically states that he believes there is no God. Alma points out that he is trapped in his own epistemology, saying, "And now what evidence have ye that there is no God, or that Christ cometh not? I say unto you that ye have none, save it be your own word only" (Alma 30:40). If Korihor really were consistent (in believing only that which he can experience), then he cannot believe there is no God, because he cannot prove there is no God.

Let's see if we can illustrate the force of this argument. Suppose that a person decided he wanted to prove once and for all there is no God. Since the scriptures claim that God dwells in the heavens, the first task the person would have is to examine every cubic inch of the heavens (the universe), to see if there was no God. But even that impossible task creates a new set of problems. First of all, it would have to be an examination in the fullest sense of the word. Human beings *see* only visible light,

Chart 3
Alma's Answer (Alma 30:32-45)

YOU KNOW:	BUT YOU SAY:	THEREFORE:	FINAL CONCLUSION:
<i>We don't profit from our service in the Church.</i>	<i>We glut ourselves on the labor of the people.</i>	<i>You deliberately twist the truth.</i>	 <p>You are possessed of a lying spirit.</p>
<i>You cannot prove there is no God.</i>	<i>You only believe what can be proved.</i>	<i>You are not consistent with yourself.</i>	
<i>You believe there is a God.</i>	<i>You cannot believe in him.</i>	<i>You are lying to yourself and to us.</i>	
<i>There are many signs which prove God lives.</i>	<i>You won't believe unless you see a sign.</i>	<i>You won't accept truth when it is given to you.</i>	

* Note Korihor's confirmation of this in Alma 30:52.

which is a tiny portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. If by *see* we mean only what the eye can register, God would be totally missed if he exists at another frequency of the light spectrum. In other words, suppose God were at the ultraviolet or infrared frequencies. This person looking for God would miss him completely.

But examining every inch of the universe across the fulness of the electromagnetic spectrum still wouldn't provide irrefutable proof. Suppose the person marked out the universe in a grid and began to search it systematically, square by square, from A to Z, and doesn't find God in any of the squares. Could that person then say there was no God? No! What if God was in square L when the searcher started in square A, but by the time that person reached square L, God had moved back to square B or C?

Let's put it simply. Korihor says he will only believe what can be seen or proven. Yet he says he believes there is no God. To prove there is no God, a person would have to perceive (in the fullest sense of the word) every cubic inch of the entire universe simultaneously! In other words, *one would have to be a god in order to prove there is no God*. And yet Korihor blithely denies any belief in God's existence. In other words, Korihor is acting as much on faith (not righteous faith, but belief based on evidence that cannot be seen) as are those who believe there is a God. No wonder Alma accuses Korihor of having a "lying spirit" (Alma 30:42).

There is one more thing on Chart 3 that ought to be noted. After pointing out that there is much evidence that God does exist, Alma asks Korihor if he believes these things are true. Without waiting for an answer, he flatly states: "Behold, I know that thou believest" (Alma 30:42). Is this just a prophet's attempt to confound an argumentative person? Hardly. A few verses later, after having called down the sign upon himself, Korihor confirms Alma's statement, saying, "I *always* knew that there was a God" (Alma 30:52; emphasis added). So again, Alma shows that Korihor's real problem is that he is a liar.

The Word of God and Its Power

Let's return back to the scriptural foil that we began with. We showed that through this portion of the book of Alma there is a focus on the power of the word. It starts in the account of Ammon and his brothers and continues through Alma's mission to the Zoramites. Right in the middle of that chain, we see Korihor, a compelling, negative example of the power of the word. This serves as a foil which contrasts the power of God's word and truth and the power of Satan's word and untruth.

As we close our discussion of Korihor, we note two great ironies that also seem to be part of that scriptural foil as well. When Korihor demanded to have a sign before he would believe, Alma warned him of consequences of this action. But he still demanded proof. Of all the things the Lord could have chosen to convince Korihor of his power, what did he choose to do? Korihor is struck dumb (see Alma 30:49–50). In other words, *Korihor had the power to persuade others by the word taken from him.*

When Alma refused to lift the curse from him, Korihor left the Land of Zarahemla and went over among the Zoramites. There he was “run upon and trodden down, even until he was dead” (Alma 30:59). Here is the second great irony. The Zoramites were a group of apostates who had left the Nephite religion and started their own church. In chapter 31, we are given an account of their teachings in some detail. Note the following phrases from that chapter which describe the doctrines of the Zoramites. Mormon tells us they had “fallen into great errors” (v 9); they rejected the traditions of their Nephite brethren as being “handed down to them by the childishness of their fathers” (v 16); they did not want to be “led away after the foolish traditions of our brethren, which doth bind them down to a belief in Christ” (v 17); and they refused “to believe in things to come, which they knew nothing about” (v 22).

Familiar echoes? Indeed they are. The Zoramites are a reflection of some of Korihor's primary teachings. In other words, the Zoramites represent the end result of Korihor's

philosophy. This is where his doctrine leads people. What an irony that Korihor should come to his end by the hands of the very people that practiced what he preached.

Elder Maxwell, citing C. S. Lewis, pointed out that this is typical of those who try to reject God as part of their philosophy.

C. S. Lewis wrote well when he asserted: "What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they . . . could . . . invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy. . . .

"That is the key to history. Terrific energy is expended—civilizations are built up—excellent institutions devised; but each time something goes wrong. Some fatal flaw always brings the selfish and cruel people to the top and it all slides back into misery and ruin. In fact, the machine conks. It seems to start up all right and runs a few years, and then it breaks down. They are trying to run it on the wrong juice. That is what Satan has done to us humans." (*Mere Christianity*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1958, p. 39, cited in "Eternalism vs Secularism" 71)

Might this not be the very thing which caused Mormon, working under the inspiration of God, to include in the Book of Mormon an account of this anti-Christ and his teachings? It is for our benefit. It helps us see false teachings for what they are and the end result of them. This is partly what is meant by the "power of the word." This is part of the power of the Book of Mormon. President Benson made this clear when he said:

It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that too. But there is something more. There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called "the words of life" (see D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance. These promises — increased love and harmony in the home, greater respect between parent and child, increased spirituality and righteousness—these are not idle

promises, but exactly what the Prophet Joseph Smith meant when he said the Book of Mormon will help us draw nearer to God. (54)

Korihor tried to teach people that there is happiness and joy to be found outside of God and the gospel. The Book of Mormon clearly shows that this is not true. It reminds us of the power of God's word, the power to change our lives, the power to bring us peace and joy and the answers to those issues in life that trouble us. As we learn this lesson from Korihor, we again are reminded of the promise of President Ezra Taft Benson, the living Prophet:

I bless you with increased discernment to judge between Christ and anti-Christ. I bless you with increased power to do good and resist evil. I bless you with increased understanding of the Book of Mormon. I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown. (65)

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Seeds of Faith: A Follower's View of Alma 32

8

Elaine Shaw Sorensen

No more beautiful discussion on the principle of faith is offered anywhere in scripture than in the thirty-second chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon. Alma had already seen the powerful effect of the word of God upon the hearts of the people. He recognized that sharing the word has a greater effect “than the sword or anything else” (Alma 31:5). The beauty of Alma’s message is preserved in Mormon’s abridgement by a literary style that builds from profound insights into humility, through the metaphor of the planting and nourishing of the seed of God’s word, to understated allusions to the fruits of faith. The seminal analogy lays a foundation for understanding the essential characteristics of the doctrine of faith.

Humility Precedes Faith

The Zoramites had once known the word of God (Alma 31:8), and it is significant to note that even in their apostasy they had not ceased to worship. Indeed, their diligence was apparent in their weekly prescribed prayers of thanks for worldly prosperity, in which they thanked God that they were chosen and elected over others (Alma 31:16–18). Not only was that a false notion, but they had also abandoned the essential humility necessary to maintain a faithful connection with truth. With the

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loss of humility came the loss of ability to discern good from evil, the loss of a Christian nature that applies the word of God in daily life (Alma 31:23), which was replaced by increasingly complex worship rituals, traditions, and structures (Alma 31:12–18). Ultimately, among their greatest loss was that of the gift of faith.

Among the apostate Zoramites, only the humbled poor, those cast out of the synagogues they had help build, listened to Alma. He rejoiced that their poverty and afflictions had humbled them, even though he recognized that their humility, was constrained. He knew being humble is prerequisite to building faith (Alma 32:6–8; see also Moroni 7:43). However, he affirmed the greater blessing of those who humble themselves of their own will when they hear the word of God, regardless of their circumstances (Alma 32:15–16, 25).

Shown by how it prepared the Zoramites “to hear the word” (Alma 32:6), such humility is an integral part of the nature of one who submits to the wisdom of God and provides fertility to the soil for planting the seeds of the word of God, for those seeds only can be nurtured by faith. Alma noted that faith comes from submission to the word, an abiding characteristic of the faithful, rather than from performance of external acts. He found hope in the humility of the Zoramites even more than in their apparent willingness to do weekly worship in the synagogues. Though important, such outward acts are transcended by the change of the inner nature of the individual, as observed in Alma’s words, “I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye . . . Do ye suppose that ye cannot worship God save it be in your synagogues only? . . . Do ye suppose that ye must not worship God only once in a week?” (Alma 32:8, 10–11) Alma is implying by these rhetorical questions that worship is a spiritual, perpetual act of faith, not merely a weekly ritual.

Alma’s lesson has meaning today. Latter-day Saints seem naturally inclined to focus upon their works. This propensity to rely so heavily on works that document obedience seems to be an outgrowth of our present technological, behavioristic

society, which places so much emphasis on observable achievement. Increasingly encumbering and complex, family, career, and even Church activities can disperse attentions toward multiple distractions among tasks and programs. Illusionary time and goal management techniques, if not grounded in a basic Christian nature, can further contribute to task-based rituals and repetitions in life. By extending ourselves laterally *outward* in noisy worldly ways, we risk becoming swallowed up in the proud illusion of progress (Alma 31:27), when what we need is to extend quietly *inward* toward humility and *upward* toward God. As with the apostate Zoramites who lacked the essential humility that leads to faith, the achievements and prosperity that embellish our lives become meaningless trappings of mortality with no eternal significance without faith. Doing home teaching, earning a scout merit badge, or doing other assigned acts of service can become little more than offerings on the Rameumptom (Alma 31:21), if our hearts are not earnest and our daily nature not Christian.

Business measures success by outcomes. In education the technical training model promotes a behavioral tradition that results in specific performances. Sometimes, as the Zoramites, we also desire to offer the set of rules in our spiritual lives, with the documented trail of our good actions coupled with prosperity, as evidence of our place on the path to exaltation. Such emphasis upon works tends to give a sense of control. We find reasons for blessings and see trials as consequences of failure. We seek training for exaltation. Such behaviorism works for things that are concrete, visible, and rule-driven.

Behaviorism alone does not work, however, for those elements that are spiritual in nature: discernment; finding meaning; longing after goodness; having ethical awareness and moral courage; loving learning; having concern for excellence; having love, charity, or humility; becoming godly. Alma called the learning of these principles “wisdom” (Alma 32:12). Such wisdom, provoked by humility, provides the necessary foundation

for coming to faith, and enriches the soil that receives the seeds of the word of God.

What Faith Is and What Faith Is Not

The concept of faith appears throughout most of scripture with very little definition. Contextual discussions generally assume a sense of meaning pertaining to particular situations (See Alma 15:10; 48:15; 57:26–27). Alma's analogy of the seed is particularly valuable because it (a) provides a poetic and meaningful definition of faith, (b) focuses on the process as much as on the outcome of the development of faith, and (c) affirms the universal applicability of the principles described. Alma poignantly notes that God often imparts his word by angels: "To men, yea not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them" (Alma 32:23). Anyone can sow the seed of the word of God, regardless of spiritual maturity, from prophet to lowliest struggling disciple. Alma clarifies what faith is and what it is not, and identifies the necessary elements for the existence and growth of faith.

Faith, Belief, And Hope

Like other writers in scripture, Alma associates the concepts of faith, belief, and hope. Elder James E. Talmage pointed out that since we have no English verb for faith, we use the term "believe," and noted that in the Bible, with few exceptions, "belief" refers to the fullest assurance of faith to mean "to live accordingly" (*Articles of Faith* 479). Belief in the seed, or living according to the word, is a key aspect of faith. It seems clear that Alma also refers to belief in explaining faith (Alma 32:18–19, 27). Though he distinguishes among belief, desire to believe, and sure knowledge, his words affirm the validity of belief as a part of faith.

Hope is also mentioned in Alma's definition of faith: "hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21).

The principle of hope was confirmed by Moroni (Ether 12:6), and in the old world by Paul (Hebrews 11:1). Hope is obviously an important part of faith. Though some have struggled with whether it precedes or follows faith, Alma seems to present hope as an interrelated principle that enlightens and expands insight into faith. Alma's poetic images of belief in planting and cultivating the seed, hoping for the growth of the seed, offer an inspiring assurance to the disciple seeking faith. Both Moroni and Mormon later validate that assurance: "Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world . . . which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast" (Ether 12:4; see also Moroni 7:42–43).

Faith Is a Gift

That faith is a gift is more explicitly described elsewhere in scripture (see Rom 12:3; I Cor 12:8; Eph 2:8; Moroni 10: 11). The Prophet Joseph Smith observed a connection between gifts and faith (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*; hereafter *TPJS* 270), proclaiming that faith is received from hearing the word of God (*TPJS* 148). The Prophet continued that faith, among other gifts of grace, repentance, and salvation, is a gift of God purchased for humanity by the blood of Christ. Elder Orson Pratt said that although faith is obtained "through the exercise of free will and agency," it remains a gift of God, transcending any reciprocal expectation from our efforts to earn it (82–83). Elder Talmage asserted, "Though within the reach of all who diligently strive to gain it, faith is nevertheless a divine gift, and can be obtained only from God" (*Jesus The Christ* 347).

Alma's reference to the gift of faith is more subtle. It lies deep within the analogy of the seed itself, in the nurturance of the word of God. Who has planted any seed, watched the sprouting, and tasted the fruit without marveling at the divine gift of the harvest? I don't remember a single summer in all the time I have spent with my father that he hasn't hosted a tour

of the fields, sweat dripping from the end of his nose, in exhilarating near surprise at the heavenly gift of a rich hay crop and mature grain harvest. Elder Neal Maxwell noted, “True faith is not to be brought about by overwhelming and intimidating intervention from God” (32).

Faith Is Action

Joseph Smith defined faith as “the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the *principle of action* in all intelligent beings” (*Lectures on Faith* 1:9). Faith as a moving force gathers power as it is activated. Again, Alma’s metaphor applies: The planting of the seed requires both active attention in distinguishing good seed from bad, barren soil from rich, and active effort in cultivating, nourishing, and even harvesting. Though the divine potential for harvest lies only within the seed, any farmer knows the analogy of the seed is one of hard physical, mental, and spiritual work, energy, and power. Elder Talmage noted that “passive belief on the part of a would-be recipient of a blessing is insufficient; only when it is vitalized into active faith is it power” (*Jesus The Christ* 319). Such active power is seen in accounts of the faithful throughout the scriptures (see Nyman 67–77).

Faith Is Not Perfect Knowledge

Three times Alma explains that to have faith is not to have knowledge. Alma repeated, “If a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe . . . faith is not to have a perfect knowledge . . . Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge” (Alma 32:17–18, 21, 26). If knowledge is not faith, can “doubt” then be a part of coming to faith? Latter-day Saints often fear, deny, or avoid the idea of doubt, as though it were synonymous with sin. Certainly, that doubt associated with skepticism or an inclination to reject the truths of salvation, to “cast out” the seed by unbelief and resist the Spirit of the

Lord (Alma 32:28), is counterproductive to the search of faith (McConkie 208). However, in seeking truth, doubt as the humble, longing, sometimes even faltering “desire to believe,” can be a motivating force in coming to God. In the wearying clouds of trial and unknowing, often all that one does know is God.

For example, for much of my own life, my faith resembled knowledge. I knew by my own experience and observation that obedience led to blessings, that God answered all my prayers. Without a trial of doubt, I was secure in a near perfect knowledge of the word of God in my life, at least for my level of development. Since then, life has brought crises of doubt. Following the sudden death of my son, I struggled with not knowing whether or where he existed. I knew where the scriptures told me he was, I knew where family, friends and Church leaders told me he was, but I resented their assumption that I could at least find comfort because I knew where he was. The truth was I did not *know*. I was convinced that my loss was no less than that of a nonbelieving mother. I did not know with any assurance that could nourish the seed of God’s word in my heart. However, what I did know was God. Only by acknowledging my doubt in a humility acquired from loss, and taking that unknowing “desire to believe” to God, was I able to find a sprouting, growing faith.

Submission of that unknowing to the will and workings of a Heavenly Father was for me the beginning of faith. Alma said, “Yea even *if ye can no more than desire to believe*, let this desire work in you.” (Alma 32:27). In this sense, doubt can be a motivating force in coming to faith. The only people who never doubt are the atheists, who share a positivistic certainty that there is no God. Hugh B. Brown was once heard to say, “No one has ever had authentic assurance unless he has served an apprenticeship in doubt” (quoted by Truman Madsen in a *Deseret News* interview with Jerry Johnston, November, 1989). Elder Boyd K. Packer observed, “Faith, to be faith, must center around something that is not known. Faith, to be faith, must go beyond that for which there is confirming evidence. Faith, to be

faith, must go into the unknown. Faith, to be faith, must walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness” (“Faith” 62; see also “What Is Faith” 42).

Necessary Elements of Faith

Woven throughout Alma’s analogy are clues to elements necessary for the existence and growth of faith. In addition to humility there are truth, agency, and works.

Truth

Alma notes that faith is “hope for things which are not seen which are *true*” (Alma 32:21). Hope in something false or wrong is faith in a bad seed that cannot swell, sprout, or grow, and must be “cast away” (Alma 32:30,32), “for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” (Alma 32:31). The Prophet Joseph Smith asserted that faith must center on the correct idea of God’s existence and nature (*Lectures on Faith* 3:3–4). And Elder Bruce R. McConkie reminded that “faith and truth cannot be separated; if there is to be faith . . . there must first be truth” (262). It follows, as an order of natural and divine law, that for the power of faith to function, the object of faith must be true. The comforting beauty of this consideration is that truth and faith mutually witness that each other exists.

Agency

A theme of agency pervades the entire analogy of the seed. The gift of faith is tempered by our choices in methods and consequences in preparing the soil, planting, nourishing, and harvesting seeds of faith. The growth of the seed depends not only on the nature of the seed (Alma 32:30–32), but also on the willingness to try the experiment (Alma 32:33, 36), to nourish the growth (Alma 32:37), and to choose not to neglect the tree (Alma 32:38, 40). While faith is offered as a gift, it must be received by the exercise of agency in acceptance and cultiva-

tion. Indeed, blessings and knowledge are often granted or withheld as a direct consequence of a person's willingness or unwillingness to receive them. Bruce C. Hafen cited the words of William James from his *Essays on Faith and Morals*, "God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity," and proposed the possibility that the strength and power of the very being of God may be increased by our fidelity, "not only because we must nourish the seed of faith in our own lives, but also because he needs us to help nourish those seeds in the lives of others" (79). To consider the positive use of agency in synchrony with the very source of the blessings of faith is a humbling, powerful affirmation of the principle of agency.

Works

The message of the role of works emerges in Alma 32:41–43, where he notes the need for "great diligence." The Apostle James also included works in the principle of faith (James 2:17–26). As discussed, faith is an active principle of power requiring energy and diligence for realization of its fruits. Works of obedience, Christian commitment, and repentance are necessary for faith to abide. Thus, Alma was intent on teaching the Zoramites correct worship according to faith (Alma 32:10–11). Orson Pratt reminded that the gift of faith is not offered to us without our own works (82). Robert Millet summarized, "We exercise appropriate faith in our Master by involving ourselves in the work of the Master" (46).

The Fruits of the Seed

Alma closed his words with a promise of the rewards of the fruits of faith (Alma 32:42–43). Citing other prophets Alma continued in patience to teach the Zoramites of worship, prayer, and the mission of the Savior. His desire and promise were that all might continue and endure in the experiment, nourish the

word of God by faith, and behold the resulting tree “springing up . . . unto everlasting life” (Alma 33:3, 15, 23).

The analogy of the planting experiment is particularly powerful. The images of nurturance of the seed and the symbols of the tree and fruit endure universally through time and culture. The messages to endure in the nurturing of the seed, to actively await the maturity of the tree and the transcending beauty of the fruit of eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God,” are themes repeated in scripture (1 Nephi 15:36; D&C 14:7).

Just as the ancients escaped death by fire and found safety from the sword of war by their faith (*TPJS* 270), Latter-day Saints may also know the fruits of faith. Those fruits may not be realized in times of doubt and testing. Indeed, we are promised no witness until after the trial of our faith (Ether 12:6). But just as Elijah did not find the Lord in the winds or the earthquakes or the fire (I Kings 19:11–13); and just as the long spring of rains on the sprouting and growing seed offer yet no fruit to one who is hungry, we must wait with hope until the tumult subsides. Then, on a quiet unsuspecting summer morning, the bud bursts with fruit. True to the longing, hopeful expectation “of things not seen,” angels whisper with confirming miracles. To each who dares the experiment, the fruit is unique and delicious, “most precious, . . . sweet above all that is sweet, . . . white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.” (Alma 32:42).

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Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons

9

S. Kent Brown

The sermons of Alma deserve at least a fraction of the centuries-long attention that the epistles of the Apostle Paul have received. Alma's recorded sermons, whether formal or spontaneous, weave a tapestry of complex and variegated colors, of rich imagery, and yet of a bold and simple unity which holds in tight focus the unspeakable blessings of accepting the atonement of Jesus Christ. This chapter looks at only one of the colorful strands woven into Alma's sermons, that of reminiscences of his conversion experience: the three days during which he was completely unconscious, after the unexpected appearance of the angel of the Lord to him and several friends (see Mosiah 27; Alma 36). To be sure, students of the Book of Mormon have long recognized that Alma's life-changing, three-day experience stood at the foundation of all that he did and said for the rest of his life. But unlike Moses and Isaiah, who almost never referred to their life-changing experiences, Alma's memory of that remarkable ordeal was present with him to the point that all his sermons are infused with allusions to it.

The passage which describes Alma's conversion experience in most detail, beginning with the appearance of the angel and recounting events of the next three days, is chapter 36 of his book. Importantly, we possess a second narration of the

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angel's words and the resulting impact on Alma in chapter 27 of the book of Mosiah. Moreover, this same passage records some of the words that Alma spoke immediately following his experience (vv 24–31). Because the angel's utterance is important for our study, and because by his own admission Alma did not hear all that the angel said—"the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them. . . . I fell to the earth and I did hear no more" (Alma 36:11)—I shall borrow from the account in Mosiah 27 to fill in the picture.

Alma's Conversion Story: Alma 36

Alma's personal recollection, recounted to his oldest son, Helaman, exhibits a number of features that appear in Alma's later sermons and extemporaneous addresses. Let me briefly summarize Alma 36 since it forms a principal key to understanding what I see as a pattern of reminiscences in Alma's sermons and sermonettes. One significant element consists of his emphasis on God's deliverance of his people, whether they be the children of Israel from Egypt, Lehi's family from Jerusalem, or others (vv 2, 28–29). A second element, which borrows language from the first, is Alma's stress on God's deliverance of the individual soul from the bondage of sin (vv 17–18). A third ingredient, related to the second, consists of a set of expressions which describe Alma's own troubled and sinful state before he received forgiveness of his sins. In this instance, he describes himself as "racked with eternal torment," "tormented with the pains of hell" (vv 12–13) and "encircled about by the everlasting chains of death" (v 18). Associated directly with his torment, and evidently a part of it, was his feeling of "inexpressible horror" at the thought of standing "in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds" (vv 14–15). A fourth component turns out to be the exact reversal of the third: indescribable joy and enlightenment at receiving forgiveness of sins through Jesus' atonement (vv 19–21). A fifth feature is his persistent description of his experience as being

“born of God,” a phrase which is distinctive to Alma among Book of Mormon authors (Mosiah 27:25, 28; Alma 5:14; 36:5, 23–24, 26; 38:6) and he is unique among Book of Mormon writers in using “born of the Spirit” and “born again” (Mosiah 27:24–25; Alma 5:49; 7:14). A sixth element arises from his actions as a preacher of salvation, which followed his extraordinary experience, bringing others to taste “as I have tasted” and to see “eye to eye as I have seen” (v 26).

Sermon in Zarahemla: Alma 5

The initial test whether these observations had an impact on Alma’s preaching comes in his first recorded sermon (Alma 5), a long and carefully articulated address delivered, presumably over a period of time and on various occasions, to “the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla” (Alma 5:2), possibly consisting of seven or more congregations (Mosiah 25:23). As one might expect, most of the elements listed above are present in the opening segment of Alma’s discourse. After establishing his divine authority for preaching (Alma 5:3), he noted that the exodus-like deliverances of his immediate ancestors were illustrations of God’s “mercy and longsuffering” and that it was important to remember these divine acts (vv 4–6). On this note, he next asked his hearers, “Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that [God] has delivered their souls from hell?” (v 6). In framing this question, Alma effectively shifts the focus of his listeners from the Exodus and other such events to the Atonement. For this purpose he borrows the language of the Exodus to describe the Atonement. Specifically, his use of the verb *deliver* in this context forms a firm bridge between Alma’s reference to the Exodus and his recounting of the blessings that flow from accepting the Atonement, a discussion of which immediately follows (vv 7–27).

As a further illustration of a pattern of reminiscences in this sermon, Alma’s vocabulary in his discourse on the Atonement exhibits clear ties to his account of the aftermath of his

encounter with the angel in Alma 36. There he spoke initially of being “racked with eternal torment” and “tormented with the pains of hell” at the memory of his sins (vv 12–13), and being “encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (v 18). Because the “thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror,” Alma had wished to “become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds” (Alma 36:14–15). Then, as he described his feelings of receiving a remission of sins, he spoke in opposite terms of the “joy, and . . . marvelous light I did behold,” as well as of a vision of “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God.” Alma exclaimed, “My soul did long to be there” (vv 20, 22). Moreover, he talked of being “born of God” and wanting to share the joy and happiness he had received (vv 23–24). Importantly, the early part of his Zarahemla speech follows a similar pattern. After noting God’s deliverance of his people, the children of Israel, Alma then described the ancestors of his hearers as being “encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them” (Alma 5:7). In counterbalance, he next affirmed that these forebears were not destroyed or lost; rather, the “bands of death” and “chains of hell . . . were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love” (vv 8–10). Then speaking of his father, Alma noted that that there had been “a mighty change wrought in his heart,” as there had been in his own (vv 12, 14), and he asked the congregation whether they themselves had been “born of God” (v 14), a phrase that he had used to describe himself. His mentioning the “song of redeeming love” (vv 9, 26) seems to be tied to the vision of God and His angels that he had seen and heard at the end of his three days of torment. That he had wanted to join in the singing is evidence of this change (Alma 36:22).

Sermon in Gideon: Alma 7

Alma's next recorded sermon appears in chapter 7. It is much shorter and less formal. He delivered it in the land of Gideon, which was apparently settled by the faithful people from the colony of Limhi whom he had known as a child. Because the sermon is chiefly an address to faithful friends, a clear patterning of reminiscences does not emerge as it does in the first section of the Zarahemla sermon. Even though the tone throughout Alma 7 is generally warm and informal, certain elements do exhibit formal language which, in Alma's words, came at the behest of the Spirit. For instance, the phrases "the Spirit hath said this much unto me" (v 9) and "for the Spirit saith" (v 14) clearly set out the authority and necessity for Alma's commanding words in verses 9 and 14–16. However, elements that echo Alma's experience do appear. For example, when speaking of the necessity of repenting he said that one must "be born again" (v 14), a phrase that uniquely characterizes Alma's messages elsewhere. Further, he says that the Lamb of God is "mighty to save" (v 14), a phrase that recalls similar language describing God's redeeming power manifested in the exodus of the children of Israel (eg, Ex 32:11; Deut 4:37; 7:8; 9:26). In another place, he speaks of looking forward "for the remission of your sins . . . which is to come" (Alma 7:6), possibly a recollection of his own remission of sins (Alma 36:19–21).

Sermon in Ammonihah: Alma 9–13

Alma's third recorded sermon, which occupies most of chapter 9, was delivered under contentious conditions in the city of Ammonihah. In an effort to postpone arrest (v 7), he opened his address by scolding his listeners for not remembering "that our father, Lehi, was brought out of Jerusalem by the hand of God" (v 9). The same point is made twice in Alma 9:22. The description of the Son of God as one who will be "quick to hear the cries of his people" (v 26) also exhibits ties to the exodus of Israelites from Egypt: God heard the cries of the children of

Israel (Ex 3:7, 9; compare 6:5). That he raised the issue of remembering “the captivity of their fathers” illustrates that Alma was obedient to the angel’s command that he remember it (Mosiah 27:16) and that he felt it important to observe this instruction in his preaching (eg, Alma 36:2, 28–29). His subsequent reference to “a state of endless misery and woe” for the unrepentant, and his warning that God “will utterly destroy you from off the face of the earth” (Alma 9:11–12) both recall the misery that Alma had felt and the destruction that he had feared during his three-day ordeal (Alma 36:11–16). Moreover, the reason for warning the people of Ammonihah of impending divine annihilation was the same as the destruction threatened by the angel against Alma so that they would no longer lead others astray, a notion also at home in the Exodus (Deut 20:17–18). The words of the angel to Alma were: “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:9, 11). To the people of Ammonihah Alma said in turn, “If ye persist in your wickedness . . . ye shall be visited with utter destruction. . . . For [God] will not suffer you that ye shall live in your iniquities, to destroy his people” (Alma 9:18–19).

In contrast, God’s wondrous power to deliver was not only apparent in the orchestrated escapes of his people in the past but also in “the salvation of their souls” which comes about “according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ” (Alma 9:28). Once again, the focus on terms such as “power” and “deliverance” recollects exodus-like events while at the same time describing the most marvelous of all deliverances, the atonement of Jesus Christ. Finally, Alma’s reference to the Final Judgment recalls another element in his description of his three-day ordeal. To the people of the city he issued this warning: “I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for [the Lamanites] in the day of judgment than for you, if ye remain in your sins” (v 15). The sense is clear. For the people of Ammonihah, the Judgment will be terrible. On this matter, Alma could speak with poignant feeling. When he had been forced

into a harried contemplation of his own sins, Alma came to wish that he “could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds” (Alma 36:15).

On the same day that Alma was obliged to deliver his sermon under contentious conditions to the people of Ammonihah (Alma 9), he spontaneously responded to questions (Alma 12–13) raised by several persons, including Zeezrom, a lawyer and skilled speaker who had openly opposed the preaching of Alma and his companion Amulek (Alma 10:31). While no real pattern of reminiscences emerges from Alma’s extemporaneous words, three elements that can be tied to Alma’s three-day conversion experience are readily identifiable. One has to do with the prophetic function of angels, clearly recalling the role of the angel of the Lord who confronted Alma and his companions. In an apparent effort to assure his listeners that divine powers were then declaring repentance and salvation among his own people, Alma observed that “the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare [salvation] unto all nations; . . . wherefore they [the angels] have come unto us” (Alma 13:22). Further, “angels are declaring [salvation] unto many at this time in our land” (v 24). Why? Because, said Alma, “at the time of [the Messiah’s] coming” his arrival will “be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels” (vv 24–26).

The second element deals with a notion that one might expect from Alma when one considers the character of his audience in Ammonihah: the terrible, eternal fate that awaits those unrepentant individuals who do not accept Jesus’ atonement. On this topic, Alma speaks of the wicked coming to be “bound down by the chains of hell” (Alma 13:30; compare 12:17), echoing the description of his nightmarish vision of being “encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18; compare Moses 7:26–27). To the people of Ammonihah, Alma had a good deal to say about such chains. By his words the devil, or adversary, seeks to “encircle you about

with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction” (Alma 12:6). Alma then spelled out what he meant by the word *chains*. Speaking of those who harden their hearts, he proclaimed that they consequently receive “the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning [God’s] mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction.” This situation, Alma disclosed, “is what is meant by the chains of hell” (vv 10–11).

Closely related to this second element is a third which concerns the scene at the judgment bar of God. Of his own torment Alma had said that the thought of standing before God “did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” and brought him to wish that he “could be banished and become extinct both soul and body” (Alma 36:14–15). To the people of Ammonihah Alma made a similar point: “If we have hardened our hearts against the word, . . . then will our state be awful. . . . And in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God” (Alma 12:13–14). Moreover, sharing Alma’s one-time desire to become extinct, those who persist in their sins “would fain be glad if [they] could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon [them] to hide [them] from his presence” (v 14). In addition, those who come thus to the judgment bar of God will do so with “everlasting shame” (v 15). As a capstone to this spontaneous address, Alma pled with his audience from the memory of the fearful experience through which he had suffered. Near the end he besought them, “Now, my brethren, I wish from the *inmost part of my heart*, yea, with *great anxiety even unto pain*, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance” (13:27; emphasis added). Because of his own ordeal, he knew better than most about the terrible consequences facing those who reject the message of salvation. In the case of the people of Ammonihah, Alma’s dire prophecies were fulfilled when an invading Lamanite army destroyed the city and all of its inhabitants in a single day (Alma 16:1–3, 9–11).

Alma's Soliloquy: Alma 29

Alma's soliloquy in chapter 29 also exhibits reminiscences of his three-day experience. First, he wishes that he were an angel and, like the angel of the Lord who confronted him, he wishes he could "go forth and speak . . . with a voice to shake the earth, . . . as with the voice of thunder" (Alma 29:1–2). The descriptions of the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Alma and his friends are compelling. In his own words, Alma recounted that "God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way. And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet" (Alma 36:6–7). The account from other witnesses says that "the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood" (Mosiah 27:11). The similarities cannot be missed. They combine mention of the angel with reference to his thundering voice and the resulting earthquake.

The reference to the captivity of his forebears forms a second tie. In his soliloquy Alma says, "I also remember the captivity of my fathers; for I surely do know that the Lord did deliver them out of bondage. . . . Yea, I have always remembered the captivity of my fathers; and that same God who delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians did deliver them out of bondage" (Alma 29:11–12). At this point, we recall the angel's instructions to Alma: "Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers. . . . For they were in bondage, and [God] has delivered them" (Mosiah 27:16).

Alma's service as a divine instrument in bringing others to God comprises a third connection. In his soliloquy Alma declared: "This is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy. And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy" (Alma 29:10). Similarly, in his personal recounting Alma told his son Helaman that from the time of his three-day ordeal until that moment, "I have labored without ceasing, that

I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste” (Alma 36:24). He continued by speaking metaphorically of his success in his missionary endeavors as if it were fruit of agricultural labors: “The Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen” (vv 25–26; compare Alma 29:13–15).

A fourth component, related to the third, may form the most direct reference back to Alma’s three-day trial. In the soliloquy he expresses gratitude for those who had come to the Lord through his efforts in the following words: “When I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy” (v 10). Significantly, the next lines form the direct link to Alma’s experience with the powers of Jesus’ atonement: “Then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer” (Alma 29:10). In my view, we have the words of this very prayer in Alma’s comments to Helaman. Alma says that, during his three-day ordeal, he recalled his father’s prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ. Then, “I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:18–19). Because of that unforgettable moment when he received forgiveness of sins from God, Alma says fervently and gratefully, “I remember [God’s] merciful arm which he extended towards me” (Alma 29:10).

The next two ties are less firm; however, they are worth mentioning. The first has to do with Alma’s guilt. From his description of his reaction to his sins, it is clear that he did not see himself as a blameless person before God. For instance, he said that in his three-day experience, “I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy command-

ments” (Alma 36:13). In discussing who is blameworthy before God and who is not, Alma gives the following in the dissertation, a clear characterization of his own situation when confronted by the angel of the Lord: “He that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience” (Alma 29:5). Alma had certainly experienced “remorse of conscience”: “My soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:12–13). The second extra component deals with a hint of Alma’s state during the three days that he was unable to respond physically but was fully conscious mentally. In the soliloquy in chapter 29 he speaks of his joy at the accomplishments of his friends, the sons of Mosiah, during their ministries among the Lamanites. And he hints that the joy which he feels at such moments almost overcomes him: “Now, when I think of the success of these my brethren my soul is carried away, even to the separation of it from the body, as it were, so great is my joy” (Alma 29:16). Perhaps Alma was thinking of his own ecstatic experience when he wrote these words.

The Trial of Korihor: Alma 30

While we possess a substantial number of words that Alma spoke during the trial of Korihor (Alma 30), because of the nature of the legal interchange, we would normally expect to find nothing linked to Alma’s three-day ordeal. But one matter reaches back to that experience: the idea that one soul perishes so that others may live.¹ To illustrate, when the angel of the Lord

¹ The justification is first laid out in Nephi’s dramatic encounter with the drunken Laban (1 Nephi 4:11–13). Compare Caiaphas’ maxim about the need for Jesus’ death (John 11:50; 18:14) that bears the sense of political expediency. The underlying principle can be seen in 2 Sam 20:20–22; Jonah 1:12–15. For similar Jewish formulations of the idea, see those cited by Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, vol 2 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924), pp. 545–46. Most of these instances deal with political reasons for one to die instead of many. Legal and religious grounds are not spelled out.

scolded Alma and his friends, the angel specifically said to Alma: “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:9). This thought led Alma not only to be “racked with eternal torment” because of all his “sins and iniquities” (vv 12–13) but apparently to conclude that he “had murdered many of [God’s] children, or rather led them away unto destruction” (v 14). In the case of Korihor, Alma tried to warn him simply to repent and not to seek a sign from God. “I am grieved,” said Alma to Korihor, “that ye will still resist the spirit of the truth, that thy soul may be destroyed. But behold, it is better that thy soul should be lost than that thou shouldst be the means of bringing many souls down to destruction” (Alma 30:46–47). Clearly, Alma had once faced the possibility that his own life might have been taken to preserve others; and his own experience of coming face to face with this reality seems to underlie his appeal to Korihor not to “resist the spirit of the truth” (v 46).

Sermon to Zoramites: Alma 32–33

About 75 BC, before the Zoramite people convinced the Lamanites to oppose Nephite interests—an act which led to war in the following year (Alma 35:10–13)—Alma and his missionary companions had tried to preach to the Zoramites (Alma 31:1–7). Even though Alma spoke frequently and to various groups in his missionary activity among these people, only one of his discourses to an audience of the poorer class is preserved (Alma 32–33). In this address Alma touched on several points that link to his three-day experience. One of the most prominent of these points concerns his affirmation that God “imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also” (Alma 32:23). Part of Alma’s testimony would have consisted of his knowledge that his missionary companion, Amulek, had been visited and taught by an angel (Alma 10:7–10). The mention of women in Alma 32:23 seems important. Depending on who the subject is in Alma 10:11—it is either Alma or the angel—the angel may have also appeared to others of Amulek’s

household, including “my women, and my children.” Alma had received many angelic visitations (see Alma 8:14); however, the first and most important visitation occurred when he and the sons of Mosiah were confronted by the angel of the Lord (Mosiah 27:11; Alma 36:5–6). Thus he was a personal witness that angels were imparting the word of God to his fellow beings.

A second feature is Alma’s discussion of the virtues of humility, contrasting being compelled to be humble with the humility that some seek without compulsion. His audience, who were from the poorer classes of the Zoramite people and who had been cast out of their synagogues (Alma 32:5), certainly invited such a comparison because of their circumstances. Nevertheless, in a real sense Alma had been compelled himself to become humble by the angel of the Lord. Thus, Alma spoke out of his own experience when he made the following observation:

Because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now . . . do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, *much more blessed* than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty. (Alma 32:13–15; emphasis added)

Alma concluded his discussion by saying: “Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; . . . yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe” (v 16). While there may exist other reminiscences to Alma’s three-day experience in this discourse, they are more difficult to demonstrate. Two come to mind. The first has to do with Alma’s metaphorical use of the verb *taste* in the sense of tasting light (Alma 32:35) and tasting joy (Alma 36:24, 26). The second possible tie would link the concern for those who seek “a sign from heaven” (Alma 32:17) and the fact that Alma was given a clear heavenly sign in the person of the angel of the Lord who appeared to him.

Counsel to His Sons: Alma 38–42

In his counsel to his second son Shiblon, Alma spoke briefly and directly of his experience. After mentioning that during his ordeal he had been “born of God” (Alma 38:6), Alma related the following:

The Lord in his great mercy sent his angel to declare unto me that I must stop the work of destruction among his people. . . . And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul. (Alma 38:7–8)

Another connection exists between Alma’s words to Shiblon and those to Helaman. It consists of the tie between exodus terminology and that used in reference to the Atonement. As I have already noted, the verb *deliver* regularly describes the Lord’s actions on behalf of both the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and Nephite peoples who found themselves in grave circumstances. When Alma complimented his second son on his patience in the face of persecution, Alma affirmed: “Thou knowest that the Lord did deliver thee” (Alma 38:4). He then continued by saying:

Now my son, Shiblon, I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day. (Alma 38:5)

The clear connection between God’s power to deliver and the resurrection is not to be missed.

In Alma’s extended counsel to his third and youngest son, Corianton (Alma 39–42), there are only a few references to Alma’s three-day ordeal, such as: “Is it not as easy at this time for the Lord to send his angel to declare these glad tidings unto us as unto our children, or as after the time of his coming?” (Alma 39:19). Apparently, the appearance of the angel of the Lord to Alma was in the back of his mind when he discussed God’s interest in informing His children in advance about the coming of the Messiah. A second point of contact is Alma’s

urgent plea that his children not lead others astray. He declared that the “Spirit of the Lord” had directed him to command his children “to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction” (v 12). Likewise, the angel of the Lord had earlier commanded Alma to “seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:11), effectively accusing Alma of leading others astray and leading Alma to accuse himself in very serious terms: “I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14).

A third feature in Alma’s instructions to Corianton is his description of the fearful condition of the wicked. In his review of the “state of the soul between death and the resurrection” (Alma 40:11), Alma says of the wicked that “these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity. . . . This is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them” (Alma 40:13–14). Alma further characterized this period as “that endless night of darkness” (Alma 41:7) and the inheritance of the wicked as “an awful death” which is tantamount to drinking “the dregs of a bitter cup” (Alma 40:26). An unrepentant Corianton’s evil acts, Alma certified, “will stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Alma 39:8). Such words, of course, recall Alma’s own horror at the thought of seeing God at the judgment bar: “So great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” (Alma 36:14).

Summary

In summary, virtually every one of Alma’s recorded sermons, whether they were formal discourses or spontaneous addresses, are characterized by the recollection of one or more features of his three-day conversion experience. The exceptions are his long prayer offered just before he and his companions began their work among the people of Zoram (Alma 31:26–35)

and his final words to his son Helaman which included his dire prophecy about the eventual extinction of their people (Alma 45:2–14). Perhaps the element most frequently alluded to is the appearance of the angel of the Lord. Further, Alma frequently referred to the captivity and deliverance of earlier generations, whether the Israelite slaves or his Nephite forebears, the memory of which was specifically enjoined on him by the angel. An important connection, not made as often, concerned the association of exodus-like deliverances with the power of deliverance manifested in Jesus' atonement. In quite a different vein, Alma repeatedly mentioned the fate of the wicked in terrifying language and imagery which he similarly used to describe his own horror at facing God at the final judgment. In addition, almost as a counterbalance, he also regularly noted the unspeakable joy and light that believers would experience if they would accept Jesus' redemption. A final ingredient is his testimony of what had happened as a result of his determination and actions to bring others to accept Jesus' atonement: to be "born of God," to taste "as I have tasted," and to see "eye to eye as I have seen" (Alma 36:26).

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The Three Most Abominable Sins

10

H. Dean Garrett

Alma experienced a great teaching moment when he interviewed his son, Corianton, who while serving as a missionary to the Zoramites had become involved with the harlot, Isabel (Alma 39:4). As Alma counseled with him concerning his mission, Corianton's rationalizations prevented him from fully realizing the enormity of his sin and his precarious current spiritual status. Alma informed him: "These things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord, yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost" (Alma 39:5). With this declaration, Alma identified for Corianton the three most abominable sins in the sight of God: (1) denying the Holy Ghost, (2) shedding innocent blood, and (3) committing sexual sin. Adultery was third to murder and the sin against the Holy Ghost as abominable sins. To fully grasp the seriousness of his sin, Corianton needed to understand its relationship to the two most abominable sins, thus allowing him to realize the possibilities of repentance and forgiveness.

Alma distinguished between unpardonable and pardonable sins. A sin that is unpardonable cannot be paid for either by the atoning blood of Christ or by the personal suffering of the sinner. The only sin that falls into this category is denying the Holy Ghost "when it once has had place in you, and you know that you deny it" (Alma 39:6). All other sins are apparently

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forgivable or pardonable because the demands of justice can be met through the atonement of Jesus Christ or through personal payment by the sinner (see D&C 19:15-18). The Apostle John taught that “There is a sin unto death . . . and there is a sin not unto death” (I John 5:16-17). Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote that the death John referred to meant “spiritual death”:

There are sins for which there is no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come. There are sins which utterly and completely preclude the sinner from gaining eternal life. Hence there are sins for which repentance does not operate, sins that the atoning blood of Christ will not wash away, sins for which the sinner must suffer and pay the full penalty personally (*New Witness* 231).

There is a difference between the sins that are unforgivable but pardonable and those that are forgivable. The Lord said, “I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death” (D&C 64:7).

Denying the Holy Ghost

Alma identified denying the Holy Ghost as the most abominable sin. According to the Lord, individuals committing this sin do five things: (1) They “know my power, and [2] have been made partakers thereof, and [3] suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome and [4] to deny the truth and [5] defy my power” (D&C 76:31). The key to these requirements appears to be the power of the priesthood. An individual must bear and be a partaker of the priesthood and then defy that power. This leads that man to deny “the Holy Spirit after having received it, and having denied the Only Begotten Son of the Father, having crucified him unto themselves and put him to open shame” (D&C 76:35). Joseph Smith indicated that such an individual must “have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against Him. . . . He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes

open to the truth of it” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 358; hereafter *TPJS*). Thus they become Sons of Perdition. These qualifications limit those who receive this judgment. A person must have made priesthood covenants with God and then have received knowledge and power beyond what the vast majority of us have received. Spencer W. Kimball stated, “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin” (*Teachings* 23).

This knowledge must be gained in mortality. An individual cannot become a Son of Perdition in the post-mortal spirit world. Joseph Smith taught, “A man cannot commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body” (*TPJS* 357). However, if a mortal today gains sufficient knowledge, light, and truth, and then turns against that illumination and denies what he knows, he has committed the unpardonable and non-redemptive sin, he will be cast into outer darkness forever.

Once individuals deny the Holy Ghost, the penalty is final. The Lord declared that these were the ones for “whom I have said there is no forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come” (D&C 76:34). Alma taught that all sins are pardonable except the sin against the Holy Ghost: “For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had a place in you and ye know that ye deny it, behold this is a sin which is unpardonable” (Alma 39:6). For a sin to be unpardonable, it must be of such a nature that it would not be covered by the atoning blood of the Savior, nor could the personal suffering of the sinner pay the price for the broken law. All other sins can be covered by either of these methods and, therefore, are pardonable.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “The unpardonable sin is to shed innocent blood, or be accessory thereto. All other sins will be visited with the judgment in the flesh, and the spirit being delivered to the buffetings of Satan until the day of the Lord Jesus” (*TPJS* 301). In his sermons the Prophet used the term “innocent blood” in relation to both the sin against the Holy Ghost and murder. In relationship with the sin against the Holy Ghost,

this apparently refers to those who have so rebelled against the Savior that they seek after the blood of Christ and if possible would shed his blood anew.

Because the sin against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable, no redemption will be made through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Therefore, no glory will be inherited by these people. President Joseph Fielding Smith said: “It is the purpose of the Almighty to save all mankind, and all will enter into his kingdoms in some degree of glory, except sons of perdition who sin beyond the power of repentance and redemption, and therefore cannot receive forgiveness of sins. All the rest shall be saved, but not all with the same degree of glory or exaltation” (2:21).

The unpardonable nature of this sin is such that “it had been better for them never to have been born” (D&C 76:32). They become the “vessel of wrath” and the only ones “on whom the second death shall have any power.” They are the “only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord” (D&C 76:32–38). If they have lived on this earth and have received a mortal body, they shall come forth in the last resurrection with an immortal body; but that body will not be glorified. Instead they “go away into the lake of fire and brimstone, with the devil and his angels” (D&C 76:36), “into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment” (D&C 76:44). Only those who commit this sin will know the nature of this torment and its duration:

The end thereof, neither the place thereof, nor their torment, no man knows; neither was it revealed, neither is, neither will be unto man, except to them who are made partakers thereof; . . . wherefore, the end, the width, the height, the depth, and the misery thereof, they understand not, neither any man except those who are ordained unto this condemnation. (D&C 76:45–46, 48)

However, it is important to note that although no human knows the eternal state of these people, it would be incorrect to teach that there is possible redemption for them at some future

time. In response to such doctrine taught by a Brother Hulet, Joseph Smith wrote:

Say to the brothers Hulet and to all others, that the Lord never authorized them to say that the devil, his angels, or the sons of perdition, should ever be restored; for their state of destiny was not revealed to man, is not revealed, nor ever shall be revealed, save to those who are made partakers thereof: consequently those who teach this doctrine have not received it of the Spirit of the Lord. . . . We, therefore, command that this doctrine be taught no more in Zion. (TPJS 24)

Therefore, if mortals today gain sufficient knowledge, light, and truth, and then turn against that illumination and deny what they know, they will have committed the unpardonable and nonredemptive sin, and will be cast into outer darkness forever. Denying the Holy Ghost is an unpardonable sin, thus differing in a key aspect from the sin of murder by the shedding of innocent blood.

Shedding of Innocent Blood

Alma listed murder, the shedding of innocent blood, as the second most abominable sin. The Church defines murder as “the deliberate and unjustified taking of human life” (*General Handbook* 10–13). Alma indicated: “Whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness” (Alma 39:6). In this dispensation, the Lord gave further insight on the eternal condition of those members of the Church who commit murder. In giving the law of the Church, the Lord declared: “I speak unto the church. Thou shalt not kill; and he that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world, nor in the world to come” (D&C 42:18). This appears to contradict Alma 34:6, but it is important to note the Doctrine and Covenants section 42 is the Law of the Church, and in verse 18 the Lord specifically stated that he was speaking to the Church. Elder McConkie wrote: “We do know that there are murders committed by Gentiles for which they at least can repent, be baptized, and receive a remission of their sins” (*New Witness*

231; see also 3 Nephi 30:12). The light and knowledge that the murderer possesses will be a factor in determining his or her eternal condition. Elder Spencer W. Kimball wrote:

Even among willful murderers there are grades and categories. . . . There are those who kill in drunkenness, in rage, in anger, in jealousy. There are those who kill for gain, for power, for fear. There are those who kill for lust. They certainly will suffer different degrees of punishment hereafter. (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 12930)

The Lord will judge.

For persons not to receive forgiveness neither in this world nor in the world to come does not mean that they will be cast into outer darkness, for the sin of murder can be pardoned even though it is unforgivable. Joseph Smith taught: “A murderer, one that sheds innocent blood, cannot have forgiveness” (*TPJS* 339). The Prophet used David as an example. “David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it through hell: he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell” (*TPJS* 339). President Joseph F. Smith indicated that this meant “even he [David] shall escape the second death” (434).

Murder is unforgivable because of the nature of the sin. In order for a sin to be forgiven, the sinner must repent. If the sin is of such a nature that repentance cannot take place or if the sinner refuses to repent, then it remains “as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death” (*Alma* 11:41). President Harold B. Lee stated:

One of the most serious of all sins and crimes against the Lord’s plan of salvation is the sin of murder or the destruction of human life. It seems clear that to be guilty of destroying life is the act of “rebellion” against the plan of the Almighty by denying an individual thus destroyed in mortality, the privilege of a full experience in this earth-school of opportunity. It is in the same category as the rebellion of Satan and his hosts and therefore it would not be surprising if the penalties to be imposed upon a murderer were to be of similar character as the penalties meted out to those spirits which were cast out of heaven with Satan. (“The Sixth Commandment” 88)

Because of this rebellion, the fulness of the atonement of Jesus Christ is not effective in murderers' lives. In order for the demands of justice to be met, murderers must pay the price themselves before they can enter into a kingdom of glory. Elder McConkie suggests that it appears that they "shall eventually go to the Telestial Kingdom" (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:584).

The fact that they will go to the telestial kingdom becomes apparent from comparing two scriptural verses. In describing the inhabitants of the telestial kingdom, the Lord told Joseph Smith: "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers and whosoever loves and makes a lie" (D&C 76:103). This same wording is used in Revelation 22:15 except murderers and idolaters are added to the list. Peter taught the Jewish people that David did not resurrect with the Saints that came forth at the time of Christ's resurrection: "For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). Joseph Smith further explained David's situation by stating that his

remains were then in the tomb. Now, we read that many bodies of the Saints arose at Christ's resurrection, probably all the Saints, but it seems that David did not. Why? Because he had been a murderer. If the ministers of religion had a proper understanding of the doctrine of eternal judgment, they would not be found attending the man who forfeited his life to the injured laws of his country, by shedding innocent blood; for such characters cannot be forgiven, until they have paid the last farthing. (*TPJS* 188–89)

However, after paying the last farthing, murderers will reside in the Telestial Kingdom and thus be saved in the kingdom of God. Although the sin of murder is unforgivable as far as the atonement of Christ is concerned, the repentant murderer can still qualify for salvation in the Telestial Kingdom. Thus the sin of murder is different from the sin against the Holy Ghost and sexual sin.

Committing Sexual Sin

The third most serious type of sin is sexual transgression. Although forgivable and pardonable, this is still a most serious sin, for Alma declared to Corianton: “I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime” (Alma 39:7). To understand the seriousness of sexual sins, we must comprehend the role of the procreative powers in the plan that God has given his children. A careful study of Doctrine and Covenants section 132 reveals that sacred role. Those who live worthy to pass by the gods and the angels “to their exaltation and glory in all things” will receive the glory of a “fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.” They shall become “gods, because they have no end” and shall have a “continuation of the seeds” (see D&C 132:19–22). If an individual does not qualify through the marriage covenant for this exaltation, that will be the “end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:4). The key words—“continuation of seeds,” “continuation of the seeds,” and “increase”—all suggest the role of the continuing power of procreation. Of all the power which God possesses, this power separates him from the angels. He has granted this deifying power to men and women on this earth for this short probationary period. How we use it and the attitudes that we develop about it determine whether we will have the opportunity to possess it during the eternities. The misuse of this power can be very condemning.

President Joseph F. Smith emphasized the significance of this power when he stated:

The man and the woman who engage in this ordinance of matrimony are engaging in something that is of such far-reaching character, and is of such vast importance, that thereby hangs life and death, and eternal increase. Thereupon depends eternal happiness, or eternal misery. For this reason, God has guarded this sacred institution by the most severe penalties, and has declared that whosoever is untrue to the marriage relation, whosoever is guilty of adultery, shall be put to death. This is scriptural law, though it is not practiced today, because modern civilization does not recognize the laws of God in relation to moral status of mankind. The Lord commanded, “Whosoever sheddeth innocent blood, by man shall his blood be

shed.” Thereby God has given the law. Life is an important thing. No one has any right to take life, unless God commanded it. The law of God as to violation of the marriage covenant is just as strict, and is on a parallel with law against murder notwithstanding the former is not carried out. (273)

The seriousness of this sin has been repeatedly restated in this dispensation. For example, in 1942 the First Presidency stated: “The doctrine of this Church is that sexual sin—the illicit sexual relations of men and women—stands, in its enormity, next to murder. The Lord has drawn no essential distinctions between fornication, adultery, and harlotry or prostitution. Each has fallen under His solemn and awful condemnation” (Grant 758).

Joseph Smith declared: “If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom” (HC 6:81). This troublesome statement has caused some to feel a hopelessness because of their transgressions. However, after making a thorough review of scriptures on repentance revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Spencer W. Kimball observed: “Going back to the Prophet’s original statement, had he inserted in it the three words I believe it implies ‘and remains unrepentant,’ this statement would fit perfectly in the program as given in the numerous scriptures, many of which came through the Prophet himself” (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 350). In stating this, President Kimball emphasized that he did not intend to minimize “the seriousness of the sexual sins or other transgressions but merely to hold out hope to the transgressor, so that men and women of sin may strive with all their power to overcome their errors, wash themselves ‘in the blood of the Lamb’ and be purged and purified, and thus be able to return to their maker” (351).

The word “adultery” also implies fornication. President Harold B. Lee taught that “the Master used interchangeably the words *adultery* and *fornication* in defining sexual impurity, and it has been severely condemned in every dispensation by authorized church leaders” (*Stand Ye In Holy Places* 332).

One major difference between adultery and fornication is the making of covenants. The act of being married is an act of covenant making. This is even more serious when the marriage covenants are made in the temple. Committing sexual sin after having been endowed in a temple and not yet being married is also very serious. To a young unmarried man who had been endowed in the temple, seeking forgiveness after committing fornication, President Kimball wrote: “Your sin is the most serious thing you could have done in your youth this side of murder” (*Teachings* 266).

Possibilities of Repentance and Forgiveness

Repentance is possible for sexual sins, but the process is very demanding. President Kimball stated:

The grievousness of the sin enhances the difficulty of repenting. Sometimes offenders reach the point of no return and cannot repent, for the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. . . . One sad experience may not totally destroy, for repentance is in order, but one experience of fornication can break down the bars, blast and scar a life, and start a soul on a lifetime of regret and anguish. (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 63)

Alma taught Corianton the steps necessary to repent of his sexual sins; he counseled him to “give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother” (Alma 39:2). Instead of following the prophet, Corianton had gone about “boasting in [his] strength and [his own] wisdom” (Alma 39:2). Pride and arrogance are a common cause of sexual sin. Corianton failed to observe “the steadiness of [his] brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God” (Alma 39:2). Instead, he wanted to go his own way and do his own thing. Although he had been taught by precept and example what was right, he forsook the ministry with which he had been entrusted. Apparently believing that he did not have to follow counsel of prophets and family, Corianton’s pride and desire for independence led him through boasting in his own strength and wisdom into sin.

To overcome his pride, Corianton needed to sink into the depths of humility and recognize deep in his soul that without God and Christ he was in a “carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:2). He had to recognize that he could not repent on his own without the help of Christ, and he needed to “turn to the Lord with all [his] mind, might, and strength” and exercise his faith in the atoning power of Christ who was to “come to take away the sins of the world” (Alma 39:13–15).

Corianton’s sin not only affected himself, but it also negatively influenced others. By his actions, Corianton had brought great iniquity “upon the Zoramites; for when they saw [his] conduct they would not believe” his prophet father (Alma 39:11). President Joseph Fielding Smith observed: “The Lord says if we labor all our days and save but one soul, how great will be our joy with him; on the other hand *how great will be our sorrow and our condemnation if through our acts we have led one soul away from this truth*” (1:314).

It was important that Corianton understand his relationship with God. He could not “hide [his] crimes from God” (Alma 39:8). Instead he had to humble himself before God and repent of his sins. This type of humility and dependency on Christ led Corianton to be obedient to God and to “cross [himself] in all these things” (Alma 39:9). To his disciples in Jerusalem the Savior said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24). The Savior, at another time, counseled: “It is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell” (3 Nephi 12:30). To “cross yourself” means to deny yourself of “all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments” (JST Matt 16:21). In order to cross himself in these things, Corianton could no longer go “after the lusts of [his] eyes” (Alma 39:9) but rather needed to forsake his sins and confess them. Alma was very concerned that Corianton seriously consider his situation: “I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good” (Alma 39:7). Later he

counseled Corianton to “let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance” (Alma 42:29).

Among the other requirements of repentance, the Lord declared that a person has repented when the sins are confessed and forsaken (see D&C 58:43). Corianton took this step by appearing before Alma, who was the prophet. Just as today, sexual sin must be confessed to one’s bishop, the “Judge of Israel.” The sinner must also eternally forsake the sin. If the sinner returns to the sin, then “shall the former sins return” (D&C 82:7). Confessing and forsaking one’s sins, however, do not constitute full repentance. President Spencer W. Kimball testified: “There must be a washing, a purging, a changing of attitudes, a correcting of appraisals, a strengthening toward self-mastery. And these cleansing processes cannot be accomplished as easily as taking a bath or shampooing the hair, or sending a suit of clothes to the cleaners. There must be many prayers, and volumes of tears” (*Miracle of Forgiveness* 155).

To repent means to change. The suffering that one experiences allows for a purifying and sanctifying influence on the soul. The repentant person will no longer focus on the temporal or the physical. The spiritual influence will be the driving power of the soul. The repenting sinner will “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

Making restitution for sexual sins is very difficult because it is impossible to physically restore virtue. However, it can be restored spiritually; and the cleansing process of Christ’s atonement will restore that virtue. One way that restitution can be made is through service to others and to God. Elder Derek Cuthbert stated: “Service . . . helps to recompense for sin. . . . We can express regret and feel remorse for things done wrong, but *full* repentance should include recompense, such as service gives” (12–13).

The key to Corianton’s repentance process for his sexual sins was to understand the power of the Atonement in his life.

Alma wanted Corianton to comprehend fully that he would have restored to him “evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous” (Alma 41:13). It was his choice. He could live in a “carnal state . . . in the gall of bitterness in the bonds of iniquity” (Alma 41:11), or he could follow the plan of happiness. Whatever his choice, justice must be satisfied, and if he would live the laws of God, mercy would “appease the demands of justice” (Alma 42:15). Because mercy “claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement” (Alma 42:23), it was critical that Corianton should “deny the justice of God no more,” but rather he should “let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway” in his heart and let it take him “down to the dust in humility” (Alma 42:30).

Corianton allowed the words of Alma to sink into his heart. The limited knowledge we have of him after this exchange with his father illustrates the path of repentance that he followed. Alma instructed him to “go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them” (Alma 42:31). One year later we find that the preaching of Corianton and his brothers had produced peace and prosperity in the church (Alma 49:30). Eighteen years later, Corianton sailed to the land northward to deliver provisions to the people who had gone into that land to settle. In Corianton’s absence Helaman became the keeper. Had Corianton kept the plates we might have learned more of his repentance process.

Conclusion

From Alma’s discussion with his son Corianton, we learn the three most abominable sins in the sight of God and the categories in which these sins fall. Those who commit the unpardonable sin of denying the Holy Ghost will not have the power of the Atonement of Christ, but will be cast out into outer

darkness forever. The unforgivable sin of murder is unrepentable and the influence of the Atonement is limited. After the demands of justice have been fully satisfied, a murderer will come forth in a degree of glory and receive salvation in the kingdom of God. All sins for which repentance can take place are forgivable. Sexual sins fall into this category. However, before the Atonement can have full power in the lives of individuals committing these sins, repentance must take place. Through repentance, the tender mercies of the Atonement provide the cleansing power to purify the repentant individual.

Corianton learned that all sinners, especially those guilty of committing any of the three most abominable sins in the sight of God, must come down to the dust in humility. Those guilty of committing the unpardonable sin of denying the Holy Ghost and the unforgivable sin of shedding innocent blood must face the justice of God. They must pay the full demands of justice. However, those who commit sexual sins must throw themselves upon the tender mercies of the Lord and qualify themselves through full repentance to gain forgiveness from God. Corianton came to understand the fulness of his father's counsel as he concluded his instruction with these words: "Therefore, O my son, whosoever *will* come *may* come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds" (Alma 42:27; emphasis added).

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The State of the Soul Between Death and the Resurrection

11

Monte S. Nyman

The Book of Mormon's teachings about the spirit world are not extensive. There are six verses in Alma 40 that relate directly to the topic (Alma 40:6–7, 11–14), and only a few other verses in the rest of the book that supplement Alma's teachings (2 Nephi 9:38; Alma 34:32–35). These verses have great value, however, for they clarify some of the biblical teachings on the spirit world. They also make comments about the spirit world that raise questions and occasionally leave misunderstandings about "the state of the soul between death and the resurrection" (Alma 40:11). Alma's comments about the spirit world were part of a discussion of the Resurrection. Had he been addressing the topic of the spirit world directly, he undoubtedly would have expanded his remarks and answered some of the questions that have since been clarified by latter-day revelation through modern prophets of God; such questions would include the following: What is the spirit world? Where is it? Are there divisions in the spirit world? If so, what are they? Who are the righteous spirits? Who are the wicked spirits? Is it possible for the wicked spirits to escape from their prison?

The topic of this chapter is Alma's teachings concerning the "state of the soul between death and the resurrection" (Alma

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40:11). I propose to analyze the six verses in Alma chapter 40 and, with the help of other passages from the Book of Mormon and explanations of latter-day prophets of God, attempt to answer the above questions and to clarify any misunderstandings that may have arisen.

What Is the Spirit World?

The Bible mentions the spirit world in various ways. It speaks of spirits continuing to exist after death (Eccl 7:12); of spirits in prison being visited by the Savior (1 Peter 3:19; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18); and of a promise to the condemned thief on the cross to be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43). In addition, Jesus gave the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, both of whom had died but were in two separate places in the afterlife (Luke 16:19–31). Without further enlightenment, these few biblical passages on the spirit world might be confusing. It is the Book of Mormon, especially the book of Alma, that clarifies the purpose and function of the spirit world and enables us to better understand the biblical passages just noted.

Alma 40:7 enlarges upon the biblical teaching that the spirit continues to exist after the death of the body. Alma speaks of “a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” and asks what happens to the souls (spirits) of men in this interim period. (Even though Alma uses the terms *soul* and *spirit* interchangeably here, latter-day revelation defines the soul as the union of the body and spirit [D&C 88:15]). Following some comments about the Resurrection, Alma teaches Corianton that an angel had made known to him “that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life” (Alma 40:11).

Where Is the Spirit World?

Where are the spirits taken? The Book of Mormon does not answer this question, but President Brigham Young did. He also gave an interpretation of the phrase “being taken home to God”:

I will tell you. Will I locate them? Yes, if you wish me to. They do not pass out of the organization of this earth on which we live. You read in the Bible that when the spirit leaves the body it goes to God who gave it. Now tell me where God is not, if you please; you cannot. How far would you have to go in order to go to God, if your spirits were unclothed? Would you have to go out of this bowery to find God, if you were in the spirit? . . . It reads that the spirit goes to God who gave it. Let me render this Scripture a little plainer; when the spirits leave their bodies they are in the presence of our Father and God, they are prepared then to see, hear and understand spiritual things. But where is the spirit world? It is incorporated within this celestial system. Can you see it with your natural eyes? No. Can you see spirits in this room? No. Suppose the Lord should touch your eyes that you might see, could you then see the spirits? Yes, as plainly as you now see bodies, as did the servant of Elijah. [Elisha. See 2 Kings 6:17.] If the Lord would permit it, and it was His will that it should be done, you could see the spirits that have departed from this world, as plainly as you now see bodies with your natural eyes. (*Journal of Discourses* 3:368; hereafter cited as *JD*; see also Cannon 1:73)

Later in this same sermon, President Young said that the spirit world is “on this earth that was organized for the people that have lived and that do and will live upon it” (3:372).

Separations in the Spirit World

Although all the spirits are taken home to the spirit world, Alma further explains that the righteous and the wicked are separated as they depart this life: “the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow” (Alma 40:12).

Alma further taught Corianton

that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection. (Alma 40:13–14)

The description of the spirits' being in a "state of" happiness or fear seems to suggest a mental condition rather than two, separate places. This concept is supported by a statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "The righteous and the wicked all go to the same world of spirits until the resurrection (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 310; hereafter *TPJS*). However, President Joseph F. Smith referred to Alma's teachings as a separation, a partial judgment where the spirit is "assigned to its place, either to associate with the good and the noble ones who have lived in the paradise of God, or be confined in the 'prison-house' to await the resurrection of the body from the grave" (448–49). Although the words *paradise* and *prison* are used interchangeably in the Bible, President Joseph F. Smith uses Alma's definition of paradise as the state of the righteous, and the spirit prison as the state of the wicked in darkness and fear. I will use Alma's definition here. President Brigham Young spoke of those who reject the spirit of revelation as being "banished to another part of the spirit world, where the devil has power and control over them" (*JD* 2:141). Another statement by the Prophet describes the part of the spirit world (paradise) where the righteous reside: "When men are prepared, they are better off to go hence. . . . The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained

therewith" (*TPJS* 326). The just spirits being enveloped in flaming fire is certainly different from the darkness surrounding the wicked which comes from their having "no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord" (Alma 40:13). Joseph's statement also verifies Brigham Young's teaching that we could see the departed spirits plainly if the Lord would permit it. But where are the wicked spirits who depart this life and what is their condition?

The Wicked Spirits

Alma's explanation of the place of the wicked spirits is one of the more difficult passages in the Book of Mormon to understand because it sounds as if they are expelled from the earth into outer darkness at the time of death. However, we have just noted in Alma 40:13 that the state of darkness among the wicked is described as an absence of any "portion of the Spirit of the Lord," the Spirit having withdrawn because of their wickedness. Among the wicked in the spirit world would be those who have chosen such evil works that the devil has taken "possession of their house [spirit]," and they are in "a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them" (Alma 40:13–14). Their condition seems to be similar to the pre-earth servants of the devil who know their final destiny and dreadfully fear its coming. That the servants of the devil know their destiny was illustrated when the Savior, in his earthly ministry in the country of the Gergesenes, met two who were possessed by devils. Upon recognizing him, they cried out: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt 8:29). Concerning this passage the Prophet Joseph said: "It would seem also, that wicked spirits . . . know their future destiny" (*TPJS* 208). The mental attitude of these two satanic spirits seems to be the same as that of the wicked spirits described by Alma who were "fearful[ly] looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them" (Alma 40:14). The

spirits of the wicked in the spirit world are apparently assembled together somewhere where they will not have the Spirit of the Lord until the time of the Resurrection as Alma and President Joseph F. Smith said, but there are more than two divisions. There seem to be various degrees of wickedness and of righteousness, too, that exist in the spirit world.

Once more we turn to President Brigham Young for further insight: “We may enquire where the spirits dwell, that the devil has power over? They dwell anywhere, . . . on this continent; it is full of them. If you could see, . . . you would see millions on millions of the spirits of those who have been slain upon this continent. Would you see the spirits of those who were as good in the flesh as they knew how to be? Yes. Would you see the spirits of the wicked? Yes. Could you see the spirits of devils? Yes, and that is all there is of them” (*JD* 3:368). President Young is apparently describing three classes of spirits that the devil has power over in the spirit world. The first class, those who were as good as they knew how to be while they lived on the earth, are probably the terrestrial spirits, the honorable men of the earth (*D&C* 76:75). Although they were good people by earthly standards, they are still among the congregation of the wicked (*D&C* 62:5), having been “blinded by the subtle craftiness of men . . . [they] are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” (*D&C* 123:12). They remain under the bondage of sin because they come not unto Christ (*D&C* 84:49–51) which means they were not baptized by Christ’s authorized servants (*3 Nephi* 12:1–2; 21:6; 27:20). The second group, the spirits of the wicked, would be the telestial spirits, or those who are not redeemed until the last resurrection because of the sins they committed while on earth (*D&C* 76:82–85). The third group, the spirits of the devils, would be those who became sons of perdition in this life, and those spirits who were denied a body because of their decision in the premortal life to follow Lucifer. The devil has power over those spirits because they did not attain the Spirit of the Lord in their lives when they had the opportunity to do so (*Alma* 34:34–35). These three degrees of

wickedness described by Brigham Young, plus the celestial spirits, are all in the same world of spirits, but they are separated from each other by the state of their souls (spirits).

Although the wicked and the righteous are received into separate states in the spirit world as explained by Alma and President Brigham Young, there does not seem to be a physical barrier, such as a wall or fence that separates the various groups; however, there are some other forms of restriction imposed. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said, the “wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed or controlled” (*TPJS* 208). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, there was a gulf between the two (Luke 16:19–31). That gulf is described in the Book of Mormon as the justice of God that separates the righteous from the wicked:

And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God. And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked. And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end. (1 Nephi 15:28–30)

A God of justice is a God of law (2 Nephi 2:5; Alma 42:13). All blessings of the gospel are predicated upon obedience to law (D&C 130:20–21). Law also inflicts a punishment for breaking it (Alma 42:22). The brightness of the justice of God, likened to a flaming fire, is probably the Spirit of the Lord that envelopes the spirits of the just as the Prophet Joseph said (*TPJS* 326). Either the flaming fire or the Spirit of the Lord would prevent wicked spirits from passing through it because of fear or possibly restrictions placed upon them. Any restrictions would probably be imposed by the priesthood. The following interpretation comes from Joseph Smith regarding Job 1:7, “when Satan presented himself before the Lord, among the sons of God, he said that he came ‘from going to and fro in the earth, and from wandering up and down in it;’ and he is emphatically called the prince of the power of the air; and, it is very evident

that they possess a power that none but those who have the Priesthood can control” (TPJS 208). The priesthood is an eternal power and is held by people in the spirit world (Alma 13:7–9). Those not meeting the prerequisites, such as worthiness or priesthood ordinances, would not be allowed to enter certain areas where the righteous are assembled. Mercy cannot rob justice (Alma 42:25).

The Paradise of God

More information about the gulf that separates the righteous from the wicked in the spirit world comes through an analysis of the dream given to Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 8). Those people who in mortal life desire to partake of the fruit of the tree, which is eternal life (1 Nephi 15:36), must enter the path to that tree. The gate to the path is faith, repentance, and baptism. In the justice of God, baptism in mortal life is required for entrance to that path (2 Nephi 31:9, 17). The Prophet Joseph taught the following:

God set the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens, and gave them their laws, conditions and bounds, which they cannot pass, except by His commandments; they all move in perfect harmony in their sphere and order, and are as lights, wonders and signs unto us. The sea also has its bounds which it cannot pass. . . . Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God, . . . It is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom. Those who seek to enter in any other way will seek in vain; for God will not receive them, *neither will the angels acknowledge their works as accepted*, for they have not obeyed the ordinances, nor attended to the signs which God ordained for the salvation of man. (TPJS 197–98; emphasis added)

Therefore, it seems that a requirement for entrance to what Alma calls the spirit world paradise is the ordinance of baptism.

The vision of the redemption of the dead shown to President Joseph F. Smith on October 3, 1918, as he pondered over the meaning of 1 Peter 3:28–20, seems to verify the concept that the righteous spirits who have been baptized and have lived

according to those baptismal covenants will be in the state of paradise.

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. (D&C 138:12–14)

A definition of what “the testimony of Jesus” includes being baptized. In the vision of the celestial world shown to the Prophet Joseph and Sidney Rigdon, they recorded that

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power (D&C 76:51–52; emphasis added).

Although this scripture describes the people in the celestial kingdom, the same definition would be applicable to the corresponding group of spirits in the spirit world.

Conversely, the wicked are described in the Doctrine and Covenants as those who do not come unto Christ (D&C 84:49–51). To come unto Christ is to be baptized (3 Nephi 12:1–3, 21:6; 27:20). Jesus did not go among the wicked while visiting the spirit world, that would include the unbaptized, but he “organized his forces and appointed messengers” to teach those who had died in their sins, “faith in God, repentance from sin, *vicarious baptism for the remission of sins*, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands” (D&C 138:20, 30–33; emphasis added). President Joseph Fielding Smith concluded that his father’s vision was evidence that baptism was required to be among the righteous spirits. “There, as I understand it, *the righteous—meaning those who have been baptized and who have been faithful*—are gathered in one part and all the others

in another part of the spirit world” (2:230). I do not know of any scriptures or teachings of modern prophets that give direct evidence of unbaptized people being in the paradise described by Alma.

Associations in the Spirit World

There are also some natural restrictions that exist in both paradise and the spirit prison. Such restrictions are defined here as the tendencies of people to associate with others of similar moral standards, interests, or family connections. If our eyes were opened, we would probably see some association among the several groups of spirits similar to the associations of peoples upon the earth. Brigham Young said:

The spirits that dwell in these tabernacles on this earth, when they leave them, go directly into the world of spirits. What, a congregated mass of inhabitants there in spirit, mingling with each other, as they do here? Yes, brethren, they are there together, and if they associate together, and collect together in clans and in societies as they do here, it is their privilege. No doubt they yet, more or less, see, hear, converse, and have to do with each other, both good and bad. (*JD* 2:137)

The natural associations would have existed among the righteous in paradise who are baptized, the unbaptized who are in the spirit prison, and those who are judged not to have lived up to their baptismal covenants. Since the Savior’s journey to the spirit world after his crucifixion, the associations between spirit groups have increased through the missionary program that he organized among the righteous messengers appointed to “carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men” (D&C 138:30).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

The organization of the spiritual and heavenly worlds, and of spiritual and heavenly beings, was agreeable to the most perfect order and harmony: their limits and bounds were fixed irrevocably, and voluntarily subscribed to in their heavenly estate by themselves, and were by our first parents subscribed to upon the earth. (*TPJS* 325)

Man may thus act for himself and choose to follow or not to follow the commandments of God (2 Nephi 2:11–16), but only those who follow the commandments may eventually attain that perfect order of “the spiritual and heavenly worlds.” President Brigham Young told of the Prophet Joseph’s appearing to him in a dream and instructing him to tell the people to follow the Spirit of the Lord, and promising that “if they will, they can find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion” (Romney 141). If the Father’s perfect order is attainable in the mortal earth, it must also exist and be attainable in the spirit world. The most righteous would have “their limits and bounds” but would be in “perfect order and harmony.” On the other hand, the wicked spirits would not have complied with this “perfect order and harmony” and would be grouped together by priesthood restrictions as well as by natural association. Elder Parley P. Pratt said, “Many spirits of the departed, who are unhappy, linger in lonely wretchedness about the earth, and in the air, and especially about their ancient homesteads, and the places rendered dear to them by the memory of the former scenes” (117). On another occasion, he reasoned as follows:

If we reason from analogy, we should at once conclude that things exist there after the same pattern. I have not the least doubt but there are spirits there who have dwelt there a thousand years, who, if we could converse with them face to face, would be found as ignorant of the truths, the ordinances, powers, keys, Priesthood, resurrection, and eternal life of the body, in short . . . ignorant of the fulness of the Gospel. . . . (*JD* 1:10)

President George Q. Cannon attributed a similar teaching to the Prophet Joseph:

Brother Joseph Smith gave an explanation of [evil influences]. There are places in the Mississippi Valley where the influence or the presence of invisible spirits are very perceptibly felt. He said that numbers had been slain there in war and that there were evil influences or spirits which affect the spirits of those who have tabernacles

on the earth. I myself have felt those influences in other places besides the continent of America; I have felt them on the old battle grounds on the Sandwich Islands. I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, we should feel differently on this subject than we do; we would not be so unguarded and careless and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and prayerful to our Heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us to overcome every evil influence. (1:82)

Therefore, were we permitted, we would see the assemblies of spirits of various orders of wickedness and righteousness in the spirit world. We would also see righteous spirits carrying the gospel to those who sit in darkness, so that all may have the opportunity to attain the “perfect order and harmony” that exists in the “spiritual and heavenly worlds.”

Escape from Spirit Prison

The work of the righteous is to preach the gospel to as many as will receive it, so that whosoever receives it unto repentance may leave the spirit prison and enter into paradise when the ordinances have been done vicariously for them on earth. Through the institution of baptism for the dead, the Church is able to open the gate of baptism, which allows the repentant spirits to exit the spirit prison of hell, the state of the wicked in the spirit world. The performance and acceptance of this ordinance lifts the imposed restriction and allows entrance among the righteous spirits. The gates of hell do not prevail against the Church (see 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:5–6; 1 Corinthians 15:29). Jesus apparently taught this doctrine during the forty days of his post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:31). Based upon a Coptic (Christian Egyptian) manuscript discovered in 1895 and authenticated by modern scholars, Professor Hugh Nibley has written:

To the Jews “the gates of hell” meant something very specific. Both Jews and Christians thought of the world of the dead as a prison—*carcer*, *phylake*, *phoura*—in which the dead were detained

but not necessarily made to suffer any other discomfort. . . . The Christians talked of “the prison of death” to which baptism held the key of release—a significant thought, as we shall see.

It is the proper function of a gate to shut creatures in or out of a place (Isaiah 45:1); when a gate “prevails,” it succeeds in this purpose; when it does not “prevail,” someone succeeds in getting past it. But *prevail* is a rather free English rendering of the far more specific Greek *katischyō*, meaning to overpower in the sense of holding back, holding down, detaining, suppressing, etc. Moreover, the thing which is held back, is (Matthew 16:18) not the church, for the object is not in the accusative but in the partitive genitive: it is ‘hers,’ part of her, that which belongs to her, that the gates will not be able to contain. . . . In one of the very earliest Christian poems Christ is described as going to the underworld to preach to the dead, “And the dead say to him, ‘Open the gate to us!’” whereupon the Lord, “heeding their faith,” gives them the seal of baptism. Baptism for the dead, then, was the key to the gates of hell which no church claimed to possess until the nineteenth century, the gates remaining inexorably closed against those very dead of whose salvation the early Christians had been so morally certain. . . . this poem in its conclusion definitely associated the release of the dead with the “rock.”

The same idea is even more obviously expressed by Ignatius in what is perhaps the earliest extant mention of the rock after New Testament times:

This is the Way which leads to the Father, the Rock . . . the Key . . . the Gate of Knowledge, through which have entered Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and all the host of prophets. . . .

From which it is clear that Matthew 16:17–19, with its combination of gates, keys, and rock, definitely hinges on the subject of salvation for the dead, and the work by which they are admitted to the presence of the Father.

Those who fondly suppose that “the gates of hell shall not prevail” is a guarantee of the security of the church on *this* earth are inventing a doctrine diametrically opposed to the belief of the early church. If there was one point on which the primitive Saints and their Jewish contemporaries saw eye to eye, it was the belief that Satan is “the prince of *this* world,” nay, “the god of *this* world.” It is here that men are under his power, and here that he overcomes the kingdom of God by violence. (788)

Jesus told Peter that His church would be built upon the rock of revelation (see *TPJS* 274) and that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). One of the gates that will not prevail against the Church will, at least in one sense, be the one that would prevent the repentant spirits from exiting the

spirit prison. The Lord also told Peter that He would give him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19). This binding power is the priesthood. Ordinances that are performed by the priesthood on earth are for eternal purposes and are effective in the hereafter. The loosing power given to Peter would include, but not be limited to, the power to perform ordinances on earth that would loose the spirits from bondage in the spirit world or in other words would open the gate of the spirit prison for those who have been vicariously baptized on earth and are repentant to be able to exit. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church.

When people accept the gospel in the spirit world, they must depend on the people on earth to perform essential ordinances for them. Joseph Smith said the following about baptism for the dead:

Every man that has been baptized and belongs to the kingdom has a right to be baptized for those who have gone before; and as soon as the law of the Gospel is obeyed here by their friends who act as proxy for them, the Lord has administrators there to set them free. A man may act as proxy for his own relatives; the ordinances of the Gospel which were laid out before the foundations of the world have thus been fulfilled by them, and we may be baptized for those whom we have much friendship for; *but it must first be revealed to the man of God, lest we should run too far.* (TPJS 367; emphasis added)

When people in the spirit world are ready to receive the ordinances, there will be some kind of communication between the spirit world and those on earth. There will be people ministered to by angels or moved upon by the spirit to get the work done. Elder Melvin J. Ballard related this story that happened at the time of the dedication of the Logan Temple:

The day before the dedication while writing recommends to the members of his ward who were to be present at the first service, two elderly gentlemen walked down the streets of Logan, approached my two younger sisters, and, coming to the elder one of the two placed in her hands a newspaper and said:

“Take this to your father. Give it to no one else. Go quickly with it. Don’t lose it.”

The child responded and when she met her mother, her mother wanted the paper. The child said, “No, I must give it to Father and no one else.”

She was admitted into the room and told her story. We looked in vain for these travelers. They were not to be seen. No one else saw them. Then we turned to the paper. The newspaper, *The Newbury Weekly News*, was printed in my father’s old English home, Thursday, May 15th, 1884, and reached our hands May 18th, 1884, three days after its publication. We were astonished, for by no earthly means could it have reached us, so that our curiosity increased as we examined it. Then we discovered one page devoted to the writings of a reporter of the paper, who had gone on his vacation, and among other places had visited an old cemetery. The curious inscriptions led him to write what he found on the tombstones, including the verses. He also added the names, date of birth, death, etc., filling nearly an entire page.

It was the old cemetery where the Ballard family had been buried for generations, and very many of my father’s immediate relatives and other intimate friends were mentioned. . . .

I will tell you what will happen. When you have gone as far as you can go, the names of your righteous dead who have embraced the gospel in the spirit world will be given you through the instrumentality of your dead kindred. But only the names of those who have received the gospel will be revealed. (250–51)

The essential requirement for entrance into paradise in the spirit world is, therefore, baptism. As stated by Elder Parley P. Pratt, “As in earth, so in the spirit world. No person can enter into the privileges of the Gospel, until the keys are turned, and the Gospel opened by those in authority, for all which there is a time, according to the wise dispensations of justice and mercy” (*JD* 1:11). Baptism for the dead must be performed vicariously before those who are in the spirit prison can leave the state of the wicked. Elder Melvin J. Ballard, in speaking of the celestial kingdom said: “And those who are prepared to enter into this exaltation, before they can pass by the angels to their glory and their exaltation, must subscribe to every gospel principle, not only live it in the spirit world, but be judged according to men in the flesh. They cannot ignore baptism” (227). It should be remembered that the phrase “the wicked” is a general category

for those who have not been baptized (see D&C 62:5; 84:49–51). One of the oft-cited scriptures by those who object to the idea that baptism is a requirement for entering paradise is the promise of Jesus to the thief on the cross: “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The objection is answered by the following explanation by the Prophet Joseph Smith:

I will say something about the spirits in prison. There has been much said by modern divines about the words of Jesus [when on the cross] to the thief, saying, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” King James’ translators make it out to say paradise. But what is paradise? It is a modern word: it does not answer at all to the original word that Jesus made use of. Find the original of the word paradise. You may as easily find a needle in a haymow. Here is a chance for battle, ye learned men. There is nothing in the original word in Greek from which this was taken that signifies paradise; but it was—This day thou shalt be with me in the world of spirits: then I will teach you all about it and answer your inquiries. And Peter says he went and preached to the world of spirits [spirits in prison, I Peter, 3rd chap. 19th verse], so that they who would receive it could have it answered by proxy by those who live on the earth, etc. . . .

Hades, the Greek, or Sheol, the Hebrew, these two significations mean a world of spirits. Hades, Sheol, paradise, spirits in prison, are all one: it is a world of spirits.

The righteous and the wicked all go to the same world of spirits until the resurrection. ‘I do not think so,’ says one. If you will go to my house any time, I will take my lexicon and prove it to you. (TPJS 30910)

When baptism for the dead is performed, the gates of hell will not prevail in the spirit world.

Being baptized is not all that is required for a spirit to be in paradise or to be released from the spirit prison. Those who have been baptized must live up to the covenants made in that ordinance. Those who are judged not to have kept their covenants will be cast into prison until their sins have been paid for either by the Savior through their repentance or by their own suffering (see 3 Nephi 12:23–26; D&C 19:16–18). If they have kept their covenants, they will find a state of peace in paradise. This peace will be both internal and external. It will be internal because of they will know they have done as the Lord would have them do. It will be external because of the caliber of people

with whom they associate. Theirs will be a state of rest from the cares, troubles, and sorrows of the mortal world. Although they may be pained from their observations of friends and family who are still in mortality, they will know that they “have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it” (2 Nephi 9:18). However, they will still look forward to the Resurrection, considering “the long absence of [their] spirits from [their] bodies to be a bondage” (D&C 45:17). Nevertheless, they will eventually be “received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

On the other hand, the wicked have several different groupings. There are those “who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house” (Alma 40:13). These are the sons of perdition. Their eventual fate is to be cast into outer darkness with those who rebelled in the premortal state. Perhaps it is this group of whom Jacob says they “die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins” (2 Nephi 9:38). They are, as king Benjamin describes, in “open rebellion against God” and choose “to obey the evil spirit, and [become] an enemy to all righteousness . . . and [remain] and [die] an enemy to God” (Mosiah 2:37–38). Their fate seems to be set and when they see God it will be to bring about “the demands of divine justice [that] do awaken [their] immortal soul to a lively sense of [their] own guilt which doth cause [them] to shrink from the presence of the Lord” (Mosiah 2:38). Their “final doom is to endure a never-ending torment” (Mosiah 2:39). The burning of their conscience is a torment “*like* an unquenchable fire, whose flame [ascends] up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38; emphasis added).

Between these two extremes—never-ending torment and never-ending happiness (Mosiah 2:39, 41)—there are several degrees of torment or happiness. President Brigham Young said that some were as good as they knew how to be (terrestrial

spirits), and others were wicked (telestial spirits). He also said that there are differences within each of these groups teaching that:

All men, excepting those who sin against the Holy Ghost, who shed innocent blood or who consent thereto, will be saved in some kingdom; for in my father's house, says Jesus, are many mansions. Where is John Wesley's abode in the other world? He is not where the Father and the Son live, but he is gone into what is called hades, or paradise, or the spirit-world. He did not receive the gospel as preached by Jesus Christ and His apostles; it was not then upon the earth. The power of the Holy Priesthood was not then among men; but I suppose that Mr. Wesley lived according to the best light he had, and tried to improve upon it all the days of his life. Where is the departed spirit of that celebrated reformer? It occupies a better place than ever entered his heart to conceive of when he was in the flesh. (JD 11:126)

However, President Young appears to be using several terms as general designations of the spirit world rather than identifying specific places.

Elder Parley P. Pratt also taught that there are different grades or classes in the spirit world:

I will suppose, in the spirit world, a grade of spirits of the lowest order, composed of murderers, robbers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards, and persons ignorant, uncultivated, &c., who are in prison, or in hell, without hope, without God, and unworthy as yet of Gospel instruction. Such spirits, if they could communicate, would not tell you of the resurrection or of any of the Gospel truths, for they know nothing about them.

Take another class of spirits—pious, well-disposed men; for instance, the honest Quaker, Presbyterian, or other sectarian, who, although honest, and well disposed, had not, while in the flesh, the privilege of the Priesthood and Gospel. They believed in Jesus Christ, but died in ignorance of his ordinances, and had not clear conceptions of his doctrine, and of the resurrection. They expected to go to that place called heaven, as soon as they were dead, and that their doom would then and there be fixed, without any further alteration or preparation. (JD 1:12)

These various groups are in some degree of darkness until the light of the gospel is carried to them. When vicarious baptism has been performed for them and they have repented and

accepted the gospel, they can enter paradise to await the Resurrection.

The counsel of Amulek to prepare to meet God in this life is fitting:

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:34)

Some readers of the Book of Mormon may interpret these verses to say that people have the same character and attributes when they enter into the spirit world as they had in this life. While that is a true principle (see Alma 41:3–6), it is not the main point of Amulek’s statement, which is to admonish the people to seek the Spirit of the Lord in this life or else the spirit of the devil will have power over them, as shown in the following verse:

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked. (Alma 34:5)

The degree to which we entertain either spirit will continue into the spirit world.

Amulek taught 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.

And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. (Alma 34:32–33)

The following, given to the Prophet Joseph concerning the Resurrection, is consistent with Alma’s teachings:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection [spirit world].

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 [spirit] world to come. (D&C 130:18–19)

The Prophet Joseph also said:

Salvation is nothing more nor less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet. And when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world, and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come, then we are saved, as in the case of Jesus, who was to reign until He had put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy was death. (*TPJS* 297)

Satan has power in the spirit world too but the degree of his influence there is dependent upon how we have learned to control him here. “The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power” (*TPJS* 181).

Conclusion

Since we have relied heavily on President Brigham Young to help us understand the spirit world, a testimony born by Heber C. Kimball at the funeral of Jedediah M. Grant, both of whom were counselors in Brigham Young’s First Presidency, seems a fitting conclusion to lend authority to the statements previously cited.

[Brother Grant] said to me, brother Heber, I have been into the spirit world two nights in succession, and, of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worst was to have to again return to my body, though I had to do it. . . . O, says he, the order and government that were there! When in the spirit world, I saw the order of righteous men and women; beheld them organized in their several grades, and there appeared to be no obstruction to my vision; I could see every man and woman in their grade and order. I looked to see whether there was any disorder there, but there was none; neither could I see any death nor any darkness, disorder or confusion. . . . that the people he there saw were organized in family capacities; and when he looked at them he saw grade after grade, and all were organized and in perfect harmony. . . . “Why, it is just as brother Brigham says it is; it is just as he has told us many a time. . . .”

He saw the righteous gathered together in the spirit world, and there were no wicked spirits among them. (*JD* 4:135–36)

With the teachings in the book of Alma and those from our latter-day prophets, supplementing the Bible, we Latter-day Saints know more about the spirit world than any other people on earth. However, there is still much that we do not know, but the additional teachings that we do have should inspire us to prepare ourselves for the time when we enter into that “state of the soul between death and the resurrection” (*Alma* 40:11). In the meantime, may we try to fashion our lives in such a way that our righteous ancestors who know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions are not pained therewith, and may we be diligent both in preaching the gospel here upon the earth and in finding the names of our departed dead and performing the vicarious ordinances for them so they can live in the paradise until the Resurrection.

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A New Meaning of “Restoration” : The Book of Mormon on Life After Death

12

Richard O. Cowan

Our eternal life can be divided into three basic periods (see Chart 1). Before we came to this earth, we lived in a premortal estate. After our existence as intelligences, each of us was born as a spirit son or daughter of our heavenly parents. After having the gospel plan taught to us in its fulness, we were given agency to do or not do what was asked of us. While those who yielded to Satan’s temptations were cast out, those who did not were allowed to enter their “second estate,” or, life on earth. Everyone who has been or will be born proved to the Father that they were willing to do all that was required by him.

Abraham explained that what we did during our “first estate” influenced our condition during this “second estate” or the present period of probation (Abr 3:22–26). Alma the Younger specifically taught that priesthood bearers were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works,” while others “on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds” would not have “as great privilege as their brethren” (Alma 13:3–4).

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Mortality is merely a continuation of that pre-earthly estate with many of the same experiences recurring here. This time we were born with a physical body as children of earthly parents. The Book of Mormon places its major emphasis on this second estate, stressing the importance of living righteously now in preparation for our continued eternal existence after this life.

Chart 1.
MAN'S ETERNAL LIFE

FIRST ESTATE	SECOND ESTATE	THIRD ESTATE
Pre-Earthly existence (Intelligence, Spirit)	Probationary State (Mortality, Post-Earthly Spirit World)	Four Final States (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial, or Perdition)
Spirit Birth	Death	
Physical Birth		Resurrection and Judgment

The teachings of Alma the Younger emphasize the importance of wisely using our earthly time to repent and serve God. Alma the Younger taught much about being spiritually prepared to leave this life and venturing on to meet our Father in Heaven. To the Church in Zarahemla he asked: "Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?" (Alma 5:27). On another occasion he continued this same thought: "This life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless [post-resurrection] state which has been spoken of by us" (Alma 12:24). Alma's missionary companion Amulek made this same point even more emphatically: "For behold, 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. . . . Therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we

do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:32–33). The emphasis on “this life” is consistent with the Book of Mormon’s announced mission—convincing “Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (Title Page). Some of the most powerful testimonies of the Savior and his atonement, and some of the most beautiful expositions of gospel principles are found in the Book of Mormon. In its pages we can read the admonitions of prophet after prophet exhorting us to take advantage in this present life, of the gift which Christ offers.

The Book of Mormon’s teachings on life after death seem intended primarily to give perspective and meaning to counsels concerning our present existence. Our conduct in this life will determine where and how we will continue our progression in what may be called the “third estate” or life following the resurrection and final judgment. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that even as our present state was influenced by what we did in our pre-earthly existence, we “will receive rewards hereafter for deeds done in the body” (*Doctrines of Salvation* 1:66). President Harold B. Lee concurred, insisting that “there is no truth more plainly taught in the Gospel than that our condition in the next world will depend upon the kind of lives we live here” (164).

We will not enter our ultimate condition in eternity immediately following death. Alma insisted that “there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” (Alma 40:6). Upon leaving mortality, people are judged by “that God who gave them life.” The righteous will enter a state of happiness or rest called “paradise,” while the wicked will enter a place of torment sometimes referred to as the “spirit prison,” where repentance and obedience to gospel principles must be learned and accepted (see Alma 40:6, 11–14). This period in the world of spirits completes our probationary “second estate.”

The Doctrine of Restoration

God's prophets have promised a restoration of all things (see Matt 17:1; Acts 3:21). When we hear the term *restoration*, we typically think of the latter-day return of the Church and the revelation of the gospel in its fulness. Book of Mormon prophets, however, use this term in a rather different sense. They teach that every individual will receive a temporal as well as a spiritual restoration, good for good, evil for evil (Alma 41:13).

Following our sojourn in the post-earthly spirit world, we will be resurrected and pass through the final judgment. Both of these steps are necessary to accomplish the promised restoration. This chapter will emphasize insights concerning our "third estate," including the resurrection, judgment, and the distinct conditions we may subsequently inherit.

Nature of the Resurrection

Perhaps the best known teachings of the Bible concerning the resurrection are found in 1 Corinthians 15:22, where Paul assures us that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." He explains that what is now a "natural body" will be "raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). Concerning the nature of these resurrected bodies, he further notes that there will be "celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor 15:40–42). These statements, however, leave many questions unanswered concerning the nature of the resurrected body itself and the qualifications to receive the respective degrees of glory enumerated by Paul. To find these answers we must turn to latter-day scriptures and teachings of modern prophets.

The book of Alma explains precisely how the physical restoration will take place in the resurrection. Amulek promised

that “the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame” (Alma 11:43). Alma repeated this same promise: “The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23).

Expounding on these teachings, Elder Orson Pratt observed that many chemical substances from other sources become part of our bodies but are then later cast off. He estimated that during a typical person’s lifetime approximately seventy-two inches of nail is trimmed away from each finger and toe, and that approximately twenty-four feet of hair and beard is cut away. “Now can we suppose,” asked Elder Pratt humorously, “that when a man rises from the dead that he will come forth with nails six feet long? I cannot conceive any such thing.” He was sure that a resurrected being’s nails “will be of a reasonable length.” He did not believe that every element that had ever been a part of our bodies would rise with us in the resurrection but that “a sufficient amount of the particles which have once been incorporated in the system will be used by the Almighty in the resurrection to make perfect and complete tabernacles for celestial spirits to dwell in” (*Journal of Discourses* 16:355; hereafter *JD*).

President Brigham Young further explained that there are certain “particles” unique to each individual which will form the basis for his or her resurrected body:

The question may be asked, do not the particles that compose man’s body, when returned to mother earth, go to make or compose other bodies? No, they do not. . . . Neither can the particles which have comprised the body of man become parts of the bodies of other men, or of beasts, fowls, fish, insect, or vegetables. . . . At the sound of the trumpet of God every particle of our physical structures necessary to make our tabernacles perfect will be assembled, to be rejoined with the spirit, every man in his order. Not one particle will be lost. (“Resurrection” 153)

The Prophet Joseph Smith had earlier taught this same truth: "There is no fundamental principle belonging to a human system that ever goes into another in this world or in the world to come; I care not what the theories of men are. We have the testimony that God will raise us up, and he has the power to do it. If anyone supposes that any part of our bodies, that is, the fundamental parts thereof, ever goes into another body, he is mistaken" (*HC* 5:339).

There is a purpose for which the particles of our bodies return to the ground. "Yes, we will lay down these bodies in the grave," stated Brigham Young. "What for? That the dust, our mother earth, that composes the house of the spirit, may be purified by passing through this ordeal, and be prepared to be called up and united with the intelligent heavenly body that God has prepared. . . . We bear the image of our earthly parents in their fallen state," President Young continued, "but by obedience to the Gospel of salvation, and the renovating influences of the Holy Ghost, and the holy resurrection, we shall put on the image of the heavenly, in beauty, glory, power and goodness" (*Discourses of Brigham Young* 373–74).

The restoration of the body to its "perfect frame" is not complete at the moment of resurrection, but takes place immediately thereafter. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that "all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young, there will not be 'added unto their stature one cubit'" (*Woodruff* 3:752). President Joseph F. Smith felt certain that the immortal spirit would not be satisfied to inhabit an imperfect body in eternity. "From the day of the resurrection, the body [of a child] will develop until it reaches the full measure of the stature of its spirit, whether it be male or female" (594). Similarly, he explained that defects will be removed "in their course, in their proper time, according to the merciful providence of God" (592). In summary, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith declared: "Children will rise as they were laid away, but after the resurrection their bodies will grow to the full stature of their spirits. Deformities will be erased and in the resurrection

will be made whole” (*Church History and Modern Revelation* 2:301).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell offered a broader understanding of what will be restored in the resurrection: “It seems clear that our intelligence will rise with us, meaning not simply our IQ, but also our capacity to receive and apply truth. Our talents, attributes, and skills will rise with us; certainly also our capacity to learn, our degree of self-discipline, and our capacity to work” (12).

The Book of Mormon notes that translated beings are different from resurrected ones. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “translated bodies are designed for future missions” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 191; hereafter *TPJS*). Moses and Elijah, for example, retained their physical bodies, enabling them to restore keys by the laying on of hands at the time of the Savior’s transfiguration. The three Nephite disciples were similarly promised: “Ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of the Father, when I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven.” Mormon explained: “That they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow. . . . Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day” (3 Nephi 28:7, 38–39). What was the nature of this initial change? Joseph Smith observed that many have incorrectly supposed that translated beings are “taken immediately into the presence of God, and into eternal fulness.” He explained, “Their place of habitation is that of the terrestrial order” (*TPJS* 170–71). Hence, the three Nephites were quickened from our present telestial condition to a higher terrestrial state. What, then, will be the nature of their greater future change? The Savior had specifically told them that “when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality” (3 Nephi 28:8). In summary, we are telestial mortals, translated beings are terrestrial mortals,

while exalted resurrected beings are celestial immortals (see Chart 2).

Chart 2.
TYPES OF BODIES

	Spirit	Mortal	Immortal
Celestial	Holy Ghost (Us—in pre-mortal existence)		Father and Son; resurrected in celestial kingdom
Terrestrial		Translated beings; mortal during millennium	Resurrected in terrestrial kingdom
Telestial		Our present state	Resurrected in telestial kingdom
Sons of Perdition	Those who followed Satan in pre-mortal existence		Resurrected who committed unpardonable sin

Sequence of Resurrections

Not all will be resurrected at once, but “every man in his own order” (1 Cor 15:23; see Chart 3). Joseph Fielding Smith taught that the first resurrection is for those worthy of the celestial kingdom and who are caught up to meet Christ in the air at his Second Coming. Shortly afterwards, but still part of the “first resurrection,” another raising from the dead will include those who lived at least a terrestrial law and those who died without a knowledge of the gospel plan. The “second resurrection” or “resurrection of the unjust” will not occur until after the millennium and will include the remainder of those who have ever lived on the earth, that is, “liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers and all who love and make a lie.” These will inherit the telestial kingdom or become sons of perdition (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:297).

Chart 3.
SEQUENCE OF RESURRECTIONS

FIRST RESURRECTION (Resurrection of the Just)		SECOND RESURRECTION (Resurrection of the Unjust)	
Morning Celestial	Evening Terrestrial, Some Celestial	Telestial	Sons of Perdition
Resurrection of Christ	Second Coming	End of the Millennium	Final Judgment

Alma also believed there may be more than one time when people will be resurrected. He said: “Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead” (Alma 40:5; see also “Alma on the Resurrection” 495). Alma acknowledged that he was not sure when the various groups would be resurrected. He supposed that all who died before the resurrection of Christ would come forth before any who died after that event (Alma 40:19). “It is evident,” observed Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, that “Alma’s understanding of the extent of the resurrection at the time the Savior came forth from the dead was limited, therefore he stated only his opinion” (“Alma on the Resurrection” 495). Alma correctly suggested that only the righteous will rise with Christ from the grave (Alma 40:20–21). This confusion stands in marked contrast to Alma’s positive testimony concerning the spirit world which he declared had been made known to him by an angel (Alma 40:11–14).

Alma’s supposition that at least the righteous would be resurrected with Christ had been taught earlier by the prophet Abinadi. He declared that the righteous, as well as those who had died without a knowledge of the gospel, would come forth in the “first resurrection” or resurrection of the just, which started at the time of Christ and will conclude at the end of the

millennium. On the other hand, he affirmed that the wicked would have no part in the first resurrection (Mosiah 15:22–26).

The Prophet Brigham Young provided an interesting insight into one factor influencing the precise time of a given individual's resurrection:

We have not, neither can we receive here, the ordinance and the keys of the resurrection. They will be given to those who have passed off this stage of action and have received their bodies again. . . . They will be ordained, by those who hold the keys of the resurrection, to go forth and resurrect the Saints, just as we receive the ordinance of baptism, then the keys to baptize others for the remission of sins. This is one of the ordinances we can not receive here, and there are many more. (*JD* 15:137)

President Spencer W. Kimball quoted this statement and emphasized that we still do not have the power to resurrect one another (49).

The Final Judgment

The Book of Mormon teaches that the spiritual "restoration" is accomplished through the judgment. Amulek testified: "The day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works." He warned that on that occasion we will "have a bright recollection of all our guilt" (Alma 11:41, 43). "Therefore the wicked remain," he explained, "as though there had been no redemption made, except it be for the loosing of the bands of death" (v 41). In conclusion he emphasized: "This restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous" (v 44).

The prophet Alma warned that more than our actual deeds will be taken into account at the judgment: "Our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence" (Alma

12:14). Later, counseling his wayward son Corianton, Alma affirmed: “The plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. . . . And it is requisite with justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil” (Alma 41:24).

Continuing his counsel to Corianton, Alma taught clearly the eternal principle that mercy cannot rob justice. The principle of justice specifies that God operates according to laws, obedience to which will always bring blessings (D&C 130:20–21), but disobedience to which brings punishment (Alma 42:22). According to the principle of mercy, however, another person, if willing and able, may pay the penalties resulting from our sins. Christ was willing to make this payment because of his great love for us (D&C 34:3), and he was able to make an infinite atonement because he was the son of God and was sinless. He made this payment in a way as not to rob justice, requiring that we repent in order to qualify for the payment he has made in our behalf. Alma insisted: “Justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:24–25).

Alma had pointed out that there is a relationship between understanding gospel principles and being accountable for our actions. He warned the wicked Nephites in Ammonihah: “If this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have . . . it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them” because the Lamanites had sinned in ignorance (Alma 9:23). Elder George Albert Smith similarly declared: “We will not be judged as our brothers and sisters of the world are judged, but according to the greater opportunities

placed in our keeping” (47). Therefore, those that are born into heathen countries and do not learn the gospel, President John Taylor had earlier explained, will be “judged without law” (52). Centuries earlier the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob testified: “Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of justice upon all those who have not the law given to them” (2 Nephi 9:25–26). Nevertheless, Jacob warned: “But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!” (2 Nephi 9:27).

For these reasons Alma counseled his son Corianton: “Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.” Alma continued:

Is the meaning of the word restoration to take a thing of a natural state and place it in a state opposite to its nature? O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful. Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again. (Alma 41:12–14)

Final Rewards

In contrast to the Doctrine and Covenants which clearly describes four basic final kingdoms, the Book of Mormon gives relatively little detail about the precise nature of our ultimate rewards, or what Alma refers to as “that endless state” (Alma 12:24). Nephite prophets seem to emphasize the extremes to be

inherited by the righteous or the wicked respectively. (Even Doctrine and Covenants, section 76 devotes most of its attention to the contrasting rewards of damnation and exaltation.) In his counsel to Corianton, for example, Alma declared that following the judgment all shall be “raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on the one hand, the other on the other” (Alma 41:4). The prophet Jacob had stated this same truth much earlier:

And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel . . . they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them. . . . But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever. (2 Nephi 9:15–16, 18)

Interestingly, Jacob used the term “hell” in this discourse in reference to the spirit prison rather than the ultimate fate of the wicked (vv 12–13).

Alma characterized the reward of the righteous as being received into glory (Alma 14:11). King Benjamin described this kingdom in somewhat the same terms as did Jacob and Alma, testifying that those who keep the commandments and endure to the end “are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

Book of Mormon prophets had more to say concerning the fate of the wicked. For example, Jacob warned the wicked: “The power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God[.] And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone

is endless torment" (Jacob 6:9–10; compare 2 Nephi 9:19; 28:23). Jacob had also declared that the lake of fire is the "second death" (Jacob 3:11). Samuel the Lamanite prophet explained the nature of this "second death." Because of the Fall, all are "considered as dead," being cut off from the presence of God, nevertheless the atonement of Christ "bringeth them back into the presence the Lord" to be judged. Those who do not repent are "hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness" (Hel 14:15–19).

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that these references to "fire and brimstone" are only figurative. Jacob and Alma, for example, declare that the torment of the damned would be "as" or "like" a lake of fire (2 Nephi 9:16; Alma 12:17). Old Testament prophets had wanted to compare eternal damnation to the worst possible place known to the people at that time. Hinnom, a sulfurous dump outside Jerusalem where garbage was continually being consumed by fire, became a most fitting symbol (2 Kings 23:10–14; see also Jer 32:35).

In his great discourse, king Benjamin explained what the actual nature of this torment will be. If a person does not repent, "the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever" (Mosiah 2:38; compare 3:25–27).

Conclusion

Mormon, who abridged most of the records to create the Book of Mormon, reflected on the main thrust of the prophets' messages he had recorded. As a conclusion to those records he declared: "And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam;

and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil; And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which ye shall have among you. . . . And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ” (Mormon 3:20–22).

Moroni, Mormon’s son, concluded the Nephite record with a similar plea: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

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The Law of Justice and the Law of Mercy

13

H. Donl Peterson

Corianton, the prophet Alma's son, had left his field of missionary labor, traveled to a border town, and there engaged in sexual relations with a prostitute. This young elder had much repenting to do before he could obtain forgiveness from the Lord, receive the acceptance of the Church, and once again have personal peace of mind. In following the steps of repentance he was bothered by the exactness of the stipulations that he was asked to do. He was also troubled about related doctrinal matters:

1. Why did the doctrine of the Atonement of Christ need to be taught prior to the actual birth and ministry of Christ (Alma 39:15–19)?
2. Why does God require that sinners suffer in the spirit world between death and the resurrection and then judge them after the resurrection (Alma 40:11–14, 21)?
3. How does the doctrine of restoration relate to the justice and mercy of God (Alma 41:1–15)?
4. Why does a merciful Heavenly Father punish his wayward children (Alma 42:1)?

Alma tried to help his son find answers to his questions. Based upon Alma's teachings particularly in chapter 42, this paper will discuss (1) the consequences of the fall of Adam and Eve, (2) the atonement of Jesus Christ, and (3) how justice and mercy are compatible virtues of God. President Kimball said:

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“Perhaps the greatest scriptural expositions on the respective roles of justice and mercy, and God’s position in it all, is that of Alma to his son Corianton— (359).

The Fall of Adam and Eve

To enable Corianton to understand the law of justice, Alma explained the consequences of the Fall. After the Lord God sent forth Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, he placed “cherubim and a flaming sword” (Alma 42:2–3) to keep them from partaking of the tree of life. This was for their blessing and protection. Not only had Adam and Eve become mortal, they had also become as God knowing good and evil (Alma 42:3). Had they partaken of the tree of life in their mortal state, it would have frustrated God’s eternal plan for his children in that, as Alma explained, they would “live forever” in their fallen, decadent state eternally alienated from God. Mortality was intended to be a temporary lay-over in man’s eternal journey, not his final destination.

After they fell, Adam and Eve were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord. They were left alone with the recollection that the Garden of Eden had been a higher realm of existence that the Father and Son had frequented and where tranquility and harmony prevailed. They had considerable time to reflect upon their lesser mortal state and to wonder about the purpose of their existence and the final state that God had in mind for them. It appears that the Lord did not reveal the specifics of the plan of salvation to Adam and Eve until after they felt a great void in their lives and needed to receive meaning and direction in their lives. The scripture states “after many days,” possibly after they had children and even grandchildren, an angel of the Lord appeared to Adam and Eve and taught them that a Savior had been provided and further explained the “plan of redemption” to them. They rejoiced in the gospel plan and taught it to their posterity (Moses 5:4–12).

Adam and Eve brought upon themselves their fallen state through their “own disobedience” (Alma 42:12); therefore,

justice demands that they be punished for their action. Their fall affected all of their posterity as well.

Adam and Eve had been placed in the Garden of Eden as immortal beings, that is, not subject to death. Since they voluntarily partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they brought mortality into the world. Some people believe that their transgression in the Garden of Eden caught heaven unaware. Adam and Eve were not inexperienced novices who destroyed the plan of God. Modern revelation teaches that they were seasoned leaders on the side of righteousness in their premortal state and their fall was foreordained. President John Taylor reasoned:

Was it known that man would fall? Yes. We are clearly told that it was understood that man should fall, and it was understood that the penalty of departing from the law would be death, death temporal. And there was a provision made for that. Man was not able to make the provision himself, and hence, we are told that it needed the atonement of a God to accomplish this purpose; and the son of God presented himself to carry out that object . . . hence it was written, he was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. (*Journal of Discourses* 22:300; hereafter *JD*)

Adam, known as Michael the Archangel in his premortal existence, was the captain of the heavenly hosts who cast Satan and his fallen angels out of heaven (*JST Rev* 12:7). Adam and Eve were wisely chosen to lead the human family.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Alma explained to Corianton that were it not for the “plan of redemption,” a plan wherein a redeemer is provided, as soon as Adam and Eve died they would have been eternally “miserable being cut off from the presence of God” (*Alma* 42:11). The prophet Jacob taught that without the atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind would become “devils, angels to a devil” (*2 Nephi* 9:8–9).

In the great gospel plan, instituted before the world was, Christ was foreordained to compensate for the anticipated fall

of Adam and Eve (1 Peter 1:20). Paul explained it well when he said: “For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ] came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21–22). Justice required that Adam and Eve be placed in the Garden as immortal beings capable of becoming mortal. Likewise, Jesus inherited mortality from his mother Mary and immortality from his Eternal Father. Paul referred to these two unique beings as the “first Adam” and the “last Adam” and the “first man” and the “second man” (1 Cor 15:45–47).

All of us in mortality must die; only Adam and Christ, two beings who possessed immortality by their natures, had the option to live on indefinitely or to die. The Book of Mormon states: “Adam fell that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25) that is, Adam’s choosing to become mortal enabled us, his offspring, to be born into this second phase of our eternal existence. Likewise, Jesus explained, “I lay down my life, that I take it up again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17–18). Adam and Eve as immortal beings introduced death into the world, and Jesus, an immortal being, who chose to die for us and alone was able to resurrect himself and all humankind, brought back immortality. Immortality, therefore is a gift of God for all mankind prescribed by the law of justice.

Alma continued to explain to Corianton that “according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance . . . in this probationary state” and except for repentance mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice” (Alma 42:13).

Alma continued: “And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore, God himself atoneth for the sins of the world to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

Alma stated that “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment . . . eternal as the life of the soul” which would parallel “the plan of happiness which also was as eternal . . . as the life of the soul” (Alma 42:16). A savior by definition is “one that saves from danger or destruction” (Webster’s 1045). A redeemer is “one who frees one from what distresses or harms” or “frees one from the consequences of sin” (Webster’s 986). Jesus was willing and able to take upon himself the suffering justice required because of man’s disobedience in this “carnal, sensual and devilish” state (Alma 42:10). As finite beings, we can but fragmentarily comprehend what Jesus endured during his whippings, the intense suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the many mockings and humiliations, the terrible aloneness, his beatings, and finally the anguish he endured on the cross, in order to qualify as our Savior and our Redeemer. The Savior stated that his “suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink that bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:18–19). Jesus volunteered to be our mediator, therefore, justice was satisfied in that as a consequence of sin a punishment was imposed. Jesus willingly accepted the required punishments for the sins of the world. Isaiah explained “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5; see also Mosiah 14:5).

Justice and Mercy: Compatible Qualities in God

All virtues originate from God himself. In order for humankind to have faith in God, they must accept the idea that justice and mercy are attributes of God. The Lectures on Faith state:

It is also necessary that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in God in order to exercise faith in him unto life and salvation. For without the idea of the existence of the attribute

justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction. For they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the Judge of all the earth would not do right, and thus fear or doubt existing in the mind would preclude the possibility of the exercise of faith in him for life and salvation. But when the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity is fairly planted in the mind, it leaves no room for doubt to get into the heart; and the mind is enabled to cast itself upon the Almighty without doubt, and with the most unshaken confidence, believing that the Judge of all the earth will do right. (78)

Relative to mercy the Lectures on Faith state:

And again, it is equally important that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute mercy in the Deity in order to exercise faith in him for life and salvation. For without the idea of the existence of this attribute in the Deity, the spirits of the Saints would faint in the midst of the tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions which they have to endure for righteousness' sake. But when the idea of the existence of this attribute is once established in the mind, it gives life and energy to the spirits of the Saints, who believe then that the mercy of God will be poured out upon them in the midst of their afflictions, and that he will be compassionate to them in their sufferings, and that the mercy of God will lay hold of them and secure them in the arms of his love, so that they will receive a full reward for all their sufferings. (79)

Alma stated to Corianton, "My son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand—which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery" (Alma 42:1). Corianton apparently had failed to understand or accept the unalterable fact that to be just, God must impartially mete out rewards or punishments in relation to his children's obedience or disobedience to eternal gospel principles. It is not the nature of men and women in our sinful and fallen state to plead for justice upon ourselves. We don't want to receive that which we justly deserve. Like Corianton, we prefer to focus on God's love, compassion and mercy and ignore the fact that our Heavenly Father is a God of justice also. Corianton's sin ranks

next to denying the Holy Ghost and murder in its seriousness before God (Alma 39:5). Justice would demand dire consequences.

The prerequisite for both justice and mercy is law. A law is given to all things by the perfect lawgiver, even God the Father, through his son Jesus Christ. The term *law* in the scriptures refers primarily to the law of the Lord, including the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the saving ordinances, and the authority of the priesthood. Alma reasoned: "Now, how could a man repent except he could sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?" (Alma 42:17). The prophet Lehi succinctly explained how basic law is to the gospel plan when he stated:

And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away. (2 Nephi 2:13)

All who have lived, do live, or will live upon the earth and who are accountable before God, have sinned or will sin, save Jesus. We have indulged in sin and punishment is required. In God's court of justice rewards or punishments are meted out impartially according to our works. Christ alone, who excelled in righteousness in the pre-earth life, and who never yielded to temptation on earth, would receive from the bar of justice the reward of eternal life. He merited being chosen as our Savior and God. The Savior's calling was not an unwarranted political appointment. Justice and mercy are based upon law.

In order for justice and mercy to harmonize and yet not lose their identity as they pertain to the individual soul, it is imperative that each person has a conscience. Without a conscience a person would not hesitate to violate divine law and would play the game of life with a different set of rules or with no rules at all. Alma explained "Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto

man. Now, if there was no law given—if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder? And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin?” (Alma 42:18–20). Everyone born into this world has been given a conscience as a guide. It is referred to in the scriptures as the light of Christ. The Lord said: “And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 84:46). The prophet Mormon explained that “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16). However, when people continue to sin and ignore the promptings of the Spirit, they become calloused against spiritual things and after a time they are no longer protected by the promptings of the spirit to do right. Nephi, son of Lehi, said his brothers Laman and Lemuel were “past feeling, that they could not feel his [the Lord] words” when they were still wicked even after they had had many miraculous affirmations of spiritual things (1 Nephi 17:45; compare Eph 4:19). The Apostle Paul prophesied that people in the last days will depart from the faith “having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2). This “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9; see also D&C 93:2) is that inner voice that aids us in “feeling” the saving words of Christ. Without people having a conscience, the law of justice and mercy would fall on deaf ears.

Elder Orson Pratt explained that justice and mercy are placed in our souls by God himself:

God is perfectly just, being just according to our notions of justice, for among the original qualities of our mind we have correct notions of justice implanted in our bosoms originally by God himself; also what we know of mercy originated from God. He implanted the principles of justice and mercy in our hearts, and he implanted the same principles that swell in his own bosom. What is justice with us, when we are truly enlightened, is justice with God; and what is mercy with us, when we are truly enlightened, is mercy with God; and these great attributes will be magnified in the dealing out of punishments and rewards. Every man who has lived, or ever will live, will be dealt with according to his works and the law of the Gospel. (Lundwall 268–69)

When we become aware of our wickedness before God and the consequences we face because of the demands of justice for a broken law, our troubled consciences will help us want to repent and return to Christ. Therefore, both law and conscience are basic to understanding and implementing the law of justice and mercy.

President John Taylor explained how justice and mercy are united through the atonement of Jesus Christ:

Is justice dishonored? No; it is satisfied, the debt is paid. Is righteousness departed from? No; this is a righteous act. All requirements are met. Is judgment violated? No; its demands are fulfilled. Is mercy triumphant? No; she simply claims her own. Justice, judgment, mercy and truth all harmonize as the attributes of Deity. "Justice and truth have met together righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Justice and judgment triumph as well as mercy and peace; all the attributes of Deity harmonize in this great, grand, momentous, just, equitable, merciful and meritorious act. (167)

Alma continued and explained that "mercy claimeth the penitent" (Alma 42:23). We may be beneficiaries of God's blessings only if we are submissive to the teachings of Christ. Both Peter and Paul use the expression that God "bought us" with a price (1 Cor 6:20, 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1). Without repentance refining our lives based upon the example and teachings of the Savior, we will not be able to enjoy God's plan of mercy. Many scriptures confirm this statement. "And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else" (Alma 11:40). Amulek stated that Jesus

shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And this mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircle them in the arms of safety, while he that exerciseth no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption. (Alma 34:15-16)

Alma further instructed Corianton:

For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so God would cease to be God. And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery. (Alma 42:24–26)

Corianton surely understood by then that if the Lord blessed him, without his sincere repentance, God would be a respecter of persons.

Toward the conclusion of his profound remarks Alma reminded Corianton that the gospel is taught, so “whosoever *will* come *may* come and partake of the waters of life freely” but that no one was “compelled to come”; however, in the last day “it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds” (Alma 42:27; emphasis added). Justice embodies the principle of restoration. Alma continued: “If [anyone] has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God” (Alma 42:28). Alma counseled Corianton to no longer let the doctrinal questions trouble him but “only let your sins trouble you with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance” (Alma 42:29). Alma’s final admonition summarizes his thesis on the relationship of justice and mercy:

O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility. (Alma 42:30)

Conclusion

In consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve, mortality was introduced which brought both physical and spiritual death. Jesus Christ overcame both deaths by breaking their bonds

through his resurrection and paying for the sins of the repentant through the atoning sacrifice of his suffering and life. Adam and Eve overcame spiritual death by living the commandments of God. This is the same way that all of us, their children, can overcome alienation from God. The quality of our resurrection and our eternal lifestyle is contingent upon our obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. This is the doctrine of restoration. Alma succinctly stated:

Mercy claimeth the penitent and mercy cometh because of the atonement and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according their works, according to the law and justice. For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus none but the truly penitent are saved. What do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:23–25)

Eliza R. Snow summarizes the heart of this great message of God's divine harmonizing of justice and mercy in the hymn "How Great the Wisdom and the Love":

How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high
And sent the Savior from above
To suffer, bleed, and die!
His precious blood he freely spilt;
His life he freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.
By strict obedience Jesus won
The prize with glory rife:
"Thy will, O God, not mine be done,"
Adorned his mortal life.
He marked the path and led the way,
And ev'ry point defines
To light and life and endless day

Where God's full presence shines.
In mem'ry of the broken flesh
We eat the broken bread,
And witness with the cup, afresh,
Our faith in Christ, our Head.
How great, how glorious, how complete,
Redemption's grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!
(Hymns 195)

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The Captain and the Covenant

14

Thomas R. Valletta

Mormon masterfully abridged the scriptural record about Moroni, chief captain of the Nephite armies, demonstrating to his anticipated readers that this was a man most needed not only for his day, but also for our own. He explicitly editorialized for those who might otherwise miss his point: “verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). In accordance with Mormon’s hopes, Captain Moroni endures as a model of courage and righteousness to many Latter-day Saints. His powerful example is obscured only by ignorance and misunderstanding of the world in which he lived. Brigham Young taught that the scriptures can best be understood by reading them “as though [we] stood in the place of the men who wrote them” (*Journal of Discourses* 7:333; hereafter *JD*). There is an immense historical and cultural distance separating Moroni from modern comprehension. This distance can be narrowed by striving to view Moroni within the context of his own world. While that project is far too encompassing for the scope of this chapter, one particularly fruitful area worth investigating concerns Moroni’s covenantal perspective.

In Mormon’s view, Captain Moroni exemplified the model Nephite disciple of Christ:

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[He] was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding; yea, a man that did not delight in bloodshed; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery; Yea, a man whose heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God, for the many privileges and blessings which he bestowed upon his people; a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people. Yea, and he was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. (Alma 48:11–13)

This seemingly simple list of character qualities, scrutinized within the context of modern times, raises important questions. For example: What constitutes “perfect understanding” and how is it obtained? For one who “does not delight in bloodshed” but rejoices in the “sacred word of God” (Alma 44:5), why is Captain Moroni seemingly so committed to the sword? What is the source and meaning of his ancient law of liberty? What is the origin and nature of the Nephite oaths that might cause him to commit “even to the loss of his blood?” (Alma 48:13). The list of questions goes on, but reflection is persuasive that Moroni’s character and actions are more understandable within their historical, cultural, and theological context.

Implicit in Mormon’s description of Moroni is the prophetic model of a man who understood the nature and value of covenant-making and keeping. The weight of the evidence accumulated in Alma chapters forty-three through sixty-three reveals that both Captain Moroni and Mormon were steeped in the scriptural understanding of covenants. His greatness resulted from his knowledge of and faithfulness to his covenants. Like his ancient Israelite ancestors, Moroni viewed his world through covenant theology now generally lost among the moderns.

The Prevalence of Covenants in Ancient Times

From before the foundations of the world, God has covenanted with his children (Abr 3:24–28; Rasmussen 12–13). In

every dispensation, covenanting has been the divine method of binding us in commitment to gospel principles and ordinances essential to our progress and salvation (eg Gen 17:2; D&C 49:9). Prophets and apostles in our own time have consistently stressed the importance of covenants. President Marion G. Romney, as one example among many, commented in a general conference talk: “Traditionally, God’s people have always been known as a covenant people. The gospel itself is the new and everlasting covenant. The posterity of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob constitute what is known as the covenant race. We come into the Church by covenant, which we enter into when we go into the waters of baptism. The new and everlasting covenant of celestial marriage is the gate to exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Men receive the Melchizedek Priesthood by an oath and covenant” (Romney 43). Eternal covenants constitute God’s approach to His children’s progress and perfection.

Covenant Defined

Although the etymology of the Hebrew word for “covenant,” *berith*, is debatable, “the most plausible solution” seems to tie it to the Akkadian *biritu*, meaning to “clasp,” “fetter” or “bind.” The original meaning of the word was not “agreement or settlement between two parties,” but, as Weinfeld indicates:

berith implies first and foremost the notion of “imposition,” “liability,” or “obligation.” Thus we find that *berith* is commanded (*tsivvah beritho*, “he has commanded his covenant,” Ps 111:9; Judges 2:20), which certainly cannot be said about a mutual agreement. . . . *Berith* is synonymous with law and commandment (eg Deut 4:13; 33:9; Isa 24:5; Ps 50:16; 103:18), and the covenant at Sinai in Exodus 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people (vv 3–8). (Weinfeld 255)

According to the LDS Bible Dictionary, covenant

sometimes denotes an agreement between persons (1 Sam 23:18) or nations (1 Sam 11:1); more often between God and man; but in this latter case it is important to notice that the two parties to the agreement do not stand in the relation of independent and equal

contractors. God in his good pleasure fixes the terms, which man accepts. (651)

Oaths and "Cutting a Covenant"

The texts of both Old Testament covenants and covenant renewals and Ancient Near Eastern treaties support the notion of the serious binding nature of covenants. Considerable scholarly effort has been expended detailing the comparisons between their structural similarities (see Baltzer; McCarthy *Old Testament Covenant*). In 1954, George E. Mendenhall compared the structure of the Sinai Covenant with that of the Hittite treaties of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. ("Covenant Forms" 54). The Hittite treaties, in his estimation, have an identical structural typology with that of the biblical covenant. He also suggests that initially there was a formal oath which was "a conditional self cursing, an appeal to the gods to punish the promiser if he defaults" (52). There was, according to Mendenhall, "some solemn ceremony which accompanied the oath" (61). Weinfeld agrees that the covenant had to be "confirmed by an oath (eg Gen 21:22–24; 26:26–31; Deut 29:9–29; Josh 9:15–20; 2 Kgs. 11:4; Ezek 16:8; 17:13–19); which included most probably a conditional imprecation: "May thus and thus happen to me if I violate the obligation" (256). "Sacrifices accompanied the oath in connection with a covenant," according to M. H. Pope, which may be the origin of the Hebrew idiom "to cut a covenant with" someone. He explains:

In the sacrifices of the covenant the animals were cut in two, and one or both parties passed between the pieces (Gen 15:10, 17). In Jeremiah 34:18 those who break the covenant with the Lord are told that they will be made like the calf which they cut in two and passed between its parts. This suggests that the oath which bound the parties to a covenant may have stipulated in the conditional curse that the violator should be treated like the sacrificial animal. (576)

This imagery illuminates the divine warnings of an impending sword to come down upon a covenant-breaking Israel. For example, in Leviticus 26:25, we read: "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant:

and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy” (compare Deut 32:41; Jer 46:10). Metaphorically and historically, a covenant-breaking Israel faced the terrible prospect of a punishing sword.

It is noteworthy that sometimes the term “word” was used synonymously with “covenant” (eg Num 30:2; Deut 33:9; 1 Chron 16:15; Ps 105:8). This may be a result of the binding nature of the revealed word of God (compare Ex 13:16; Deut 11:18). In our own dispensation, the Lord has revealed: “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3). Phrases such as “keeping the commandments” (Alma 48:15), and “maintenance of the sacred word of God” (Alma 44:5), are the scriptural equivalent of living the covenants of the Lord (Alma 46:21).

Covenants in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a record of a covenant people and their relationship to God (eg Gen 6:17, 18; 9:1–17; 11:1–9; 17:1–7; Ex 6:5–7; Ex 19: 3–6; JST Ex 34:1–2; Deut 26, 28; Josh 24; Isa 49:15–23; Jer 11:9–10; 33:19–26). Scholars have written extensively concerning the importance of ancient covenants (see Eichrodt; McCarthy *Treaty and Covenant*; Mendenhall “Covenant”). McComiskey is among the many who considers the covenant “the most foundational aspect of Old Testament theology” (15). He asserts: “The history of redemption in the Old Testament is marked by the ratification of covenants in which God affirmed his will for his people. A covenantal structure underlies the program of redemption” (10). This is consistent with Nephi’s summary of the Biblical record’s value:

The book . . . is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets; and it is a record like unto the engravings which are upon the plates of brass, save there are not so many; nevertheless, they contain the covenants

of the Lord, which he hath made unto the house of Israel; wherefore, they are of great worth. (1 Nephi 13: 23)

Like the Israelites before them, the Latter-day Saints are a covenant people conversant with the need and importance of covenant-making. Less familiar, yet critical to understanding Captain Moroni's actions is the Old Testament view that the formation of all social, political, and religious community is based upon the covenant. The central idea and foundational principle of ancient Israel was the covenant. The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* indicates: "the covenant is not merely a theological concept, but is rather the original form of social and religious organization. . . . Thus the covenant, though a religious rather than a political structure, was no more a mere theological concept than politics is purely a philosophical concept today" (719). In ancient Israel, all history was viewed through the lens of the covenant. Every man was expected to study the law and statutes of God (Deut 17:19; 31:11; Josh 8:34; 2 Kgs 22:8). The covenant enabled "Israel to make sense—moral sense—of historical experience" (Levenson 55).

Captain Moroni and Book of Mormon Covenant Theology

As would be expected for divinely led Israelite transplants, covenants constituted the core of religion, society and government in the sacral world of the ancient Nephites. To assert that Captain Moroni is better understood within the tradition of a covenant people is not a particularly radical thought. The living prophet of his day, Alma, was prone to quote the covenant promise and cursing revealed centuries earlier by Father Lehi: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land . . . And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 9:13; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1). This prophecy from Lehi was repeated over and over by the Book of Mormon prophets to remind the Nephites of their responsibilities as inhabitants of the promised land (eg 1 Nephi 2:20–21; 2 Nephi 1:7–9, 20; Alma 45:10–14, 16; 50:20). Alma's father had been

instrumental in re-establishing the Church at the waters of Mormon with baptism “as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead” (Mosiah 18:13). Moroni also would likely have been familiar with what some have described as ancient covenant renewal practices during the years of Nephite monarchy (see Nibley, *An Approach* 295–310; Ricks “Treaty/Covenant Pattern” 151–62). Recognizing that “the Book of Mormon records Hebraic treaty-covenants,” Richard Lloyd Anderson points out, however, that “its overarching covenant is that of God with his people, tenuous because of the constant threat that these transplanted Israelites will forget their heritage and the miracles of their New World exodus.” Professor Anderson reiterates the reminder of John the Baptist to Judah that “a national relationship can continue only to the extent of valid individual relationships with God—these add up to the general divine covenant. The Book of Mormon brings us closer to God because no scripture more specifically ties the Christian ordinances of baptism and the sacrament to the covenant concept. No book does more to bring the national covenant down to individual responsibility” (12). Early in the history of the Nephite nation, the prophets displayed the same sacral perspectives operative in the old world. Nephi noted this continuity when he rejoiced how his soul “delighteth in the covenants of the Lord which he hath made to our fathers” (2 Nephi 11:5). From the book of Ether’s warning that “this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off” (Ether 2:10), to the Savior’s profound covenantal discourse in 3 Nephi 20, the Book of Mormon is so permeated with covenants and covenant-making that its title page declares that one of its major purposes in the Latter-days is to “show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever” (Title Page of the Book of Mormon).

In addition to the pervading covenantal concept in the Book of Mormon, a brief quantitative summary of the word itself reveals that Captain Moroni was steeped in covenant theology. The word “covenant” or its derivatives appear 26 times in the Book of Alma chapters dealing with Moroni (Alma 43–62), while they appear only three other times in the rest of the book. “Covenant” appears seven times in Alma 46 and five times in Alma 44, a frequency surpassed only by the Lord’s discourse in 3 Nephi 20, where the term or a derivative appears ten times. Additionally, the term “oath” appears twelve times in the Captain Moroni chapters, while it doesn’t appear at all elsewhere in the Book of Alma. The closest match is in the book of Mosiah, where it appears nine times. Clearly, realizing Moroni’s fundamental grounding in and adherence to covenants is necessary to understand him. Indeed, his words and his actions can only be understood in the light of ancient covenant theology.

A Man of Perfect Understanding

Mormon describes Captain Moroni as “a man of a perfect understanding” (Alma 48:11). Today’s readers, living in an age of excessive and empty flattery, can miss the power and intent of Mormon’s tribute, which had to be etched in metal plates; consequently, each word was carefully chosen (see Mormon 8:5; 9:33). Mormon’s descriptive phrase “perfect understanding” has profound significance when we view it in historical context, for it shows that Moroni himself excelled at keeping covenants.

The term “understanding” also has several meanings throughout the Book of Mormon. One important use of the word carries the idea of spiritual perception or comprehension. This use is frequently described as “understanding” centered in the heart (eg 2 Nephi 16:10; Mosiah 2:9; 12:27). The heart, according to Joseph Fielding McConkie, is often employed in the scriptures as a symbolic “expression of spiritual receptivity or the lack of it, such as the hardening of the heart (1 Nephi 15:10),” as well as the place of true gospel understanding (262;

see Matt 13:15). In the context of the scriptures which Mormon edited or wrote, “understanding” is a gift from God (WofM 1:9), attainable only by studying and giving heed to the word of God (Alma 32:28). Mormon taught that spiritual understanding leads to a knowledge of truth. For example, he says that Alma and the Sons of Mosiah “waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (Alma 17:2).

Mormon’s use of the term “understanding” is consistent with Old Testament usage. The most common word for “understanding” and “insight” in Hebrew is *binah*, which is formed from the root *byn*, and originally meant “to distinguish, separate” (Ringgren 99). Israel was only able to distinguish the truth from error by discernment given of God as she studied and gave heed to his law. Thus, Moses reported to the people,

I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. (Deut 4:5–6)

Here, in part, is the divine prescription for wisdom and understanding: learn and do the covenants of God.

In ancient Israel, “understanding” was often tied to the genre of “wisdom literature,” which includes the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms. These books underscore how vital it is to get (Prov 4:5, 7; 16:16), to seek (Prov 23:23), and to learn (Prov 4:1; compare 1:2; 2:3) wisdom and understanding.

In Job 28:12, 20, the question is asked, “Where shall wisdom or understanding be found?”—God alone knows (v 23). Thus we read, “The fear of Yahweh is wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10; compare Job 28:28). Thus it can even be said: “Trust in Yahweh and do not rely on your own insight” (*binah* Prov 3:5; compare 23:4). (Ringgren 105)

According to these scriptures, all true understanding ultimately has its source in God. We can gain spiritual insight only by learning and doing the laws and statutes of God, by keeping covenants. Psalms 111:10 asserts that, “a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.” This spiritual discernment is a blessing from God, which is given to aid in further observation of the law. This thought is expressed in Psalm 119:34: “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”

In the 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, “perfect” means “finished or complete,” which is consistent with the Hebrew terms translated “perfect” in the King James Version of the Bible. To state, therefore that Captain Moroni was “a man of a perfect understanding” is to declare that he diligently studied and lived by the sacred word of God, and that he understood the consequences of not giving heed to the covenants. Moroni’s own testimony to Zerahemnah supports this conclusion, where he claims:

we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church, and by the sacred support which we owe to our wives and our children, by that liberty which binds us to our lands and our country yea, and also by the maintenance of the sacred word of God, to which we owe all our happiness and by all that is most dear unto us. (Alma 44:5)

As noted earlier, at times the term “word” was used synonymously with “covenant” in the Old Testament. “Maintenance of the sacred word of God” is tantamount to being faithful to one’s sacred covenants (Alma 44:5). Captain Moroni felt so anchored to God’s word that before he would do battle against the Lamanites, he inquired of the prophet “whither the armies of the Nephites should go” (43:23). He had confidence “that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies . . . and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good, in preserving his people, yea, in keeping the commandments of God, yea, and resisting iniquity” (48:16). His behavior in this

respect follows the pattern found in ancient Israel (Nibley, *Since Cumorah* 297; Ricks, “Holy War” 103–117; Vaux 1:258–67). Old Testament scriptures provide many examples of belief in the necessity of divine sanction as a necessary prelude to battle (Judges 7:9–14; I Sam 28:5–6; 30:8; II Sam 5:19–25; I Kings 8:44; 22:5, 7–8). Modern scripture confirms that God directed the ancients “that they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people” unless he commanded them to (D&C 98:33). Moroni’s faith and reliance upon the word of God is much like the faith of the ancients spoken of by the author of Hebrews: “who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb 11:33–34; see the JST changes in this chapter). Mormon is consistent with this view in his testimonial that Moroni was a “man who was firm in the faith of Christ . . . and in keeping the commandments of God” (Alma 48:13, 15).

Moroni and the Title of Liberty

One of the many examples of Moroni’s scriptural foundation in the covenants of God is his experience with the “title of liberty.” In response to the dissension of Amalickiah and his proud followers, Captain Moroni followed ancient ritual and “rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children” (Alma 46:12). Hugh Nibley notes parallels of Moroni’s action in “The Rule of Battle for the Sons of Light” of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, which involves inscribing significant phrases on battle ensigns. This act also is reminiscent of the legendary Iranian Independence Flag of Kawe, which, according to Professor Nibley, involved the hanging of a leather apron upon a pole to rally the forces of liberty (“New Approaches” 92–95). After fastening the title of liberty on the end of a pole and dressing in his armor, Moroni “bowed to the earth,

and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land” (Alma 46:13). He then declared, in a pointed reference to their faithfulness in keeping covenants: “Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (v 18).

Moroni then “went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing” and cried aloud, “Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them” (vv 19–20). This rallied the faithful, who “came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments” (v 21).

While twentieth-century readers correctly view this moment as a time of great patriotism, it is important to note that any such feelings of the Nephites were founded in their covenants. The focus in the record is not upon an emotional flag-waving fervor, but upon the necessity of keeping covenants with the Lord in order to be preserved in the land. According to the record, “the covenant which they made,” as they “cast their garments at the feet of Moroni,” was: “We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression” (v 22).

Hugh Nibley has said “treading on one’s garments while making a covenant” follows a “forgotten but peculiar old Jewish

rite” (“Freemen” 335–36), and Terrence Szink has found comparable rites in the ancient world (35–45). He suggests that the oath of the Nephite army described in Alma 46:21–22,

is similar to a number of Near Eastern oaths that have two characteristics. First, they are self-execrative in nature: the party making the covenant or treaty takes upon himself a conditional curse, swearing that, if he fails to fulfill his part of the agreement, he is willing to endure a specified punishment. Second, they are accompanied by various rites that in some way symbolized the punishment to be inflicted. (36)

One striking example of just such an oath from the Ancient Near East is the “so-called Hittite Soldiers’ Oath” located at Boghazkoy in present-day Turkey. Dating back to the second millennium BC, “it contains a series of rituals in which an officer [presumably a priest] presents the participants with an object that, either through its destruction or by its very nature, represents the punishment for breaking the oath or for showing disrespect to the king” (37). Instead of clothing, the Hittite ritual employs wax and mutton fat. In one case they are thrown onto a flame with the explanation: “‘Just as this wax melts, and just as the mutton fat dissolves, whoever breaks these oaths [shows disrespect to the king] of the Hatt [land], let [him] melt lik[e wax], let him dissolve like [mutton fat]!’ [The me]n declare: ‘So be it!’” (36–7).

In another case the priest throws the wax and mutton fat on the ground and, according to the text: “they trample it under foot and he speaks as follows: ‘Whoever breaks these oaths, even so let the Hatti people come and trample that man’s town under foot’” (37). Szink’s research offers several Biblical examples of oaths taken under circumstances similar to that of Moroni’s faithful soldiers (eg Judges 19–21; 1 Sam 11).

The covenant renewal pattern of Captain Moroni’s compatriots is more properly understood within the framework of ancient Israelite thought. Nephite social cohesion, like the “unity of the Israelite people and its relationship with God, was founded on covenant, and this covenant was in its original form a purely religious affair” (McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*

23). While most Latter-day Saints are familiar with covenants, few realize that anciently the covenant was the very foundation for government. Moroni's sentiment parallels ancient Israel's view that government was based upon covenants between God and his children, as well as between God's children. When Moroni rallies the forces, it is not to some partisan political cause but to the cause of their covenants with God.

Drawing upon ancient types and shadows, Moroni dramatically compares their current state of affairs with that of their covenantal lineage by declaring: "Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren into many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain" (v 23). With the recollection of an old world tradition, Moroni calls out to rally his forces: "Let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph" (v 24).

The appropriateness of this typology cannot be overstated. Joseph was historical proof that jealousy and dissension could lead to bondage, but that faithfulness to covenants with God leads to preservation and liberty. Anciently, Joseph was a symbol of freedom and liberty. Midrashic commentators have considerable to say about the story of Joseph, and particularly his struggles with his brothers. One account has God telling the guilty brothers: "By your lives you sold Joseph into slavery, and therefore you will recite the tale of your own Egyptian bondage until the end of time" (Graves 253).

First-time readers of the Book of Mormon are often surprised at the number of references to "freedom" and "liberty." Actually, "freedom" appears 26 times in Alma, all between chapters 43 and 63. There are only three other direct references in the entire Book of Mormon. The term "liberty" or its derivative appears thirty-three times in these same Alma chapters, more than the rest of the Book of Mormon put together. Concerning the antiquity of these concepts, Hugh Nibley has noted

that “the constant recurrence of the word liberty (*kherut*) in the Dead Sea Scrolls, to say nothing of the Bar Kochba coins, shows that it is entirely in order in Moroni’s world” (“Bar-Kochba” 280).

Both “freedom” and “liberty” (Hebrew: *deror* and *hopsi*) have their Hebrew roots in emancipation from slavery. As is true of Joseph as an individual and Israel as a nation, freedom and liberty came because of making and keeping covenants with God. At Sinai God set Israel free, based upon obedience to his covenant. God taught Israel that freedom and liberty were not the result of their prowess, but the result of their trusting his power (compare Ex 23:20–25; Deut 5:6–6:2). Likewise, when they least trusted God, they found themselves enslaved by their enemies (eg Lev 26). The Book of Mormon contains the same construct. Moroni realized that freedom came from diligence and giving heed to the word of God, and not from Nephite cunning and military might.

The rent coat plays a particularly significant role in the comparison between Moroni’s cause with that of Joseph’s. Moroni reminds his people of the words of Jacob when “he saw that a part of the remnant of the coat of Joseph was preserved and had not decayed” (Alma 46:24). Though this prophecy of Jacob is nowhere recorded in the Bible, support has been documented in several apocryphal stories. One such story, told by the renowned Moslem historian, Muhammad ibn-ibrahim ath-Tha’labi, is particularly relevant:

And when Joseph had made himself known unto them [his brethren] he asked them about his father, saying, “What did my father after [I left]?” They answered, “He lost his eyesight [from weeping].” Then he gave them his garment [*qamis*, long outer shirt]. According to ad-Dahak that garment was of the weave [pattern, design] of Paradise, and the breath [spirit, odor] of Paradise was in it, so *that it never decayed* or in any way deteriorated [and that was] a sign [omen]. And Joseph gave them that garment, and it was the very one that had belonged to Abraham, having already had a long history. And he said to them, “Go, take this garment of mine and place it upon the face of my father so he may have sight again, and return [to me] with all your families.” And when they had put Egypt behind them

and come to Canaan their father Jacob said, "Behold, I perceive the spirit [breath, odor] of Joseph, if you will not think me wandering in my mind and weak-headed from age." [for] he knew that upon all the earth there was no spirit [breath, odor] of Paradise save in that garment alone. And as-Sadi says that Judah said to Joseph, "It was I who took the garment bedaubed with blood to Jacob, and reported to him that the wolf had eaten Joseph; so give me this day thy garment that I might tell him that thou art living, that I might cause him to rejoice now as greatly as I caused him to sorrow then." And Ibn-Abbas says that Judah took the garment and went forth in great haste, panting with the exertion and anxiety . . . and when he brought the garment he laid it upon his face, so that his sight returned to him. And ad-Dahak says that his sight returned after blindness, and his strength after weakness, and youth after age, and joy after sorrow. [Then follows a dialogue between Jacob and the King of Death]. (Nibley *An Approach* 219–20).

In this account, we not only have the preserved remnant of the garment sent by Joseph to his father to show he was alive, and the torn one mingled with blood which Judah took to his father as evidence of Joseph's death, but we also have a tradition that the one preserved once belonged to Abraham. This peculiar garment had in it the "weave" and "breath" of Paradise. Here is evidence of what might be a symbolic use of garments to represent the covenants of the Lord. Israel traced their covenants with God back to Abraham (Ex 2:24; Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23; 1 Chron 16:16; Ps 105:9; Acts 3:25; 7:8). In this apocryphal story Joseph's garment, which once belonged to Abraham, is preserved just as the covenant (as well as the covenant people) is preserved through Joseph. The evidence of Paradise in the garment's "weave" and "breath" may reflect the "coats of skins" with which God clothed Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen 3:21).

Another story from the same Moslem source documents the garment's symbolism of the covenant. As Dr. Nibley paraphrases it: "Joseph's brethren bring his torn garment to their father as proof that he is dead, but Jacob after examining the garment ('and there were in the garment of Joseph three marks or tokens when they brought it to his father') declares that the way the cloth is torn shows him that their story is not true" (*An*

Approach 218). Jacob prophesied: “Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God, and be taken unto himself, while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment” (Alma 46:24). The rent garment symbolized the covenants of God to preserve a posterity unto Jacob and Joseph. While those of Joseph who reject the covenants through apostasy and dissension shall perish, God will preserve a remnant of the seed of Joseph (compare Ether 13:6). Moroni says it could very well be that “the remnant of the seed of Joseph, which shall perish as his garment, are those who have dissented from us.” In fact, he forewarns, “it shall be ourselves if we do not stand fast in the faith of Christ” (Alma 46:27).

Moroni and the Sword

Most of what we know about the life of this faithful “man of Christ” involves his career as a great military leader. It seems odd to some modern readers that a man versed in the word of God, and practiced in keeping the covenants of the Lord, could be so entangled in military affairs. This may partially explain Mormon’s insistence that Moroni “did not delight in bloodshed” and was taught “never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives” (Alma 48:11, 14). Mormon makes clear in his narrative that the motives of Moroni were pure and correct and that he had the utmost consideration for covenants. One example is particularly illustrative. During a bloody battle against Zerahemnah’s forces, Mormon explicitly tells the reader:

The Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church. And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second,

ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies. (Alma 43:45–46)

The Nephites here were following the ancient law of war that has been reiterated, but mostly ignored in our own dispensation (D&C 98:32–38; Deut 20:10–12). Knowledge that their actions were consistent with God’s word must have enheartened Moroni’s forces. At one point in the battle, however, when things were not going in favor of the Nephites, Moroni inspired them with “thoughts of their lands, their liberty, yea, their freedom from bondage” (v 48). His motivational leadership turned the tide to victory.

When the Nephites had their enemy encircled, Moroni “commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood” (v 54). After causing his men to withdraw from the confrontation, Moroni sought for a covenant of peace by explaining to Zerahemnah that “we do not desire to slay you. Behold, we have not come out to battle against you that we might shed your blood for power; neither do we desire to bring any one to the yoke of bondage” (vv 1–2). Moroni’s subsequent words reveal that he understood the cause of the conflict to be religious persecution: “this is the very cause for which ye have come against us; yea, and ye are angry with us because of our religion” (v 2). He testified to Zerahemnah, “ye behold that the Lord is with us; and ye behold that he has delivered you into our hands. And now I would that ye should understand that this is done unto us because of our religion and our faith in Christ. And now ye see that ye cannot destroy this our faith” (v 3).

With the fervent zeal of a man truly converted to the Lord, Moroni testified that “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion” (v 4). Yet, unlike some of our modern fanatics blinded by the passion of false religion, Moroni’s desire was not for further vengeance and blood, but for peace. He promised Zerahemnah if “ye deliver up your weapons of war unto us . . . we will seek not your blood, but we will spare your lives, if ye will go your way and come not again to war against us” (v 6).

Zerahemnah caused his men to surrender their weapons but, in a gesture uniquely suited to a covenant society, he emphatically refused to “take an oath” which he knew they would break (v 8). His intense hatred toward the Nephites forced an impasse in the peace negotiations, and in frustration Moroni handed back the weapons of war to Zerahemnah (vv 9–10). The Captain warned him, however, that he would “not depart except ye depart with an oath that ye will not return again against us to war.” Declared Moroni, “Now as ye are in our hands we will spill your blood upon the ground, or ye shall submit to the conditions which I have proposed” (v 11).

Immediately upon regaining his sword, Zerahemnah rushed forward in a frenzied attempt to slay the Captain, but one of Moroni’s quick-thinking soldiers intervened by knocking away Zerahemnah’s sword and cutting off his scalp (Alma 44:12). This soldier then raised up the scalp as a warning to the rest of Zerahemnah’s forces and a token of the covenant of peace (v 14). Many “entered into a covenant of peace” at this time and “depart[ed] into the wilderness” (v 15). Zerahemnah, however, was “exceedingly wroth, and he did stir up the remainder of his soldiers to anger, to contend more powerfully against the Nephites” (v 16). An angered Moroni “commanded his people that they should fall upon them and slay them” (v 17). When slaughter became so great that neither side could even count their dead “because of the greatness of the number,” Moroni again called a halt to the terrible action. This time the soundly defeated Lamanites surrendered their weapons, “entered into a covenant with him of peace,” and were allowed to “depart into the wilderness” (vv 20–21).

This sequence of scripture effectively reveals Moroni, not as a man of war, but of peace. Repeatedly, Mormon records how Moroni offers opportunities for peace and forgiveness to his battered but belligerent opponents. He also interprets Moroni’s military actions as preparation “to support [the Nephites’] liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they

might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians” (Alma 48:10).

There are other, more symbolic reasons for Moroni’s close identification with the sword. Book of Mormon writers often use the term “sword” for a symbol of divine power, particularly as judgment (Hamblin 332–34). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Hebrew idiom, “cutting a covenant,” may have had its roots in the sacrifices so intimately connected with the oath-swearing tied to covenants. Those sacrifices, as noted, may have had personal implications for the person or persons involved in entering the covenants. Whether these curses or penalties were intended to be taken literally or symbolically or both, the scriptures clearly say that the “sword” is a penalty designated for covenant-breakers (eg Lev 26:25; Deut 32:41; Job 19:29; Isa 34:1–5; Jer 46:10). Alma 26:19 is an example of this metaphoric convention: “Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction, yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?”

Much later in the Book of Mormon record, Samuel the Lamanite warns the Nephites that God “hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people” (Hel 13:5; compare Alma 54:6; 60:29; 3 Nephi 2:19; 20:20; 29:4; Mor 8:41; Ether 8:23). Moroni employed this phraseology in his warning to Ammoron, when he declared, “Behold, I would tell you somewhat concerning the justice of God, and the sword of his almighty wrath, which doth hang over you except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands” (Alma 54:6). Again, in Alma 60:29, when he denounced apparent government waste and corruption, he proclaimed that “except ye do bestir yourselves in the defence of your country and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.”

Mormon seems to have organized and shaped the book of Alma to show that “the preaching of the word” has a “more

powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5), but rejection of the word of God leads the people “to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites” (50:22). Mormon introduces Captain Moroni at a pivotal point in the book. Chapter 43 opens with a pointed statement that Alma and his sons “did go forth among the people, to declare the word unto them,” but that “we shall say no more concerning their preaching, except that they preached the word, and the truth, according to the spirit of prophecy and revelation; and they preached after the holy order of God by which they were called” (v 1–2). At this point, Mormon turns his attention to the “wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites” (v 3). After describing the socio-political-religious situation in the eighteenth year of the reign of judges, and noting that the Lamanites were mainly led by “those who had dissented from the Nephites” (vv 5, 6, 13) Mormon introduces Moroni, chief captain over the armies of the Nephites (vv 16–17). Throughout the remainder of the book of Alma, Moroni spent much of his time exercising the sword (eg chapters 43–44, 46, 48, 50–53, 55, 60, 62), an inevitable result of some people’s rejection of the word. In many respects, Moroni personified the very “sword of justice” which he warned Pahoran “doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction” (Alma 60:29). Mormon seems to have had this symbolism in mind, for although he calls Moroni a man of “the word,” Moroni’s role can be best characterized as a man of “the sword.”

Moroni and the Dissenters

Moroni and his sword led the fight against pride, nobility and dissension (Alma 51: 17–20); combated iniquity and evil (46:9–11); supported the “cause of freedom” (35); and “delighted in the saving of his people from destruction” (55:19). It is likely that Mormon included so much material on Moroni for more substantial reasons than a fascination with military history. Moroni was a man needed in his day to counter the

pride, dissension, iniquity and covenant-breaking which abounded. The term “dissension” or its derivative appears over 26 times in these chapters, more than in any other book. The next most frequent usage is in the book of Helaman, where the term or a derivative appears 15 times.

Moroni’s views concerning dissension and disunity can be best understood within his covenantal perspective. He coupled a love of freedom and liberty with the knowledge that these could only be secured by faithfulness and obedience to covenants. Dissidents, in his view, were covenant-breakers. Their lack of trust in God or concern for the community of the saints put the whole people in jeopardy. Their alliances with Nephite enemies only compounded the problem. Both Moroni and Mormon saw dissension as a root cause of Nephite problems. Moroni’s “Title of Liberty” speech warned of the serious consequences for “those who have dissented” (46:27). Mormon also had similar views: “For it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations . . . which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (50:21).

Describing Moroni’s motivation, Mormon declared: “For it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction” (51:16; compare 60:14–16, 32). One cannot blame Moroni for his sensitivity to dissension. Without exception, every enemy specifically identified by Mormon in Alma 43–63 is a body of Nephite dissenters or a group led by a Nephite dissenter (eg 43:5–8, 46:3–7, 50:25–28, 51:16, 52:3, 61:8). While the narrative indicates that Moroni faced Lamanite opposition, Mormon goes out of his way to point out that they were led by Nephite dissenters. He shaped the narrative so we could see the wickedness and dangers of dissension and dissenters, of covenant-breaking and covenant-breakers.

Conclusion

The prophet Moroni, son of Mormon, foresaw these same problems in our day, and warned that “the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer” (Mormon 8:41). As mankind increasingly rejects God’s word and the mercy of his covenants, modern Saints must look more attentively to the pattern and type of Captain Moroni. He is a man most needed for our own day. His Christlike example and leadership in a time of socio-political crisis is unsurpassed in scripture. Yet, for many, the lessons of his life have been illusive, or, at best, elusive.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that covenant-making and keeping is at the heart of understanding Captain Moroni. His words concerning freedom and liberty can appear shallow and useless until we view them in their covenantal origin and fragility. His views concerning dissension may seem narrow and intolerant unless we view them in that covenant perspective. His actions in crisis and war could be mistaken for demagoguery unless we are aware of their ancient roots and Hebrew traditions.

Reading the Captain Moroni chapters in the book of Alma through the lens of the “covenant” allows us a better grasp of the mind and heart of this great servant of God, a chance to see as he saw, and to feel as he felt. We can liken these classic stories of the “war” chapters in Alma, such as the raising of the “Title of Liberty,” to us when we study them within the context of the ancient covenantal perspective. One of Mormon’s many editorial summaries makes it clear that he meant these chapters to be understood this way. Noting the Nephite prosperity and strength in the twenty-first year of the reign of Judges, Mormon attributes these blessings to the mercy and justice of the Lord, “to the fulfilling of all his words unto the children of men” (Alma 50:19). He cites a revelation from the Lord to Father Lehi indicating that “inasmuch as they [Lehi and his posterity] shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But

inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (v 20). Mormon then testifies:

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions. And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief, and mingle with the Lamanites. But behold there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni (vv 21–23).

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Hagoth and the Polynesians

15

Robert E. Parsons

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has shown deep interest in the Polynesian people almost from the time the Church was organized in 1830. Just thirteen years later, in 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith sent the first missionaries to the islands of the Pacific. The interest in the people of the Pacific comes from a brief account in the Book of Mormon of one Hagoth, a Nephite shipbuilder who left the Americas and sailed away and was “never heard of more” (Alma 63:8). This paper will review the traditional beliefs of the Church regarding the Polynesian people, and will thus explain the Prophet Joseph’s early interest in these people of the Pacific Islands. It will not thoroughly examine the current or past theories of the origin of the Polynesians, but concentrate on the Book of Mormon account and supplementary interpretations that have led to the traditional beliefs.

The story of Hagoth is recorded in just six verses (4–9) of Alma 63. Great wars between the Nephites and Lamanites had just concluded and there seemed to be a restlessness among the survivors. At that time thousands (even tens of thousands) migrated to the land northward (Alma 63:4). In 55 BC, Hagoth built an “exceedingly large ship” and launched it into the West Sea by the narrow neck of land and went north with many men, women, children, and provisions (Alma 63:5–6). This ship returned in 54 BC, was provisioned and sailed north again never

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to be heard from thereafter. An additional ship was launched that year, and it also was never heard from again (Alma 63:7–8). Interest in this one-half page abridgment of two years of Nephite history has led to the interpretations that will follow.

What happened to these lost ships? Only speculation and theories can be advanced, but the most common is that the ships were lost at sea. This is what the Nephites thought happened to them (Alma 63:8).

A second theory is that they went to Japan. The basis of this theory is the prayer Elder Heber J. Grant offered when he dedicated Japan in 1901 to receive the restored gospel.

According to Alma Taylor's reminiscences of the event, Elder Grant "spoke of those who, because of iniquity, had been cut off from among the Nephites . . . and said we felt that through the lineage of those rebellious Nephites who joined with the Lamanites, that the blood of Lehi and Nephi [and of all Israel] had been transmitted unto the people of this land, many of whom have the features and manners of the American Indians, [and he] asked the Lord that if this were true that He would not forget the integrity of His servants Lehi and Nephi and would verify the promises made unto them concerning their descendants in the last days upon this [the Japanese] people for we felt that they were a worthy nation" (Palmer 91).

A third theory is that they went to Hawaii. In speaking to the Hawaiians at Laie, Elder Matthew Cowley said to them: "Brothers and sisters, you are God's children—you are Israel. You have in your veins the blood of Nephi" (Cole 384). Expounding this theory, some believe that they went not only to Hawaii, but also to other Polynesian Islands as well; this theory is the emphasis of this paper.

Does the Church have an official position on any connection between Hagoth and the Polynesians? In a letter to the mission president of the Samoan Mission dated September 6, 1972, and signed by N. Eldon Tanner and Marion G. Romney, under the letterhead of the First Presidency, they wrote:

In your letter of September 6, 1972, you ask if the Polynesian people are Lamanites or Nephites. There has been much speculation about the origin of these people. We have, however, no scriptural evidence

or revelation from the Lord that would tell us exactly where these people came from or their background.

Teachings of General Authorities

Notwithstanding this 1972 letter from the First Presidency, we have many definite statements from members of the Twelve, and from Presidents of the Church reiterating their firm belief that the Polynesians originated from Lehi's American colony. Elder Mark E. Petersen, in his conference message of 1962, says:

The Polynesian Saints are characterized by a tremendous faith. Why do they have this great faith? It is because these people are of the blood of Israel. They are heirs to the promises of the Book of Mormon. God is now awakening them to their great destiny. As Latter-day Saints we have always believed that the Polynesians are descendants of Lehi and blood relatives of the American Indians, despite the contrary theories of other men (Petersen 457).

The building of temples among the Polynesian people has been the source of many statements connecting these people with the Book of Mormon. When the cornerstone was laid at the New Zealand Temple, Elder Hugh B. Brown stated in the closing prayer:

We thank Thee, O God, for revealing to us the Book of Mormon, the story of the ancient inhabitants of America. We thank Thee that from among those inhabitants, the ancestors of these whose heads are bowed before Thee here, came from the western shores of America into the South Seas pursuant to Thy plan and now their descendants humbly raise their voices in grateful acknowledgement of Thy kindness, Thy mercy, and Thy love for them and those who went before them.

We humbly thank Thee that this building is erected in this land, so that those faithful Maoris who came here in early days, descendants of Father Lehi, may be remembered by their descendants and saved through the ordinances that will, in this House, be performed in their behalf (Cummings 63; quoted in Cheesman 14).

In the opening sentences of his dedicatory prayer at the New Zealand Temple, April 20, 1958, President David O. McKay stated:

We express gratitude that to these fertile islands thou didst guide descendants of Father Lehi and hast enabled them to prosper (McKay 2).

Later, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley commented upon Europeans being assembled with the Maoris of the Pacific at the dedication of the New Zealand Temple: “Again, there was something prophetic about it. Here were two great strains of the house of Israel the children of Ephraim from the isles of Britain, and the children of Lehi from the isles of the Pacific” (509).

Nearly twenty years later, in a talk to the Samoans in 1976, President Spencer W. Kimball said:

I thought to read to you a sacred scripture which pertains especially to you the islanders of the Pacific. It is in the sixty-third chapter of Alma. . . . [He then read the account of Hagoth.]

And so it seems to me rather clear that your ancestors moved northward and crossed a part of the South Pacific. You did not bring your records with you, but you brought much food and provisions. And so we have a great congregation of people in the South seas who came from the Nephites, and who came from the land southward and went to the land northward, which could have been Hawaii. And then the further settlement could have been a move southward again to all of these islands and even to New Zealand. The Lord knows what he is doing when he sends his people from one place to another. That was the scattering of Israel. Some of them remained in America and went from Alaska to the southern point. And others of you came this direction.

President Spencer W. Kimball continued by quoting former President Joseph F. Smith as saying:

“I would like to say to you brethren and sisters from New Zealand, you are some of Hagoth’s people, and there is *No Perhaps* about it!” He didn’t want any arguments about it. That was definite. So you are of Israel. You have been scattered. Now you are being gathered (15).

It might be of interest to you to know that when Elder Spencer W. Kimball set me apart for my mission to New Zealand in 1946, he said: “We bless you with power and the ‘gift of tongues’ to learn the language of the Maoris. . . . We set you apart among the Children of Lehi to do good.”

Besides these many statements from the Prophets, we have added insights from patriarchal blessings. Paul Cheesman notes in *Early America and the Polynesians* that Bruce G. Pitt, a graduate student, “viewed a portion of microfilm #34 in the BYU library” which contained the patriarchal blessings given to these people in regard to the lineage declared in the blessings. The following information was found: “Of 321 total Polynesian lineages viewed, 155 were declared to be of Manasseh, 2 of Manasseh and Ephraim, 68 of Joseph, 62 of Israel, 4 of Jacob, 28 of Ephraim, 1 of Lehi and 1 of Japeth. . . . Another [graduate] researcher, Max Hirschi, recorded that out of 35 patriarchal blessings given to Polynesians, thirteen were from the tribe of Ephraim, fourteen were told they were from Manasseh, and the other eight were of the tribe of Joseph” (15).

During Dr. Paul Cheesman’s visits to the islands, he questioned patriarchs in the various places and found “that nearly three-fourths [of the declared lineages] were from Manasseh and one-fourth were from Ephraim, with some being designated as descendants of the tribe of Joseph” (15). Since Lehi was a descendant of Manasseh (Alma 10:3) and Ishmael was a descendant of Ephraim (*Journal of Discourses* 23:184), the common lineage of these two descendants of Joseph who was sold into Egypt and the Polynesian Saints gives support to the theory that the Polynesians came from the American Nephites.

Another evidence of a connection between the Nephites and the Isles of the Pacific is the oral traditions among the Latter-day Saint Polynesian people. I asked Elder John Groberg, who has spent years among the Tongans, if they had any traditions concerning their coming to the islands. He said they had nothing as detailed as the Maori, but that Church members among both Tongans and Samoans were adamant in their tradition that they came from the *east*, not the *west* as some modern scholars affirm. Elder Groberg is well-qualified to speak concerning these people. He served as a missionary to Tonga, then as mission president, regional representative, and when he was ordained a member of the First Quorum of

Seventy, he served as an area supervisor of the Polynesian people.

Returning to the Maoris, my favorite oral tradition, one I learned among the Maoris, is as follows: I haere mai o tatou tipuna, i tawhiti nui, i tawhiti roa, i tawhiti pamamao i te hono i wai rua. English: Our Fathers came from a great distance, an extended distance, an extremely great distance the joining of two waters. It is this last phrase, “the joining of two waters,” that is so interesting to us Latter-day Saints.

Elder Matthew Cowley gave an interesting explanation of this tradition as he introduced one of his Maori friends who was visiting the United States.

Now we have with us here my good Israelite friend (Wi Pere Amaru). I am glad he has come to speak to us Gentiles, to bring to us a message right from the heart and blood of Israel. You know, in the 63rd chapter of Alma, there is a little story which tells of Hagoth who was such an exceedingly curious man that he built a boat, and he went out on the seas, and he came back. He built other boats, and then finally the boats went forth and never returned. We are told in The Book of Mormon the place where those ships were built was near a narrow neck of land.

When I was on my first mission as a young boy, I used to ask the oldtimers out there, “Where did you come from?” They would say in Maori, “We came from the place where the sweet potato grows wild, where it is not planted, does not have to be cultivated.”

There is only one place in all the world where the sweet potato grows wild, and that is within the environs of that narrow neck of land where Hagoth built his ships. They will tell you that they came from several degrees of distance. One degree of distance, a greater degree of distance, and then a far greater degree of distance.

The Maori scholars tell you that “i te hono i te wai rua” means the place where the spirits are joined. But I have a little different interpretation of that. *Wairua* in the Maori language means “spirit.” It also means “two waters,” *wai* meaning water, *rua* meaning two.

In the Hawaiian language *Wailua* means “two waters”; in the Samoan language *Vailua* means “two waters.” The word for *spirit* in those other languages isn’t *Wairua*, the same as in the Maori language.

The Maori scholars say that they came from a far distant place, where the spirits are joined, or where the body returns to the spirit. But I

say, knowing the story of Hagoth as I do, that they came from the joining of two waters, a narrow neck of land between two bodies of water which joins those two great continents (114–16).

Stuart Meha, a great Maori High Priest, agreed with Matthew Cowley's interpretation of "wairua" and added the following:

My name is Brother Stuart Meha. While in Salt Lake City in 1957, President David O. McKay asked me to write him an article on the origin of the Maori. This is my humble effort. It is particularly interesting to note that all the students of Maori history and lore have come to the one and same conclusion; namely, that the Maori, in the long dim past have come from India. With due respect to the academic qualifications of these men, we beg to differ and positively aver and maintain, not so with the fleet. We say clearly and unmistakably that the fleet of seven canoes came together from Hawaiki, which name is Hawaii to the Hawaiians, and the striking similarity of these names in the two languages should be good enough proof for the most critical. However, we do say that some other canoes could have come from India. We do not deny the scholars that, but positively not the fleet.

I will now give the tradition just as it was couched in words by our forefathers, also its translation into English. The tradition must be literal in order to retain as near as possible the real meaning which our antecedents wished to pass down to posterity. Here is the tradition: "I haere mai taua i Hawaiki, tawhiti nui, tawhiti roa, tawhiti pamamao i te hono i wai rua." No more, no less.

Translation: "I haere mai taua i Hawaiki." English: You and I have come from Hawaiki. "tawhiti nui, tawhiti roa, tawhiti pamamao." English: A great distance away, an extended distance away, an extremely remote distance away. "i te hono i wai rua." English: even from the joining at the two waters. Putting all the English into compact form we have: "You and I have come from Hawaiki a great distance away, an extended distance away, an extremely remote distance away, even from the joining at the two waters." The last part, "i te hono i wai rua" is where the students of Maori history fall into error. The last two words, 'wai rua' were taken as one word, "wairua," and regarded in that manner it means "spirit." Thus, their translation read, "from the joining of the spirit," presumably with a body. We hold that the view they took is erroneous, and that the old Maori migrant meant just what he had said orally—that he had come from the joining of two great lands at the two waters. . . .

I will now give the best proof of all because it came from the lips of a prophet of God. In 1913, with five others, I went to the U.S.A.—our objective being to go through the House of the Lord at Salt Lake City. On arrival outside of Vancouver, our boat, the R.M.S. Niagara, stood outside the bay awaiting medical clearance. With the doctor came a letter for me, a letter of welcome from Elder Benjamin Goddard, at that time President of the New Zealand Missionary Association of Zion. We landed and were met by two missionaries who were laboring in Vancouver and who had been requested to meet us and make arrangements for our stay in this British metropolis. They took us to the finest hotel here and made us to feel welcome. They then took me to the telegraph office, and I sent a message to Brother Goddard, thanking the Association for its welcome to our party and for all the arrangements for our stay here.

In the wire, I also said, “Who knows but that some of Hagoth’s people had arrived, *pea*?” I added the little word “*pea*” not because of any element of doubt on my part, but I wanted to raise comment, which I succeeded as will be seen later.

At a reception tended [tendered] our party at Wandamere Park, Salt Lake City, President Joseph F. Smith and his counsellors and several of the Twelve and others of the General Authorities of the Church, Governor Spry of Utah and many of the leading citizens of the city were present. President Smith in his welcome said:

“I would like to say to you brethren and sisters from New Zealand, you are some of Hagoth’s people, and there is *pea* about it!”

This is the word of a prophet of God, and we need go no further to look for proof of the origin of the Maori. (Meha tape, Waipawa, Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand, July 1962).

Ever since President Smith told that to the Maori visitors, the members of the Church in New Zealand have had no questions in their minds as far as their connection with Hagoth and their origin to that land. Since the Brethren have spoken so plainly about that in the quotations above, and since the Maori’s themselves have that tradition, we might ask ourselves, how did this teaching that the Polynesians came from the Book of Mormon people first begin? When did we first start talking about all of this in the Church?

Back in the 1830s and 40s, during Joseph Smith’s time, there was nothing that was ever said that we are aware of that

would tie the Polynesians with the Book of Mormon people. Elder George Q. Cannon is credited with first connecting the Hawaiian people and other Polynesians to the house of Israel.

The doctrine that the Hawaiian people and all other Polynesians are heirs to the blessings promised to the posterity of Abraham had its origin through George Q. Cannon. While he was at Lahaina, he received a knowledge directly from the Lord that the Hawaiians were of the house of Israel. From this time on Elder Cannon and his associates began to teach that the Hawaiian people were an offshoot branch of Israel through the posterity of Lehi, the Book of Mormon prophet (Britsch 97–98).

At a recent Mormon History Association meeting held in Hawaii, the linking together of these people with the people of Hagoth was treated.

The Israelite descent of the Polynesians is more difficult to trace in Mormon doctrine. Indeed, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith or the first Mormon missionaries sent to Polynesia in the 1840s ever made the connection. As far as is known, the doctrine was first preached publicly by Tahitian LDS missionary Louisa Pratt who identified the Nephites as “the ancient fathers of the Tahitians” at a meeting in 1851. The Israelite ancestry of the Hawaiians was also preached by the Mormon missionaries in Hawaii from the following year at least. By the late 1850s, Mormon leader Brigham Young was referring to this doctrine, and an article in a Mormon periodical in 1868 claimed with respect to the “Sandwich Islanders” that “it is well understood by us that these peoples are of the same stock as the Lamanites.” This article also claimed that native New Zealanders “have the same origin.”

A connection between the Maori and the history of the Nephites and Lamanites was firmly established at this time. On April 7, 1888, Ezra F. Richards gave the Maori conference attenders “a short account of their forefathers leaving the land of Jerusalem and going to America, and touched briefly upon some of their great battles, some building boats and leaving America.” On the 8 April, Sondra Sanders, Jr., gave the Saints “an account of some of the wars and contentions that arose between the Nephites and Lamanites, also the reason that they became a dark skinned people and the promises that had been made concerning their becoming ‘a white and delightsome people.’” And on the 9 April, after discussing the scattering of Israel, M. S. Marriot suggested that the time had come for “the gathering of the Maori people.” Thereafter, the Book’s teachings on Israelites became a focus for proselyting work among the Maori. As Francis Kirkham,

an LDS missionary to the Maori in the 1890s remembered, “we would go to them, hold up a copy of the Book of Mormon and tell them that we had a book that told the history of their ancestors” (Barber 12–15).

The Coming of the Church to New Zealand

Elder Matthew Cowley tells of a great convention held in 1881 that represented all of the native tribes of New Zealand. They were gathered at a native village near Mastertown, near Wellington. Many who attended that conference were old enough to have seen the first Christian missionaries arrive in New Zealand, and all who attended belonged to a Christian church. They were Catholics, Methodists, or Presbyterians. One of the dominant topics considered was why the Maoris were no longer religiously unified as they had been before Christianity came to them. If Christianity was the higher light—the true religion—why were they divided into many churches? So they began asking themselves which of these Christian churches was the right one for the Maori race and which one they should all belong to so that there would be only one church among them. Not knowing the answer and not being able to decide in their debate, they turned to their wisest sage, Paora Potangaroa, and asked him which church they should all join. He said he would have to think on it and then went to his own residence which was nearby. After three days of fasting and prayer, asking Jehovah which was the right church for the Maori people, he returned to his people and said: “My friends, the church for the Maori people has not yet come among us. You will recognize it when it comes. Its missionaries will travel in pairs. They will come from the rising sun. They will visit with us in our homes. They will learn our language and teach us the gospel in our own tongue. When they pray they will raise their right hands” (Cowley 200–01).

Paora Potangaroa then asked Ranginui Kingi to write down what he was going to say and his words were proclaimed to his people at the “eight-years house” on the 16th day of March 1881. Several things were said of interest to us: First, the year

1881 is the “day of fulness”; that is the year that the missionaries first taught the fulness of the gospel to the Maori people. It is also the year W. M. Bromley arrived to preside over the mission. He was told before leaving Utah “that the time had come to take the gospel to the Maori people.” Potangaroa said the next year, 1882, would be the year of the “sealing.” It was in 1882 when they were first taught about the sealing ordinances performed in the temple. He said the third year, 1883, would be the year of “the honoring,” when they would pay “tribute to whom tribute was due, custom to whom custom . . . honor to whom honor” (See Romans 13:7). Elder Cowley interpreted that as the year when Maoris joined the Church in great numbers and gave “tribute to whom tribute was due [and] custom to whom custom” was due as they began worshiping the Lord (203–04).

The prophecy went on to say that they were the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They would learn of the scepter of Judah, and of “Shiloh, the king of peace.” They would also learn of “the sacred church with a large wall surrounding it.” There would be an “increase of the[ir] race” and of their faith, love, and peace (203). That was at a time when the Maoris were beginning to be exterminated, much as the American Indian was in the United States. There was a great deal of apprehension among them, a fear they would disappear as a people.

This covenant was written down on a piece of paper, and at the top of the piece of paper they drew an “all-seeing eye.” This prophecy was then placed in a cement monument in the eight-years house where the convention was held. It remained there from 1881 until 1929, when a Maori sect known as the Ratana Church, in groping for substantiation that they were the true church of the Maoris as foretold by Potangaroa, broke open the cement monument to get at his prophecy, hoping to find something in it that would establish their claim to be the right church for the Maori (203–04).

Unfortunately, the storage chamber which contained the prophecy had not been hermetically sealed and the paper had been so damaged by moisture that nothing was legible on it.

That was 1929. In 1944, Matthew Cowley was the New Zealand mission president. He was there during the war years, and the only American missionaries he had were himself, his wife, and their daughter. They held a convention for the Maoris in the same area where Paora Potangaroa gave his prophecy in 1881. Present at the 1944 convention was Eriata Nopera, another great Maori chief. When he rose to speak, he told his people that he had been a little boy there when Paora Potangaroa gave his prophecy and repeated what he remembered of the prophecy. At the end of that day's convention, one of the women attending the convention had her husband go fetch parcel wrapped in brown paper from a trunk in their house. When he brought her the parcel, she called President Cowley and Eriata Nopera into an adjoining room and gave it to them. They opened the parcel and found a photograph of Potangaroa's written prophecy wrapped up in it (205).

What had happened was that in 1881, when the prophecy was written down by Ranginui, a photographer in Wellington had heard that a Maori had made a prophecy. He traveled out to that village and asked for permission to photograph it. This was granted and he photographed the prophecy before it was sealed in the cement monument. This woman's family got a copy of that photograph and had kept it since. She then gave it to Brother Nopera, who in turn gave it to President Matthew Cowley (205). That is the way we know what was in Paora Potangaroa's prophecy.

In conclusion it seems fair to state that although the Church has no official, published declaration on the origin of the Polynesians, there have been enough semi-official statements by prophets of the Lord to leave little doubt that the Church believes that the Polynesians are direct blood relatives of Lehi's colony and that Hagoth's lost ships provide at least one connection between the Americas and Polynesia. This is further supported by patriarchal blessings given to the members of the Church among these people and by oral traditions. The brief account of Hagoth recorded in the book of Alma is important

to an understanding of the blessings given to the descendants of Joseph, as the inhabitants of the isles of the sea.

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The Book of Alma as a Prototype for Teaching the Word of God

16

Gerald Hansen, Jr.

The entire book of Alma emphasizes, in one way or another, the power of God's word and thus becomes a prototype pattern in trusting in the power for good in teaching the word of God. One of the best indications of this emphasis is Mormon's use of the leitmotif "the word of God." (A leitmotif is a dominant or recurring theme.) He uses that phrase 47 times in the first 42 chapters and also uses "the word," "his [God's] word," or "the word of the Lord," all meaning the word of God, at least another 50 times. In each of the major episodes of these first chapters, Mormon emphasizes a different aspect of the word of God. In the last 20 chapters, he recounts a long fourteen-year period of war both to accentuate the consequences of treating the word of God trivially and to highlight the protection that comes from heeding it. A brief overview will focus the emphasis on the word of God in the book of Alma more clearly:

1–16: Alma seeks to reform the Church by preaching the word of God.

17–29: The sons of Mosiah convert the Anti-Nephi-Lehies with the word of God.

30: Alma and the word of God silence Korihor and the word of the devil.

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- 31–35: Alma and Amulek teach the Zoramite poor the process of conversion through planting the word of God in their hearts.
- 36–42: Alma teaches his sons with the word of God to prepare them to teach it.
- 43–63: The wars dramatize the power of the word of God.

Alma 1–16: Alma Seeks to Reform the Church

The account of Alma's efforts to reform the Church bears witness, first and foremost, that teaching the word of God is ultimately the best solution to society's woes. In his eight years as chief judge, Alma sought to resolve the problems of society in a variety of different ways, most notably through strict laws and, when necessary, through military force. However, because most of the problems seem to have stemmed from the false doctrines and priestcraft of Nehor, no government solution was able to eradicate the seeds of that evil. Wickedness, persecution, false teachings, and corruption ran rampant among the Nephites in spite of strict laws, military victory, and economic prosperity (Alma 1:16–22, 4:6–9). Legislation succeeded in deterring some overtly committed crimes, but it failed to make the Nephites intrinsically good (Alma 1:32–33). Obviously, only a change of heart—not legislation—could truly reclaim the people. It is impressive that Alma recognized the Nephites' true needs and gave up the highest political office of the land (as the sons of Mosiah had done, and as Nephi, son of Helaman, would do later) to concentrate on preaching the word of God.

Alma's decision is even more impressive after we discover how much hardship and suffering he endured during his long preaching tour. Because Alma, like all who teach for God in righteousness, cannot guarantee conversions or control the results of teaching the gospel, he must have paid a terrific price in patience, dedication, and faith. Mormon's narrative of Alma's preaching shows that a person's free agency to accept or reject the teacher's message is beyond the teacher's

management. In each of the places to which he traveled, Alma found a different level of preparation and acceptance. In Zarahemla, the hearts of some of the people were lifted up in pride—some repented and some did not (Alma 6:3); in Gideon the hearts of the people were not set “upon riches and the vain things of the world,” and they did repent (Alma 7:6); in Ammonihah the people hardened their hearts, letting Satan have great hold on them (Alma 8:9, 11), and most of them rejected the word of God completely. Alma was helpless to do more than what God would have him do. He could invite the people to come unto Christ by persuasion, with clarity, and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and he could participate as a tool in God’s hand in the preparation process, but he had no special formula to use to make them accept the truth. Only God can completely prepare our hearts by pouring his Spirit into them (Alma 16:16), and yet he allows us agency to reject the Spirit if we so choose. Thus, as Alma himself later declared, he sinned in his wish to do more than preach as God directed him to. He had to be content with the results his preaching brought, with faith that an omniscient, omnipotent God would do the same (Alma 29:1–4).

Alma’s willingness to say whatever God wanted him to say regardless of the consequences qualifies him as a great teacher. He clearly understood both his role as a teacher and the true source of power in teaching. By portraying Alma in diverse circumstances, Mormon shows that while Alma tried to make his message interesting and persuasive, he did not try to win followers by flattering his listeners. Instead he taught God’s word with God’s Spirit and with God’s power.

In Zarahemla, Alma admonished the people to change their hearts and then called them to repentance with straightforward questions. When he finished his questioning, he did not invite the members to come to Christ, as he did the nonmembers, but commanded them to repent (Alma 5:62). He even found it necessary to excommunicate those who would not repent because of the pride of their hearts (Alma 6:3). Alma’s preaching,

the excommunications, and the ordination of new priesthood leaders were apparently all necessary to reestablish the order of the Church again in Zarahemla (Alma 6:2–4).

In Gideon, Alma spoke more kindly than he did in Zarahemla because the hearts of the people of Gideon were “not lifted up in . . . pride” nor “set . . . upon riches” (Alma 7:6). He encouraged them to be humble, submissive, gentle, patient, faithful, hopeful, and charitable (Alma 7:23–24), encouraging them to go even farther in their righteousness.

In Ammonihah, the apostate people rejected and abused Alma in spite of the fact that he had wrestled much in the Spirit for blessings in their behalf (Alma 8:8–10). Alma left the city dejectedly. God, however, knowing he had prepared receptive hearts, sent Alma back to preach his word “according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy” (Alma 8:24). He directed Alma to tell the people that they must repent or face God’s anger (Alma 8:29)—a message that made Alma very unpopular, but one he delivered anyway, knowing he spoke in God’s behalf. Alma knew he acted only as God’s agent. He knew this principle so well that later he stood and watched, constrained by the Spirit to do nothing, while the wicked inhabitants of Ammonihah burned converted women and children.

Like Alma, all who teach the gospel have to work within divinely set parameters. No one can coerce, exploit, or unduly flatter someone into accepting the truth. Those who seek to popularize themselves practice priestcraft as Nehor did. Because they do not control the conversion process, teachers can only prepare themselves to deliver the message God wants them to give and petition the Lord for help. They teach correct principles and allow their students the agency to govern themselves, as Joseph Smith prescribed (see Berrett 159). They know, as Alma knew, that some hearers may be angered by the message because their hearts are hard (Alma 9:31), and that the teacher may consequently have to suffer as Alma and Amulek eventually did in the Ammonihah prison. The Lord’s teachers also spend much time praying and fasting in behalf of those they

teach (Alma 6:6). However, those who teach for God do not demand any particular results from their teaching. They have faith that the results will be as the Lord wants them. They know that the word of God will ultimately prove victorious as it did in Ammonihah: God received the converted martyrs to himself and delivered Alma and Amulek from prison; Zeezrom repented and joined the Church; and the rebellious wicked of the city were killed by the Lamanites and sent to the Judgment.

The story of Alma in Ammonihah closes the account of Alma's trying to reform the Church during the first 14 years of the reign of the judges. His problems during this time were created by the false teachings of Nehor. Nehor and his followers, the Amlicites and the people of Ammonihah, tried to force their priestcraft on others with violence. Alma's ultimate weapon in this battle for souls was the word of God. In the end, the word of God won. The ruins of Ammonihah which was destroyed as prophesied and renamed the "Desolation of Nehors" (Alma 16:11), are no mean reminder of this truth.

Alma 17–29: The Sons of Mosiah Convert the Anti-Nephi-Lehies

The account of the mission of Mosiah's sons to the Lamanites shows the power of the word of God. It also contributes some excellent insights on the preparation needed by those who preach the word of God and examines the relationship between their preparation and their acting as God's instruments.

The first two things Mormon tells us about Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni is that they succeeded in bringing souls to Christ because they preached with power, and they had power because they had prepared themselves properly. By searching the scriptures, praying, and fasting, they became men strong in the knowledge of the truth and obtained the spirit of prophecy and revelation (Alma 17:2–3). Because of this preparation, God gave them power in their teaching (Alma 17:3): "By the power

of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him” (Alma 17:4).

Mormon underscores the need Mosiah’s sons had for God’s power by describing the Lamanites as “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them” (Alma 17:14). Most Nephites thought the best way to deal with the Lamanites was to destroy the Lamanites in war (Alma 26:25). But the doctrinal and spiritual preparation of Ammon and his brethren allowed God to use them to save Lamanite souls. They were able to teach this “very indolent,” idol-worshiping, cursed people the plan of redemption, according to the word and power which God had given them (Alma 17:15–17).

To illustrate the connection between preparation and the ability to preach with power, Mormon records two stories. The first is the story of Ammon, a study in spiritual timing. Summoned before Lamoni, Ammon wisely forbore from asking Lamoni what he knew about the Nephite Church, preferring to wait until the king’s heart had been prepared. This does not mean that Ammon did nothing. He offered to serve the king and diligently went about that business. When the right moment came and the king agreed to believe all his words (Alma 18:23), Ammon, because of his spiritual and doctrinal preparation, was able to seize the opportunity to teach Lamoni. First, however, he waited for an opportunity to help open the Lamanites’ hearts. The occasion came when sheep thieves scattered the king’s flocks. Ammon’s heart rejoiced in this chance to show forth the power of God which was in him (Alma 17:29).

Like Ammon, most teachers assist their students by preparing their hearts to receive the word of God. Among other things, teachers contribute to the preparation process with personality, caring, and methodology. Caution, however, should be the watchword. Unless these tools are used with care, they can carry teachers into priestcraft. More often than not, as in Ammon’s case, a teacher’s participation in preparing the heart is spontaneous. Excessively elaborate or manipulative teaching

methods operate on the false premise that the teacher controls the conversion process. Such methods commonly serve as cover-ups for a lack of spiritual and doctrinal preparation on the part of the teacher. Ammon's preparation allowed him to participate in Lamoni's conversion as dictated by the Spirit. Even when the king and his servants were in obvious awe of the power he displayed, Ammon still waited for direction and help from God to say the right thing at the right time (Alma 18:16).

Ammon's teaching methods were not elaborate or excessive. He started on Lamoni's level with questions about very basic gospel principles. He then explained the doctrines of the plan of salvation—the Creation and the Fall—expounded the scriptures of ancient history, and finished with the plan of redemption. He used the scriptures from both the Old and New Worlds as his basic source (Alma 18:36–39). Ammon's straightforward doctrinal approach calls to mind President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.'s comment about how not to teach our spiritually alert youth, "There is no need for gradual approaches, for 'bed-time' stories, for coddling, for patronizing, or for any of the other childish devices" (7). If Ammon could teach doctrine from the scriptures to a wicked Lamanite who barely knew God existed, surely students in modern Zion deserve to be taught in the same way. Conversion comes, as Mormon explains in Alma 32, when we hear the word of God taught by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Mormon's second story, stressing the connection between preparation and teaching with power, is about Aaron. It ought to be noted here, that out of the entire 14 years of preaching by the sons of Mosiah, Mormon chose to relate only these two stories. It should also to be noted that these two stories, Ammon's and Aaron's, are almost identical in their basic elements. As with Ammon, Aaron's preparation allowed him to work by the Spirit: he went to the right place, the house of Lamoni's father in the land of Nephi; he went at the right time, after Lamoni's father's heart was softened; he preached the right things, the plan of salvation; and he preached in the right way,

from the scriptures. The outcome was the same as in Ammon's story: upon hearing the word of God taught with power, the king fell down as if dead, eventually arose born again, administered to the people, and converted many.

The notable difference between the two stories, that Aaron was at first rejected by the Lamanites before he came to Lamoni's father, simply confirms that teachers do not control the conversion process or its results. Aaron had little success with the hardened followers of Nehor who lived in Jerusalem. He fared no better in Ani-Anti, and he finally was thrown into prison in Middoni. In spite of these poor results, Aaron continued to preach the same thing: "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2; Alma 21:9). He did not change the message he was commissioned to carry just because his followers would not listen. Aaron's story works with Ammon's as a double witness of the principles the Lord is trying to teach.

Following these two great parallel teaching experiences, Mormon selects and arranges a few final items relative to this episode that also testify of the teaching principles he has been examining. First is an account of how the new Lamanite converts insist on laying down their lives rather than breaking their covenants—a witness of the power of their conversion through the word of God.

Next, Mormon juxtaposes an episode concerning the fulfillment of Abinadi's prophecy that the seed of the priests of Noah would be destroyed, with a summary of how God honors his promise of protection to the sons of Mosiah (Alma 25). Using this episode with this summary shows that God's words will be fulfilled. More to its purpose, however, it demonstrates that God's servants are only instruments in his hands. Mormon's statement that God "verified his word unto [the sons of Mosiah] in every particular" (Alma 25:17) coupled with the reminder of Abinadi's death (Alma 25:11) should cause us to note that God allowed Abinadi to die as a martyr yet protected the sons of Mosiah from death just as he had promised them

(Mosiah 28:7). Abinadi and the sons of Mosiah had different assignments; both fulfilled those assignments.

Finally, Mormon records the fairly long comments of both Ammon and Alma's gratitude for being God's instruments. Ammon states that he and his brethren could not have supposed before their missions the great blessings God had in store for them (Alma 26:1): they had been made instruments in God's hands (Alma 26:3); that thousands had been brought to repentance (Alma 26:12–15), the success was God-given (Alma 26:27), and by being God's instruments they had converted many more souls than they had supposed they could have (Alma 26:30–31). Ammon's words suggest that God's servants do not necessarily know beforehand all that they should do or what the results of their efforts will be. The implication is that they can only prepare to follow God's dictates.

Alma's words echo Ammon's sentiments but are arguably stronger. Lamenting that he cannot do more to make people accept the one plan that will end misery, Alma pines to be an angel, to shake the earth and declare repentance with the voice of thunder, so everyone will accept the gospel (Alma 29:1–2). Yet, he knows and states that God grants salvation or damnation to people according to their own desire (Alma 29:4). If Ammon's words do not get the point across, Alma's words should. He, like all gospel teachers, must allow people to exercise their agency. Thus he asks, "Seeing I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?" (Alma 29:6). He concludes that he can only trust in God, be an instrument in God's hands, rejoice for the success God gives him, and pray for the souls of those he teaches (Alma 29:16–17).

Alma 30: Alma's Conflict with Korihor

The episode with Korihor, though recounted in only one chapter, acts as the focal point for the entire book of Alma. In it, the word of God triumphs over the word of the devil. A brief

retelling of the story may perhaps be the best way to examine how Mormon uses it.

Korihor came forth preaching against the prophecies of Christ, using arguments, as Professor Chauncey Riddle points out, similar to the modern philosophies of empiricism, relativism, and humanism (18, 20). Equally as faith-shaking to some Nephites was Korihor's claim that God's priesthood leaders were binding the people down by their words (Alma 30:23). Mormon makes it clear that the evil spread by Korihor's words could not be legally curbed because, in accordance with God's commandments, there was no law among the Nephites regulating a person's belief (Alma 30:7). The ultimate counter to Korihor's apostasy was, once again, God's word. Alma's first response—bearing testimony and placing the burden of truth on Korihor—is a response of faith, one that acknowledges the power of the Holy Ghost as well as the individual's responsibility for his or her own conversion. Alma will not be damned for not converting Korihor, only for not preaching when and what he should.

Rebutted by Alma's testimony, Korihor still demands a sign, presumably to discredit Alma's words. God does not always immediately justify those who teach of him, but in this case he does for the sake of others. Alma silenced Korihor. Those who had been led astray repented, and in the end Korihor was trampled to death. God's work went forward unfrustrated while Satan's follower came to his mortal end. Mormon editorializes, "Thus we see that the devil will not support his children" (Alma 30:60).

The story of Korihor reiterates several points already taught in the book of Alma: God wins in the end; his word will be fulfilled, and he allows people the agency to make poor choices and suffer negative consequences. It also illustrates that a teacher must teach, but the student is responsible for his or her own conversion.

Alma 31–35: Alma and Amulek Teach the Zoramites the Process of Conversion

Mormon opens his account of the mission to the apostate Zoramites by articulating the main theme of the book of Alma:

As the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. (Alma 31:5)

The articulation of this theme at this point seems appropriate since Mormon has shown in the stories of Alma, Ammon, and Aaron just how powerful the word of God is: it can silence the devil, convert thousands of wild and hardened Lamanites, and reclaim a degenerate society. Having concentrated on the power of the word and what a teacher must do to obtain that power, Mormon now focuses on the conversion process and the responsibility of the listener in that process.

For at least two reasons, the mission to the Zoramites provides an excellent case study of these important concepts. First, it shows what the responsibility of listeners is not; listeners must do more than hear words, attend meetings, say the words of prayers, and participate in ritual as the wealthy, proud, and smugly dissenting Zoramites do. The Zoramites are religious but not righteous (Alma 31:8–25) as Alma's words help show them. Second, Alma and Amulek's answer to the humbled Zoramites' question, "What shall we do?" (Alma 32:5), examines the process of conversion and helps define where the teacher's accountability ends and the student's begins.

According to Alma, the process of conversion begins by hearing the word of God (Alma 32:22–23) thus making dedicated teachers necessary. Alma himself is a wonderful example of dedication, preaching continually (Alma 32:1) and begging the Lord in a prayer of faith (in obvious contrast to the Zoramites' condescending rameumpton prayer) for strength, power, and wisdom to bring back lost souls (Alma 31:26–35).

The next step in the conversion process moves from the realm of the teacher to that of the student: the student must desire to learn and gain faith, to plant the word in his or her heart (Alma 32:27). Without desire, true conversion cannot take place. True conversion must be a voluntary offering of the heart, which is one of the reasons why a teacher must not manipulate or coerce. Of course, if we remember Mormon's counsel, that the word of God is more powerful than anything else, then even the contemplation of coercion is foolish. The enlargement of the soul and enlightened understanding, which Alma says occurs as the word grows (Alma 32:28), must surely bring conversion—if anything can—to desiring, honest hearts.

Those who place the word of God in their hearts learn the will of the Lord. They begin to know how to worship God. They discern that something good is happening. As students nourish the word of God with spiritual food it grows larger; they learn more and progress in godliness, becoming increasingly more like the Savior through faith and diligence and patience. Finally, if students do not cut off the nourishment, the word of God becomes a tree of everlasting life (Alma 32:28–43); students find that by staying true to the knowledge given them they have become like God. And becoming like God is, as the *Lectures on Faith* say, precisely what exalts us: “Salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses and in nothing else” (7:9).

What must the teacher do, then? Teach. What must the student do, at least at some point? Desire to learn and search. If both teacher and students do their jobs with the spirit, then they understand each other and are edified (D&C 50:13–22). Alma did his job with the Zoramites; he taught them doctrine. He used the same methods that converted Lamoni, Lamoni's father, and Alma the Elder, teaching them they must plant the word, Christ and his atonement (Alma 33:11, 22–23), in their hearts and nourish it with prayer. He quoted and referred to the prophets Zenos, Zenock, and Moses as second, third, and fourth witnesses. Amulek offered a further witness, bearing testimony

that “the word is in Christ unto salvation,” that the Zoramites should call upon his holy name, repent immediately, and not harden their hearts any longer (Alma 34:6, 17–27, 31–36). The more humble of the Zoramites did repent and fulfilled their responsibility. They received the word, nourished it, and were reconverted. Persecuted by the unbelieving Zoramites, they, like the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and the converts of Ammonihah, proved the depth of Christ’s ability to convert souls by leaving their homes and lands rather than revert to their errant ways (Alma 35:14).

Alma 36–42: Alma Prepares His Sons to Teach

In spite of his successes, Alma still grieved at the number of Nephites who remained hard-hearted, offended because of the strictness of the word of God (Alma 35:15). It would seem natural for him to try a different approach since he had declared the word of God among all the people in every city (Alma 35:15). But he did not. Instead, he magnified his efforts, teaching his sons with the word of God so they would be better prepared to help him teach. A comparison of the separate counsel that Alma gave each of his sons will manifest several differences in what he said. The real contribution of the comparison, however, will be found in the similarities.

In counseling Helaman, Alma began with the story of his own powerful conversion—his deliverance from hell, so to speak. Several insights on the word of God emerge from this story. First, Alma, like each of us, was not worthy to have the word of God preached to him (Alma 36:5). God’s making himself known to us at all is a sign of his love and grace. Second, Alma was an exception—the angel got his attention with thunder. Still, it was the angel’s words that caused Alma to fear and want to repent (Alma 36:11). Third, remembrance of his father’s words concerning Jesus led him to pray, which led to spiritual relief and rebirth into the kingdom of God (Alma 36:17–18). Fourth, as a result of being born of God he was able

to help others learn the word of God so that they might be blessed as he was (Alma 36:26).

Alma also gave a charge over the sacred records and the Liahona to Helaman. The entire thirty-seventh chapter of Alma bears testimony to the power of the word of God. In it, Alma told Helaman not to underestimate the power of the words of the scriptures; they may seem small and inconsequential but “by small and simple things are great things [the restoration of the gospel] brought to pass; . . . and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls” (Alma 37:6–7). Alma explained that had they not had the scriptures, the sons of Mosiah could not have converted so many thousands of Lamanites (Alma 37:9). He dramatized his counsel on the power of the word of God with an analogy to the Liahona. Both work by faith. Both lead to promised lands, the Liahona to America and the word of God to exaltation. Both seem small and simple. Both can cease to work because of neglect. With great reverence for the power of the word of God, Alma exhorted Helaman, “O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way” (Alma 37:46). His instruction completed, he counseled Helaman, “Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober” (Alma 37:47).

To Shiblon Alma gave a shortened version of his instructions to Helaman, leaving out the instructions concerning the records. The principles Alma taught Helaman were apparently important for both sons to hear. To both sons he recounted his conversion (Alma 36:5–23, 38:6–8). To both sons he gave counsel on preaching and prayer (Alma 37:33–37; 38:10–14). To both he testified of Jesus (Alma 36:17–18; 38:9). In his testimony of Jesus to Shiblon, Alma echoed his instructions to the Zoramites. Calling Jesus the “word of truth,” he exhorted his son to “teach the word” (Alma 38:9–10). After a few other brief instructions, Alma told Shiblon, “Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people. Be sober” (Alma 38:15).

Because of Corianton’s moral difficulties, Alma taught him a different set of principles. Alma’s approach, however, did not

change; he still taught the word of God. Sensing that Corianton's moral problems resulted from a confusion over doctrine, Alma explained to him the serious nature of his sins, the coming of Christ, the resurrection, the spirit world, the restoration of good or evil to the souls of all people, the punishment of sinners, mercy and justice, agency, and other pertinent doctrines (Alma 39–42). Rather than preach to Corianton, Alma taught him the underlying doctrinal reasons for being chaste and then pleaded with him to repent, and then, as with his other sons, he exhorted him to preach the word in soberness (Alma 42:30–31).

The most important similarity in what Alma did with his sons is his “word-of-God” approach. He customized his instruction to each son according to that son's needs. He taught them all sound doctrine and bore strong testimony. And any personal counsel for each that Alma gave almost always had a doctrinal base. The second important similarity is the final counsel for each, “preach the word and be sober.” This similarity reveals the underlying reason for Alma's instructions: to prepare his sons to teach the word of God by first teaching them the word. The doctrine and testimony contained in this portion of the book of Alma would make it very valuable in and of itself. But the purpose behind Alma's instruction—to prepare his sons to better preach the word of God—considerably increases the value of these chapters, showing them as testimony to the power of the word of God in the teaching of teachers.

Alma 43–63: The Wars Dramatize the Power of the Word

In the last section of Alma, the lengthy description of war could, at first glance, seem to contradict the assertion that the theme of the book of Alma is the word of God. However, a careful reading of the war chapters reveals just the opposite. Mormon uses the drama of war to verify the old promise of prosperity if the Nephites keep God's word—and of adversity

and affliction if they do not. His purpose is to show that the Nephites as a whole brought their own problems upon themselves through iniquity and dissension, but God protected and delivered the faithful among them (Alma 50:20-22).

The irony of the wars in the book of Alma is that the Nephites were righteous enough to win the wars, but not righteous enough to prevent them from taking place. According to President Spencer W. Kimball, God had given a special promise to the Nephites which is valid to all the peoples of America: if they would stay sufficiently righteous, they would not have to fight (6). Obviously, the Nephites did not remain righteous. Both the war with Zerahemnah and the one with Amalickiah began at a time when many Nephites, including members of the Church, had hardened their hearts (Alma 35:15-16; 45:20-24). Amalickiah in particular found great success in flattering Church members away from the Church (Alma 46:7-10). Furthermore, no fewer than four different internal rebellions occurred among the Nephites during the time when all their forces should have been marshalled to fight against the Lamanites (Alma 50:25-36; 51:1-8; 53:8-9; 61:3-4). Mormon has every right to comment at the end of his war account: "There had been murders, and contentions, and dissensions, and all manner of iniquity among the people of Nephi," informing us that only "for the righteous' sake, yea, because of the prayers of the righteous" did God spare them (Alma 62:40).

Mormon's long report of this costly war almost gives us a distaste for war just by its sheer length, not to mention the account of suffering, destruction, and blood. It is almost as if Mormon were using the length of the account to help us feel the tedium of war. He certainly does not glorify war. He shows that men, women, and children suffer and die. He shows the great Nephite general, Moroni, angry and frustrated that the war drags on and that suffering and death continue (Alma 60). He also shows that the Nephites should have believed God's word and repented. He shows that the word of God is more powerful than the sword because it prevents the sword—it prevents sorrow

and suffering. It sanctifies the soul, and brings salvation. The best the sword can do is humble someone enough to pay attention to the word of God.

Mormon also shows that our only hope of deliverance, as individuals and as a society, comes from believing and trusting the word of God. He shows us this by holding up the sons of the Lamanite converts as the heroes of the war. Contrasted with all the other Nephite and Lamanite armies, these inexperienced adolescent “sons of Helaman” warriors, suffered no fatal casualties. God protected them because they were true at all times to God’s words (Alma 53:20–21).

For example, in their first battle the sons of Helaman chose to fight against overwhelming odds, believing “our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall” (Alma 56:46). They did not fear death because they believed their mothers’ words that “if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47–48). None of them were killed. More impressively, these young, inexperienced fighters fought with such power that they frightened the seasoned troops of Lamanite warriors into surrendering (Alma 56:56). Their power came to them, Helaman says, because “they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them” (Alma 57:21).

Not everyone receives this same promise of preservation. Abinadi, for example, did not. But having received this assurance, the sons of Helaman acted upon it. They stand as a great central symbol of God’s deliverance to those who trust in his word. Their preservation occurs even amidst a nation racked with turmoil. Their deliverance through believing and obeying the word of God offers hope and, at the same time, encourages us in our duty to preach the word of God according to the principles, and with the power of the word described in the book of Alma. As Mormon says after stating that transgression causes suffering: “Thus we see the great call of diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord” (Alma 28:14).

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Teaching in Black and White: Antithetic Parallel Structure in the Book of Alma, Its Form and Function

17

Donald W. Parry

The Book of Mormon prophets taught in black and white. “Gray” apparently was not an option with them. In turn, they did not want their audiences to respond in shades of gray. Their words were expressions of absoluteness and plainness. At the very beginning of Nephite history, Nephi said he gloried in teaching the message of Christ in plainness, as did Jacob (2 Nephi 25:7, 28; 31:2; 31:3; Jacob 2:11). Enos used “exceedingly great plainness of speech” to keep the stiffnecked people from “going down speedily to destruction” (Enos 1:23). King Benjamin told the assembled Saints, “I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand” (Mosiah 2:40).

The prophet Alma carried on this tradition of teaching in “plainness.” For instance, Alma delivered the “word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land . . . [so] plainly that [they could] not err” (Alma 5:1, 43). On another occasion, he noted that “Amulek had spoken plainly” concerning death, the resurrection, and the day of judgment (Alma 12:12). Some groups in the land of Ammonihah were angry with Alma, “because of the plainness

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of his words” (Alma 14:2), and then they became angry with both Alma and Amulek “because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness” (Alma 14:3). Twice Alma noted that he spoke with such plainness that his audience could not err in understanding his meaning (Alma 5:43; 13:23; see also 2 Nephi 25:7, 30).

To achieve this ultimate degree of communication, Alma frequently used a highly significant literary technique, a figure of speech called antithetical parallelism, which presents the teaching in the plainest terms possible by contrasting it with an opposite. Use of this technique was first noticed in the Bible. Bishop Robert Lowth is credited with calling attention to the importance and prevalence of biblical parallelisms. Others have carried his work further noting that parallelism is “the basic feature of biblical songs—and, for that matter, of most the sayings, proverbs, laws, laments, blessings, curses, prayers, and speeches found in the Bible” (Kugel 1).

Antithetical parallelism is characterized by an opposition of thoughts, or an antithesis between two or more contiguous lines. This “antithesis is not in terms of contradiction, thesis and antithesis, but in opposite aspects of the same idea” (Krosovec 137). Antithetical parallelism may consist of two, four, or six lines. In the instance of a two line parallelism, line two corresponds in some manner, as an antonymous echo, or a symmetrical counterpart of line one. The corresponding lines may contain antonymous or repetitious elements. Likewise in the case of a four line antithetic structure, lines one and three correspond to some degree, as do lines two and four, and so on. A common but non-essential feature of antithetic parallelism is the article “but.” In a two line antithetical parallelism, the second line may be introduced with this disjunction, then immediately follows the contrasting element.

An example of antithetical verse recorded in Proverbs 13:9 will demonstrate the usage of the disjunction “but:”

The light of the righteous rejoiceth;

but the *lamp* of the *wicked* shall be put out.

The synonymous terms “light” and “lamp” are each followed respectively by the contrasted elements “righteous” and “wicked.” The two words “righteous” and “wicked” are not simple contradictions but opposite aspects of the same idea. The one is the antithesis of the other.

The antithetic parallelisms of the Book of Mormon, like their biblical counterparts, contain rich and varied antonyms. However, examples from the Book of Mormon appear in an extended form, usually having four or more lines. Furthermore, Book of Mormon antithetical units rarely utilize the disjunction “but.”

Antithetical Parallelisms in Alma

Of special interest to this chapter are antithetical units attested in the book of Alma. Alma, in his great discourse to the Saints of Zarahemla, utilized this poetic form in brief, yet conclusive words.

1 For I say unto you that whatsoever is *good*
 2 cometh from *God*,
 1 and whatsoever is *evil*
 2 cometh from the *devil*. (Alma 5:40)

Note that I have underlined the antonymous terms that epitomize the perfect contrast, “good” and “evil,” and two beings that are considered opposite extremes on the scale of “good” and “evil,” God and the devil. God is good and the devil is evil. All good things originate from God, and Satan is the instigator of all things evil. Alma’s methods of contrast are written in the plainest of terms.

A longer example of antithetical parallelism immediately follows the verse just cited:

1 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth *good works*
 2 he hearkeneth unto the voice of the *good*
 shepherd,

3 and he *doth follow him*;
1 but whosoever bringeth forth *evil works*
2 the same becometh a child of the *devil*,
for he hearkeneth unto his voice,
3 and *doth follow him*. (Alma 5:41)

In this verse, one concept is opposed to the other “good works” versus “evil works,” the “good shepherd,” or Jesus Christ, versus the “devil.” The words are simple and easily understood.

Aaron, while in the land of Nephi presented the king of the land with the simple contrasts which make up the gospel plan. Quoting Ammon he states:

1 If ye will *repent*
2 ye shall *be saved*,
1 and if ye will *not repent*,
2 ye shall *be cast off* at the last day. (Alma 22:6)

Here the contrast is apparent. The word “repent” stands in opposition to the words “not repent,” and the phrase “shall be saved” is the obverse side of “shall be cast off.”

Yet another example is found in Alma 36:4, with Alma speaking to his son Helaman.

And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—

1 not of the *temporal*
2 but of the *spiritual*,
1 not of the *carnal mind*
2 but of *God*. (Alma 36:4)

This double antithetical parallelism demonstrates that the opposite of “temporal” is “spiritual,” and the idea of carnality and godliness are contrasting elements.

The following example of antithetic structure is well attested in the Book of Mormon. In the book of Alma alone this passage is found five times.

1 Inasmuch as ye shall *keep my commandments*,

2 ye shall *prosper* in the land.

1 And again, it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will *not*
keep my commandments

2 ye shall be *cut off* from the presence of the Lord.
(Alma 9:13; 36:30; 37:13; 38:1; 50:20)

Note the connection between keeping the commandments and prospering in the land (I believe it speaks of both temporal and spiritual prosperity), and the correspondence between disobedience and being “cut off” from God’s presence. The words are clear, the statements are expressed with simplicity, and the thesis and antithesis are portrayed with great plainness.

Here is a third example from the same speech:

1 I say unto you, can you *imagine to yourselves*

2 *that ye* hear the voice of *the Lord*,

3 *saying* unto you, in that day:

4 Come unto me ye blessed, for behold,
your works have been the *works*
of righteousness

5 upon the *face of the earth*?

1 Or do ye *imagine to yourselves*

2 *that ye* can lie unto *the Lord* in that day,

3 and *say*—

4 Lord, our works have been *righteous*
works

5 upon the *face of the earth*—and that
he will save you?

(Alma 5:16–17)

First note the repetitious aspects found in this construction. The expressions “imagine to yourselves,” “the Lord,” “works,” “face of the earth,” are each repeated twice. In the entire structure, two elements only represent the antithesis “ye hear” and “ye . . . lie,” as is shown in the two second lines. The first

deals with the ears, and perhaps denotes, as does the verb same verb in the Hebrew, to hear is to obey. When you hear the voice of the prophets, it is one and the same as if the Lord had spoken. Many hear the voice of the Lord through the prophets but they do not heed, rather they lie unto the Lord. This concept is similar to the expression found in Alma 10:6, “therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know.”

Alma counseled his son Corianton, speaking to him about the works and deeds of mankind. Those whose works were good would enjoy “endless happiness” in the “kingdom of God.” Those whose works were evil would suffer “endless misery” and inherit the “kingdom of the devil.” Alma expressed this concept in a few words only. He stated that mankind would either be

- 1 raised to *endless happiness*,
- 2 to inherit the *kingdom of God*,
- 1 or to *endless misery*
- 2 to inherit the *kingdom of the devil*. (Alma 41:4)

Again, Alma’s words were plain, not to be misunderstood.

Function of Antithetic Parallelism

We have briefly discussed the form of antithetical parallelism, now we will mention its function. The alert reader almost intuitively sees in antithetic parallelism a unique reciprocity between the two parts. Called a “paradoxical linguistic phenomenon” by Krasovec, the two reciprocal segments may initially puzzle the informed reader as the disjunctive nature of the verse is endowed with conjunctive qualities. Krasovec explains:

Antithetic structure displays . . . not only the unifying, the conjunctive principle of a given text, but has also an opposite function: disjunction, disconnection. In fact, antithesis is a paradoxical linguistic phenomenon, for antithetic structure of any kind conjoins the terms, sentences and larger units by disjoining the sense regarding the nature, quality, or action of persons or things. (88)

Thus antithetical parallelism contains not only a contrast between two ideas but also a connection between them. The meaning of the contrasted items clearly separate them, but the parallelism joins them so that they are considered together.

A second purpose of this poetic form is to allow or even force the reader to make a mental comparison, and often a choice, between two diametrically opposed but related ideas. For example, Alma positioned an extended antithetic parallelism in the midst of an instructive teaching moment directed toward his son Helaman:

Yea, I say unto you *my son*,
2 that there could be *nothing so exquisite*
3 and so bitter as were my *pains*.

1 Yea, and again I say unto you, *my son*, that on the
other hand,
2 there can be *nothing so exquisite*
3 and sweet as was my *joy*. (Alma 36:21)

In lines one and four, Alma utilizes repetition by duplicating the expression “I say unto you my son.” Similarly, in lines two and five the phrase “nothing so exquisite” is found. The antithesis comes in lines three and six, where Alma contrasts the bitterness of his pains with the sweetness of his joy. Perhaps by his phrasing his experience in this instructive manner his son will mentally side with or feel an affinity with righteousness rather than evil. In such a teaching situation, antithetical parallelism has the ability to produce a positive emotional response in both the original audience (in this case Helaman) and subsequent readers, a response which in turn may cause the audience to repent and turn unto the Lord.

Antithetic has another notable effect upon the reader in the manner in which it presents opposites and contrasts a sharp resistance between persons, places, or things represented in the two lines. Comparisons between two terms has always been an accepted tool of rhetoricians employed for the purpose of

invoking an involvement with the reader. As Aristotle has written, “This kind of style is pleasing, because contraries are easily understood and even more so when placed side by side, and also because antithesis resembles a syllogism; for refutation is a bringing together of contraries.” (Aristotle, 3.9.7–10)

Yet another function of antithetical parallelism can be demonstrated that of repetitious clauses, or duplicated lines. Two kinds of repetition are found in the book of Alma, in connection with antithetical structure. First, the exact repetition of words or expressions. In the following verse Alma is quoting an unnamed angel.

1 If they have been *righteous*
2 they shall reap the *salvation of their souls*,
3 according to the power and *deliverance*
4 of *Jesus Christ*;

1 and if they have been *evil*
2 they shall reap the *damnation of their souls*,
3 according to the power and *captivation*
4 of *the devil*.

Again I have underlined the antonymous terms. Further, in the same example I have emboldened the words which are duplicated. Note the manner in which the angel employs repetition. The expressions “if they have been,” “they shall reap,” “of their souls,” “according to the power and” and “of,” are all duplicated. Out of 22 total words found in the first half of the verse, 16 are duplicated word for word in the second half of the verse. The remaining five words stand in antithesis to the underlined words of the second half of the verse. The words “righteous,” “salvation,” “deliverance,” and “Jesus Christ” are coterminous. They stand in direct contrast to the terms “evil,” “damnation,” “captivation,” and “devil.” Both clauses begin with “if” (protasis) and are immediately followed with the apodosis statement. The sides between good and evil are thus clearly drawn. The prophet has spoken in the plainest terms.

Conclusion

The concept of antithetical parallelism is simple, beautiful, instructive, and the variations are endless. Such parallelisms can break up the monotony of the narrative and allowed inspired writers to compose scripture with greater expression.

The antithetical structure, which nearly dominates the Bible, is present in the Book of Mormon, particularly in the book of Alma. While it is not in the same exact form that is found in the Bible, it is used with a greater degree of simplicity and plainness. Because of the truths found in the Book of Mormon, and the manner in which they are presented, no one has need to “stumble” due to lack of understanding (1 Nephi 13:29). Both Nephi and Alma say they have spoken with such plainness that their audiences cannot err (2 Nephi 25:7, 30; Alma 5:43; 13:23). It is now up to the audience to heed the plainness of the prophets and to choose darkness or light, salvation or damnation, life or death. The plainest doctrines of the gospel are often presented in antithetical parallels.

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Nephi's Freedom Thesis and the Sons of Helaman 18

K. Douglas Bassett

The role of Christ in preserving the freedom of those who inhabit the promised land spoken of in the Book of Mormon is consistent throughout. Prior to the family of Lehi departing on their journey to the promised land, the Lord told Nephi, “inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20).

Nephi later expands on this promise as he quotes the word of the Lord given to Lehi in his final blessing to his children after they had been established in the land of promise: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence” (2 Nephi 1:20). This becomes a type of freedom thesis for the promised land which is repeated word for word or paraphrased many times throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon. Certainly this promise did not originate in the Book of Mormon—it is a continuation of God’s covenant with Israel found in the Old Testament (see Joshua 23:6–13; Exodus 3:8).

To understand this promise we need to define the word *prosper* in a Book of Mormon context. Certainly prosperity had to do with the physical and spiritual circumstances of the obedient, but beyond that it is used in the framework of deliverance. For example, Alma said to his son Helaman, “I swear unto you that, inasmuch as ye keep the commandments of God ye

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shall prosper in the land. I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, . . . and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions” (Alma 36:1–2). Notice how closely related the ideas of prosperity and deliverance are. The parallel usage of these two words is not uncommon in the Nephite text (see Omni 1:6–7; Mosiah 2:31; 7:29, 33; Alma 9:9, 13; 36:29–30). The promise applies to the people as a whole who dwell upon the land. However, prosperity is not without adversity and the text has several examples of individuals who obeyed the commandments and yet sealed their testimonies with their blood (see Mosiah 17:20; Alma 14:18).

Sons of Helaman

It has been fascinating to observe how the theme of being righteous and prospering weaves its way into the story of the sons of Helaman, also known as the stripling warriors. Mormon tells us, “I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people” (Words of Mormon 1:5). If Mormon recorded less than 1% of the history of the Nephites, why did he choose to include the account of the sons of Helaman? One answer is that Mormon included those things which he had been commanded to write (3 Nephi 26:12). Another factor may be that just as his son Moroni tells us, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35); we may be safe in assuming that Mormon also knew our day and chose to place in his record that which would be most profitable for us to liken unto ourselves (1 Nephi 19:23). I will submit a third option as a reason for Mormon’s including the record of the sons of Helaman on the plates, this being his continually giving evidence in support of Nephi’s Freedom Thesis. In the war chapters of Alma 43–63, it is referred to, at least in principle, in every chapter. In fact, Mormon quotes Nephi’s thesis shortly before introducing the story of the stripling warriors. Note that Mormon is paraphrasing

2 Nephi 1:20; “we can behold that his words are verified, even at this time, which he spake unto Lehi saying: . . . inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 50:19–20). Mormon is very much aware of the Freedom Thesis and chooses to include it not only as a testimony to the story line he had just shared, but also as a preface to that which he is about to share: the conflict involving the stripling warriors. Mormon reaffirms this teaching in the very chapter he introduced the sons of Helaman; “the Lamanites . . . on account of some intrigue amongst the Nephites, which caused dissensions among them, had gained some ground over the Nephites.” He continues in the next verse, “And thus because of iniquity amongst themselves yea, because of dissensions and intrigue among themselves, they were placed in the most dangerous circumstances” (Alma 53:8–9). Note that Mormon views the conflict between the Nephites and Lamanites from a spiritual context. There is no mention here of the superior military strength of the Lamanites as a reason for their advantage in battle, but it comes from the dissensions among the Nephites. This message is consistent throughout the Book of Mormon—the Lord defended the Nephites (or His covenant people) when they were righteous.

In the early pages of the Book of Mormon, the Lord promises Nephi that the Lamanites “shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also” (1 Nephi 2:23). This promise is fulfilled throughout the Book of Mormon regardless of the size of the armies on either side. Hugh Nibley has observed: “No matter how wicked and ferocious and depraved the Lamanites might be (and they were that!), no matter by how much they outnumbered the Nephites, . . . they were not the Nephite problem. They were merely kept there to remind the Nephites of their real problem which was to walk uprightly before the Lord” (Nibley 376).

To help us understand the stripling warriors, let's first see where they came from, their roots. In Alma 23 we are introduced to a group of Lamanites who were converted through the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah. These valiant converts called themselves Anti-Nephi-Lehies and unanimously took an oath never to take up arms again (Alma 23:7). To protect these newly adopted converts (later known as the "people of Ammon" or "Ammonites"), the Nephites gave them the Land of Jershon and set their armies between them and the Lamanites (Alma 27:24).

Well over a decade transpired before these converts were threatened by their former brethren, the Lamanites. This threat was directed at the Nephite nation as a whole, into which the Ammonites had been adopted. In response to this threat the People of Ammon "were about to take up weapons for they were about to break the oath which they had made" (Alma 53:14). At this point Helaman compelled them to maintain their original oath. Why does Helaman take a stand on this issue? He later explained his motive; "for I would not suffer them that they should break this covenant which they had made, supposing that God would strengthen us" (Alma 56:8). With the Ammonites maintaining their oath and not taking up arms in their own defense, it would seem that the Nephite army would be weakened. But Helaman taught that the Lord "would strengthen us," because the converts remained true to their covenant. This kind of reasoning was normal when the Nephites were righteous, but the reverse was true when they were unrighteous (see Mosiah 11:19). The problem of strengthening the Nephite armies was solved when 2,000 sons of these Lamanite converts, who had not taken the earlier oath, stepped forward and promised "to fight for the liberty of the Nephites, yea, to protect the land unto the laying down of their lives" (Alma 53:17).

Mormon gives us insight concerning the worth of these 2,000 sons: "As they never had hitherto been a disadvantage to the Nephites, they became now at this period of time also a great support" (Alma 53:19). The question arises: Of what "support"

could 2,000 young men be to an army—especially when they never had fought? The answer goes back to the spiritual strategy Helaman pointed out in his efforts to persuade the Ammonites not to fight. There is no mention of any military training for these new volunteers. In fact, Mormon keeps us focused on their spiritual strength by stating, “they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted. Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him” (Alma 53:20–21). This is the support or advantage they become to the Nephite army. How better could Mormon illustrate the Lord’s role in battle than to include in his record a story of green young volunteers who were ill equipped in a military sense? How better to illustrate the power of God than a Book of Mormon comparison to David and Goliath? What could these stripling warriors bring to battle other than their courage and faith in God?

Now the stage was set for a battle between the Lamanites, “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites” (Alma 17:14), and the 2,000 stripling warriors who were militarily inexperienced, but spiritually as strong as iron. If this were a story of mortal flesh against mortal flesh, then these young men would be predictably doomed. But this is a story reminiscent of those in the Old Testament where the God of Israel dictated the fate of battle. The words of Elisha echo their way through time as the unseen armies of God once again marshaled their forces in defense of the righteous minority: “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16).

We are indebted to Helaman for most of the information concerning these young warriors. They are called his sons because of a wonderful relationship he developed with them on the battlefield (Alma 56:44–46). These sons of Helaman are mentioned in only four chapters in the Book of Mormon, (Alma 53, 56–58) yet, the message of their experience has been used as an example to the youth in the Church from Joseph Smith’s

time to our day. Note that Alma 53 is narrated in third person by Mormon who is making an abridgement of the Large Plates of Nephi. But in Alma 56–58, Mormon chooses to give us the account on the sons of Helaman from the original source, which happens to be a letter from Helaman to the Captain of the Nephite army, Moroni. (We may rightly assume that Mormon was impressed by the accounts he includes in the latter chapters of Alma, since he named his own son after Captain Moroni). With the exception of one verse of personal commentary, (Alma 56:52) Mormon lets us see their battles through the pen of the man who saw the courage of these stripling warriors first hand.

The first battle fought by these 2,000 oath-bound soldiers is filled with some interesting twists and turns, as well as a powerful message. The Lamanites had captured four Nephite cities in the Land of Zarahemla (Alma 56:13–14). Antipus, the leader of the Nephite forces in the city of Judea, decided on a plan to draw the Lamanite army from Antiparah, one of the cities captured. Helaman and his 2,000 sons would pass by the city and bring the Lamanite army out to fight. Then the army of Helaman was to flee and the army of Antipus was to overtake the Lamanites from the rear. The plan progressed favorably until the Lamanites saw the army of Antipus coming after them from behind. Rather than get sandwiched between the two Nephite armies, the Lamanites tried to catch Helaman's smaller force and destroy them before the larger army of Antipus could overtake them (Alma 56:37). The chase continued for three days, with both armies resting at night. On the third day the Lamanites stopped (Alma 56:42).

This unexpected stopping posed quite a dilemma for Helaman. If his army continued running they might be leaving the army of Antipus without their expected support. On the other hand, if the Lamanites stopped for the sole purpose of making Helaman think that Antipus had caught up with them, and if Helaman ordered his forces back against the Lamanites, he might be sending his sons into a trap (Alma 56:42–43). What he does next indicates his confidence and respect for his sons.

Rather than issue the order, he left the decision up to his untested young companions:

Therefore what say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle? And now I say unto you, my beloved brother Moroni, that never had I seen so great courage, nay, not amongst all the Nephites. For as I had ever called them my sons (for they were all of them very young) even so they said unto me: Father, behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall; then let us go forth; . . . Now they never had fought, yet they did not fear death; and they did think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their lives; yea, they had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them. And they rehearsed unto me the words of their mothers, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it. (Alma 56:44–48)

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, a Union colonel in the Civil War, saw combat as a test of character. “It makes bad men worse, and good men better” (Burns, Burns, and Ward 170). If this is true, then the battlefield was a place where the sons of Helaman tempered their spiritual mettle.

No one could question their courage or their faith. What was the source of the strength to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the “liberty of their fathers”? Mormon simply says their mothers told them that “if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47). Of course, they had known of righteous, believing men who had been killed by the Lamanites in battle. They undoubtedly were closely related to many of the Ammonites who refused to defend themselves from the Lamanite armies and were summarily killed. It is possible that some of these young men may have witnessed that event. What made them believe that their lot would be any different, especially, since they had never been tested in battle? In fact, the first assignment for the sons of Helaman was to fill the void left by the death of many men in the army of Antipus (Alma 56:10). Would it not have been normal for them to ask, “Many of these casualties were good men. How could we expect not to have the same risk of death?” Yet, the record gives us no indication of this kind of reasoning. They remained focused on the promise of the Lord given to them through their mothers. Their faith in

their mothers' words echoed the same courage that Ammon (one of the missionary sons of Mosiah) displayed at the waters of Sebus against impossible odds (Alma 17:29–37). Just like the stripling warriors, Ammon faced the Lamanites armed with little more than the promise of a righteous parent (Alma 17:35; Mosiah 28:7–8).

The same God who gave Mosiah a promise of safety gave the mothers of this untested army the similar promise, on the condition that they would not doubt (Alma 56:47). Even the most caring mothers would not make a promise like that without the confirmation of the Lord. A promise of deliverance such as this, spoken without the inspiration and confirmation of the Spirit, is (at best) a good intention left dangling. But, the sure word spoken through inspiration gave comfort and hope to the mothers and strength to their sons. At this point the Lamanites were not the enemy, they were the test of obedience—the fire in which these young men would be refined. The only possible enemy to these young warriors would be to waver in their faith in the power of God to deliver them.

Wendell Philips once said, “One on God’s side *is* a majority” (Burns, Burns, and Ward 399). Mormon is making the same point by including the story of the sons of Helaman in his record that he did with the story of the sons of Mosiah. When the Lord is on your side, the size and strength of the opposition makes no difference, bearing further witness to Nephi’s Freedom Thesis. What could draw us closer to Christ, as a nation inhabiting this promised land, than to show that the Lord is the one who makes us, “mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20)? Mormon condenses part of Helaman’s epistle with one verse (Alma 56:52); not just for the economy of space, but to keep us on track with the theme of deliverance he is reinforcing. He keeps the focus not on the minute details of war, but the pay off to these sons of Helaman following their first battle with the Lamanites. “Behold, I numbered those young men who had fought with me, fearing lest there were many of them slain. But behold, to my great joy there

had not one soul of them fallen to the earth; yea, and they had fought as if with the strength of God” (Alma 56:55–56). True to form, Helaman gives credit for their deliverance to the “strength of God.” Even though Helaman’s forces are increased by 60 more volunteers from the Ammonites, (Alma 57:6) they are nearly overpowered in their second confrontation with the Lamanites (Alma 57:19–21). Helaman was careful to let Moroni know that as the opposition grew darker, the light of obedience glowed as brightly as ever within his sons. “Yea, and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them” (Alma 57:21).

I find the elements of obedience within this verse fascinating. What is the motivation for obeying with exactness? Could this be seen as blind obedience? Blind obedience is sheep following sheep, while following in exactness is sheep following the Shepherd; and Christ is the Good Shepherd (see Alma 5:37–39). This is the same principle the Lord was teaching the Saints in 1832, when he said, “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). By obeying Helaman’s orders with exactness, they were showing they did not doubt the Lord’s promise made to them through their mothers.

The stripling warriors must have been aware that their obedience to their leaders was an extension of their obedience to their God. This was not a new concept to the Nephites. (See 1 Nephi 3:5–7; Mosiah 2:30–31; Alma 45:2–8) Their obedience to Helaman’s command was more than swift, it was exact. A celestial strategy was involved, even in that mortal battlefield. They had been promised that if they, “did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his [God’s] marvelous power” (Alma 57:26). Would it have been possible for them to support their God without supporting their leaders? This is the ultimate test of obedience; to show one’s allegiance to a perfect and infallible God by how we obey those less than perfect who are called to lead us.

Following the second battle, Helaman searches for his sons among the wounded and dead, and this is his account of what he found: “And it came to pass that there were two hundred, out of my two thousand and sixty, who had fainted because of loss of blood; nevertheless, according to the goodness of God, and our great astonishment, and also the joy of our whole army, there was not one soul among them who did perish; yea, and neither was there one soul among them who had not received many wounds” (Alma 57:25).

If Helaman had been an egotist trying to move up in the ranks, he might have taken some of the credit, but he was acutely aware of the heavenly power of command that extended beyond his own leadership. “And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power” (Alma 57:26). Even though Helaman was their leader, he took no credit for their deliverance; he gave all the credit to God.

In his letter to Captain Moroni, Helaman includes a second testimony in regard to the Lord’s hand being in the battle. In the aforementioned conflict, the sons of Helaman were joined in battle by the army of Gid. Following this second battle Gid’s witness was recorded by Helaman: “We are again delivered out of the hands of our enemies. And blessed is the name of our God; for behold it is he who has delivered us” (Alma 57:45). What is Gid’s point? It is the same point Nephi made and Mormon has been making all along; the Lord had a mighty hand in the maintenance of their freedom. And we may rightly assume that as we liken the scriptures to ourselves, that “his hand is stretched out still” to deliver the righteous (2 Nephi 19:12, 17, 21).

Prior to a possible third conflict, Helaman’s strategy for his troops included spiritual preparation: “we did pour out our

whole souls in prayer to God, that he would strengthen us, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies. . . . yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls” (Alma 58:10–11). The events which transpired in regaining the city of Manti bore witness to the promise of deliverance made by the Lord. By once again drawing the Lamanites out of the city and then sending an army behind them into the defenseless city of Manti, “they did take possession of the city of Manti without the shedding of blood” (Alma 58:28).

Helaman continued his letter to Moroni by asking why the government had not sent the requested assistance. He feared lest the Nephite armies were too small to hold on to the cities they had recaptured. Then, almost as an apology for being negative he writes, “we do not desire to murmur” (Alma 58:35). Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said, “If our lips are closed to murmuring, then our eyes will be open” (Maxwell 82–84). Notice how Helaman has shared an unpleasant truth in a fashion that will still allow the lines of communication to remain open. His sensitivity to his leaders, as well as his subordinates, is commendable. President Harold B. Lee counseled, “The men under you will never be loyal to you if they see that you are disloyal to those who preside over you” (Lee 10). Helaman’s letter validates this principle. His was not the expression of a weak-kneed foot soldier trying not to be responsible for the bad news he had born. He is once again illustrating his total allegiance to his leaders; recognizing full well that he cannot expect God to stand by him if he doesn’t stand by his leaders. While he is not blind to a problem, he is relating the details to Moroni while at the same time reinforcing his own support. He concludes his letter by reaffirming his testimony of the source of his small army’s strength, “We trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (Alma 58:37).

Helaman pays a tribute to his warriors that connects them once again to the power of the Lord to deliver the righteous: “they stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has made them

free; and they are strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day; yea, they do observe to keep his statutes, and his judgements, and his commandments continually” (Alma 58:40).

Is it not obvious that Mormon has not only attempted to show us the problems we may face, but also the solution to those problems? What is the solution? Getting the American people to obey God the same way. The same Lord that protected the stripling warriors will maintain the freedom of America, as He did that of the Nephites, if we will obey Him.

Conclusion

Perhaps none of the latter-day prophets has written more on this subject than President Ezra Taft Benson. “I fully realize that the Lord has predicted wars and rumors of wars (D&C 45:26). I recognize that only true repentance can stay the destructive forces of war and calamity” (*Teachings* 706).

He has also written: “Before the final triumphal return of the Lord, the question as to whether we may save our constitutional republic is simply based on two factors—the number of patriots and the extent of their obedience. That the Lord desires to save this nation which He raised up there is no doubt. But that He leaves it up to us, with His help, is the awful reality” (*An Enemy* 55).

While this paper may be on the stripling warriors, those sons of Helaman do not stand as just another inspiring story in the Book of Mormon. They witness that obedience in the most trying of circumstances is the condition of prosperity and deliverance. President Benson brought this message to our day as he spoke to the young men of the Church: “In the spiritual battles you are waging, I see you as today’s sons of Helaman” (“To the Youth” 43).

The sons of Helaman represent a timeless solution to a modern challenge: even though the battlefield may be mortal, the most powerful weapon in our defense is obtained by serving “the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ” (Ether 2:12).

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The Record of Alma: A Prophetic Pattern of the Principles Governing Testimony

19

Fred E. Woods

The book of Alma in the Book of Mormon is made up of the records of three different writers: Alma and his sons, Helaman, and Shiblon. The record of Alma in the book of Alma is unique in that it comprises 22.6 percent of the entire Nephite record and yet covers only 18 years, or merely 1.76 percent of the entire 1021 years of Nephite history from 600 BC to AD 421. The record of Alma covers the first 44 chapters of the book of Alma, the 18 years from 91 to 73 BC. The record of Helaman makes up chapters 45–62, covering the 16 years from 73 to 57 BC. Mormon’s abridgement of Shiblon’s record constitutes the last chapter (Alma 63). It also serves as a transition to the book of Helaman describing the transfer of the Nephite records.

Another unusual feature of the record of Alma, in addition to its length, is its large number of superscriptions. These superscriptions were part of the manuscript and were printed in the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon and should not be ignored. They appear over chapters 1, 5, 7, 9, 17, 21, 36, 38, and 39 of the book of Alma in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon. Professor Sidney B. Sperry has explained, “The fact that they are found over the chapters enumerated and over no others would seem to indicate that Mormon took them from

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Alma's original text" (203). The fact that with the exception of the introductory superscription to the record of Helaman at Alma chapter 45, there are no other superscriptions in that part of the record of Helaman, would also lend support to the idea that these superscriptions came from Alma's own hand.

One notable difference between the 1830 and the 1981 editions of the book of Alma is that the 1981 edition added the phrase "comprising chapters . . ." to some of the original superscriptions to designate current chapter divisions. As the superscriptions appear at natural divisions in the record of Alma, they will indicate the remaining divisions of this study of the doctrine of testimony in Alma's writings. In his record, Alma sets forth the most detailed pattern in all the standard works of the principles that govern testimony. It is interesting to note that over a third of the Book of Mormon references to testimony are found in the record of Alma.

The Necessity of Bearing True Testimony (Alma 1–4)

The introductory superscription for the record of Alma reads as follows:

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma the First, and Chief Judge over the people of Nephi, and also the High Priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the Judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma the First, and Chief Judge.

The principle of testimony is found early in the record of Alma, in the first year of the reign of the judges (91 BC). Nehor had introduced priestcraft and was bearing down against the church with *false* testimony (Alma 1:3). This created the need for bearing pure, true testimony. Gideon was the testifier who combated Nehor's false teachings with the testimony of the word of God. However, his opposition angered Nehor, who, in trying to enforce his false teachings with the sword, slew Gideon. He was consequently brought before Alma, the chief

judge, and found guilty. He “suffered an ignominious death” (vv 7–16).

By the eighth year of the reign of the judges (84 BC), the Nephites had forgot God and the church had become very proud and wicked. As the chief judge, Alma was confronted with the sin of priestcraft which had been enforced with the sword, and as the high priest of the Church he had to battle the sin of pride that had resulted in great wickedness within the church (Alma 4:6–12). Discerning the need to devote all his energies to spiritual concerns, Alma gave up the chief judgeship so that he might go among his people, “seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in *bearing down in pure testimony against them*” (vv 17–19; emphasis added). Knowing that the power of pure testimony “had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just,” Alma also recognized that it would have a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else” (31:5).

President Ezra Taft Benson counseled: “As individuals and society depart more and more from the laws of God, we will need to regulate the affairs of the Church, teaching persuasively the laws of God” (*Teachings* 313). Souls are reclaimed most effectively through teaching the laws of God and bearing pure testimony. Alma could have learned from the teachings of Nephi that “when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the divine teachings] unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).

How to Bear Pure Testimony (Alma 5–6)

We live in a day when there is a definite need for the bearing of pure testimony and we can learn how from Alma. President Thomas S. Monson stated, “That energetic missionary from the Book of Mormon, even Alma, provides for us a blueprint for missionary conduct” (42). Alma chapter 5 describes the greatest step-by-step pattern for the bearing of pure testimony in all of scripture.

Before analyzing the pattern therein, let's look at the setting of this part of Alma's record. The superscription to this portion of the text states the following: "*The words which Alma, the High Priest, according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.*" The land referred to is the land of Zarahemla, and probably includes the cities of Zarahemla and Gideon and their respective villages.

In Alma 5:3 and 61, Mormon says he copied Alma's powerful discourse word for word. In it Alma testified of Christ's invitation and promise, "Repent, and I will receive you" (v 33). He taught the gospel of Jesus Christ "plainly" with all the "energy of [his] soul" (v 43). After teaching the essential doctrine of repentance, he then testified that he had been called of Jesus Christ as a bearer of the holy priesthood to testify to the truths which had been spoken of by the "fathers," meaning the previous prophets (v 44). Thus, Alma established his authority and taught what the prophets before him had taught (See D&C 42:11; also 52:9, 36). He then sealed these teachings with his testimony, affirming, "Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true" (Alma 5:45).

Concerning the bearing of personal testimony of the doctrines we teach, President Benson has said, "Now, after we teach the great plan of the eternal God, we must personally bear our testimonies of its truthfulness" (*Ensign* 85). Elder Bruce R. McConkie added a second witness to this teaching: "We are obligated also to bear testimony of the truth of the doctrines we teach, not simply that the work is true, but that we have taught true doctrine, which of course we cannot do unless we have taught by the power of the Spirit" (116).

In addition to bearing testimony of the doctrines we teach, Alma also teaches the great lesson that we must testify *how we know* that what we have taught is true. After affirming that he knows the doctrines he has taught are true, Alma asks rhetorically, "And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the

Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit” (Alma 5:45–46).

Alma then prophesies, “I know that Jesus Christ shall come . . . to take away the sins of the world” (Alma 5:48). After bearing pure testimony of Jesus Christ, Alma invites his “beloved brethren” to come unto Christ (vv 49–50). He clearly reveals that he knows Jesus Christ will come to atone for our sin and then tells how he knows. We must not only bear or carry our testimony; but more importantly, we must *bare* our testimony—expose and make clearly visible how we know it.

Alma’s testimony of Jesus Christ stirred the hearts of many in Zarahemla, and the church was set in order (Alma 6:1–4). After regulating the affairs of the church, he left the Saints in Zarahemla and headed for the valley of Gideon. There he hoped to find the members in a better spiritual shape than those he had found those in Zarahemla (6:7–8; 7:3). While in Gideon, Alma followed the same pattern of testifying that he did in Zarahemla. He testified by the Spirit with the former prophets that Jesus Christ would come to redeem his people from their sins (6:8).

*Testify, Identify the Spirit, Invite Others
to Repent (Alma 7–8)*

The superscription for Alma chapters 7–8 states the following: “*The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.*”

After Alma arrived in the city of Gideon, he was delighted that the people were keeping the commandments. In teaching and testifying to the people of Zarahemla and Gideon, Alma centered his witness on the Lord Jesus Christ, a vital component to any testimony borne under the influence of the Spirit; “For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people” (Alma 7:7). He knew, as

he would later testify, “there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ” (38:9). After testifying of the birth and mission of the promised Messiah, Alma invited the people to “Come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent . . . and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism” (7:15). He then promised that all who do this and continue to keep the commandments would have eternal life (v 16).

Following his powerful testimony, Alma rhetorically asks: “And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things? Behold, I say unto you, yea, I know that ye believe them; and the way that I know that ye believe them is by the manifestation of the Spirit which is in me” (Alma 7:17). Thus Alma knew, as we must also come to recognize, that “he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth; . . . he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:21–22). Pausing when he felt the Spirit come upon his audience, this great model teacher identified the feeling they were experiencing as the Spirit of the Lord. In regards to the manner in which Alma identified the Spirit when he testified, Elder W. Grant Bangerter stated the following:

We need confidence in the Holy Ghost; believe in it and expect its presence . . . and be able to help others to feel the influence that it brings. One of our great missionaries said: “I bear them my testimony. Then I bear them their testimony. And then I have them bear their testimony back to me. That’s the process. Alma did the same thing when he had explained to the people of the city of Gideon about the coming of Christ and the redemption that would be provided for those who would accept Him and be baptized. (47)

After teaching in Gideon, Alma rested at his home in Zarahemla for the remainder of the year, 83 BC. At the commencement of 82 BC, he taught and found much success in the city of Melek (Alma 8:1–5). He then traveled three days to the city of Ammonihah, where he was given a much different

reception than he had received at either Gideon or Melek. Although he taught the word of God in Ammonihah, with the same testimony, Satan had such a great hold upon the hearts of the people that they would not listen to his words (vv 6–10). Alma prayed fervently that God would “pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city” (v 10). Nonetheless, they continued to harden their hearts and challenge Alma because he no longer had political power over them for he had delivered up the office of chief judge to Nephihah (vv 11–12). They “reviled him, and spit upon him, and caused that he should be cast out of their city” (v 13). Although Alma had encountered opposition before, he had always found a way to overcome it. Many of the people of Zarahemla who were described as “workers of iniquity” (5:32) had repented. However, the people of Ammonihah continued to harden their hearts despite Alma’s prayers, testimony, and invitation to come unto Christ.

The Law of Witnesses unto Life or Death (Alma 9–16)

The superscription for this section reads:

The words of Alma, and also the words of Amulek, which was declared unto the people which was in the land of Ammonihah. And also they are cast into prison, and delivered by the miraculous power of God which was in them, according to the record of Alma.

In these chapters we learn the principles regarding the law of witnesses. Even though he was discouraged and on his way home, Alma was commanded by an angel to return to Ammonihah (Alma 8:16). He was to provide this corrupt city not only with his own witness a second time, but also with a second testifier, Amulek, a native of Ammonihah who had been instructed by an angel to receive Alma (v 20).

Alma stayed at Amulek’s house many days preparing him to go forth to preach (Alma 8:27). During this time, Amulek was also instructed by an angel who verified the truth of Alma’s teaching to him (10:10). The Lord instructed Alma to invite Amulek to join him as a second witness his words. They went forth together in the power of the Spirit to warn the inhabitants

of Ammonihah that if they did not repent they would be destroyed (8:29–30). Thus, the Lord’s law of warning was in full force. For he will never destroy a people, “save it were foretold them by the *prophets* of the Lord” (2 Nephi 25:9, emphasis added).

The Mosaic Law stated, “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (Deut 19:15; see also 17:6). The law of witnesses is amply attested in the Book of Mormon and the other standard works (Van Orden 307–08).

When Alma preached to the people of Ammonihah, they asked, “Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away?” (Alma 9:2). Also, “Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?” (v 6). They further said, “We will not believe thy words if thou shouldst prophesy that this great city should be destroyed in one day” (v 4). But the second time, both Alma and Amulek testified of the same truths, bearing their double witnesses, yet their warnings went unheeded (10:10, 13).

The people of Ammonihah sealed their imminent destruction when they shed the innocent blood of those who had believed in the preaching of Alma and Amulek or had been otherwise taught to believe in the word of God (Alma 14:1, 8). As Alma and Amulek were forced to witness the atrocity of the few remaining repentant and righteous Saints being burned by fire, Amulek told Alma they should stretch forth their hands to stop the killing of the innocent women and children (vv 8–10). But Alma told him that the Spirit had restrained him “that the judgments which [God] shall exercise upon [the wicked people of Ammonihah] in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day” (v 11).

Until this time, it was the prayers of these righteous few that had allowed the city to be spared, but the wicked people of Ammonihah were warned that when they had killed or cast out the righteous from among them they would be destroyed (Alma 10:23). Those believers who were not burned fled to the Land of Sidom where they met Alma and Amulek and related to them their deliverance (15:1–2). Alma and Amulek had also been delivered by the power of God (14:14–29). Before the year ended, the entire city of Ammonihah and its inhabitants were destroyed in just one day as prophesied (16:9–10). And thus we see that testimony or the law of witnesses is a two-edged sword: unto life for those who receive it, unto death for those who reject it.

Wisdom in Witnessing (Alma 17–20)

The superscription in this portion of the text states:

An account of the sons of Mosiah, which rejected their rights to the kingdom, for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi, to preach to the Lamanites.—Their sufferings and deliverance, according to the record of Alma.

The account begins with the sons of Mosiah and their companions separating to go to different portions of the land of Nephi, now occupied by the Lamanites. Ammon, chief among them (Alma 17:18), wisely took his leave for the territory of Ishmael where king Lamoni had stewardship over all the land. Ammon was captured and bound as he entered the land and was eventually brought before the king (vv 20–21). When the king asked him what he wanted, Ammon said he desired to live among his people and to be his servant (vv 22–25). Ammon worked not only as king Lamoni’s servant but also labored as the Lord’s servant to the king and his people.

In Alma chapters 17–19 we have a great example of Ammon’s wisdom in witnessing as demonstrated by the following procedures:

1. Ammon went before king Lamoni knowing that if he converted the king he would likely convert many of his kingdom.
2. He told the king he desired to live among his people and to serve him. He then provided great temporal service to the king which prepared his heart and the hearts of his people to receive his testimony (Alma 17:26–18:12).
3. Ammon recognized and capitalized on an opportunity to manifest God’s power by word and deed at the waters of Sebus when the flocks were scattered. This act of strength and courage won the hearts of the king’s servants as well as that of the king (Alma 17:29).
4. Ammon did a masterful job of testifying and inviting King Lamoni to heed his teachings (Alma 18:13–35).
5. Ammon taught on the king’s level. He identified that the Great Spirit Lamoni had spoken of was God (Alma 18:26–28).
6. Ammon taught Lamoni in plainness, testifying of the essential truths one needs to know in order to obtain salvation. He provided him with the overview of God’s plan, focusing his attention on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement (Alma 18:36–39).

Ammon’s example provides us with a second model to follow in increasing our effectiveness in teaching and testifying of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Transformation through Testimony (Alma 21–35)

This superscription covers the largest amount of information in the record of Alma, covering some 15 chapters: “*An account of the preaching of Aaron and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites.*” The sons of Mosiah were missionaries among the Lamanites for fourteen years, testifying by the power of the Spirit (Alma 17:4). Their combined testimonies converted thousands of Lamanites and brought joy and great faith to their souls (23:5; 26:4; 37:19). Paul taught that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). Joseph Smith explained, “Faith comes by hearing the word of God, through the testimony of the servants of God; that testimony is always attended by the Spirit of prophecy and revelation” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 148; hereafter *TPJS*).

These converts changed their name from Lamanites to Anti-Nephi-Lehies to distinguish themselves from the other Lamanites (Alma 23:17). The Anti-Nephi-Lehies not only developed faith in God, but they also experienced a miraculous transformation of their souls through the piercing power of the spirit of pure testimony. This transformation is evidenced by the covenant they made to bury their weapons of war as a “testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man’s blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives” (24:18).

Where thousands of Lamanites were converted to the Church, the text states that only one of the Amalekites (Alma 23:14), and none of the Amulonites, who were former members who had apostatized after “the order of the Nehors,” were converted (24:29). And Mormon noted, “And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things” (v 30).

People never remain stagnant in their relationship to God once they have received a witness of the Spirit. When they accept the witness of the Spirit and turn toward God, they experience joy, light and life; but if they reject the testimony of the Spirit, they experience pain, darkness, and spiritual death. The sons of Mosiah and the prophet Alma experienced far greater joy than pain, and because of their testimonies many were converted and permanently changed. This caused Ammon and his brethren to cry out with jubilation, and Ammon asked rhetorically:

Behold, how many thousands of our brethren has [God] loosed from the pains of hell; and they are brought to sing redeeming love, and this because of the power of his word which is in us, therefore have we not great reason to rejoice? . . . Therefore, let us glory, yea, we

will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; . . . Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel. (Alma 26:13, 16)

Alma also felt this same way as he saw many of his people return to the Lord: “And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me” (Alma 29:10).

The pain is also real when people choose to turn from God and transform themselves into children of hell. The meeting of Alma and Korihor, the Anti-Christ, is a vivid example of a reaction to the two-edged sword of testimony. When Korihor, an apostate leader and teacher, who rejected the atonement of Christ and the spirit of prophecy, was brought before Alma, the high priest of the Church, he accused Alma and his brethren in the church of teaching falsehoods in order to get gain, the very sins of which he himself was guilty (Alma 30:1–31). Knowing that Korihor knew they did not get any personal gain except the joy of laboring with others, Alma bore testimony to challenge Korihor and to protect the lives of his people (vv 34–41). When Korihor asked for a sign, Alma said he already had signs enough through the testimonies of his brethren, the prophets, the scriptures, the earth and planets, all things since everything denoted that there was indeed a God (Alma 30:43–44). When Korihor continued to demand a sign, he was struck dumb. Only then did he confess that he had been deceived by the devil who had encouraged him to teach lies (vv 49–53). As Alma made *bare* his testimony not only were the people greatly strengthened, but Alma’s own testimony grew.

When Alma went among the apostate Zoramites, he gave a formula for obtaining and maintaining a testimony. He compared a testimony to a seed of faith in the word of God, which needed first to be planted in their hearts. By nourishing this word-seed with faith, diligence and patience, they would feel it grow into a tree of testimony that would bear wonderful fruit (Alma 32). Elder Dean L. Larsen testified that “Millions of

people have tried the experiment proposed by Alma. . . . They and others in increasing numbers throughout the world today bear testimony to the good fruit that the experiment has born” (68). Through the witnessing of Alma and his brethren, many Zoramites found their testimonies again (Alma 35:6, 14).

President Harold B. Lee explained the importance of the daily nourishment of a testimony: “Testimony isn’t something you have today, and you are going to have always. A testimony is fragile. It is as hard to hold as a moonbeam. It is something you have to recapture every day of your life” (4).

Alma and Amulek did not rely only on their own testimonies, but they cited the testimonies of the former prophets such as Zenos, Zenock, and Moses who testified of Jesus Christ (Alma 33–34). This prophetic pattern of living witnesses calling upon the words of the former prophets and then bearing their own testimonies should also be followed today by the Lord’s servants when teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they too will reap rewards of transformation through the power of testimony.

A Willingness to Recount One’s Witness (Alma 36–44)

The superscriptions in this section are conceptually identical in that they note Alma’s commandments to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. The background for this section begins at the end of the 17th year of the reign of the judges (74 BC). Alma called his sons together to strengthen them because of the iniquity of the people (Alma 35:12, 15–16).

He first counseled with his eldest son Helaman, recounting to him his conversion and how his spiritual agony turned to exquisite joy through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and the power of repentance (Alma 36:16–21). To his son Shiblon, Alma also recounted his personal witness, boldly adding, “there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ (38:9). Finally, to his youngest son Corianton, who had strayed while on his mission, Alma testified that Christ “surely shall come to take away the sins of the world”

(39:15). The recounting of one's primordial witness is essential to the testifiers themselves, as well as to those who hear and receive their testimonies. For the faith of the hearers increases as they see, feel and know what God has done in the lives of the testifiers, who themselves are also strengthened as they remember the mercy and goodness of God as they recount their testimonies.

A vital point in the principle of sharing a testimony is the degree to which one is willing to bear witness of Jesus Christ at any time and in any place. Alma's father had stressed the need to "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9), when he explained the baptismal covenant to those who desired to enter the church at the waters of Mormon. And Alma serves as a great example of being a willing witness in all seasons of his life. For example, he related to his son Helaman that from the time he was converted until the present time, "I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Alma 36:24).

After counseling his three sons and charging them to go forth and declare the word, "Alma, also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth" (Alma 43:1). This divinely inspired desire to testify comes by the power of the Spirit, which brings a love for all people. The sons of Mosiah were also filled with this same desire to testify to everyone: "Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; . . . And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them" (Mosiah 28:3-4). Both Alma and the sons of Mosiah left their homes and families to spend their lives bearing testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith declared, "A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race" (*TPJS* 174).

The record of Alma concludes in 73 BC, the 18th year of the reign of the judges. Alma then turned the keeping of the records over to his son Helaman. He then prophesied that the Nephites would be destroyed four hundred years after Jesus Christ would make himself known in the flesh (Alma 45:9–10), thus ending his ministry in mortality with testimony. Leaving his blessing upon the church, Alma went to the land of Melek; however, the text indicates that he was never seen again. Throughout the church it was said “that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses” (45:17–19). Joseph Fielding Smith commented on this note: “It is a very reasonable thought to believe that both Moses and Alma, like Elijah and John, were translated to accomplish some work which the Lord had in store for them at some future day” (5:38).

Conclusion

How appropriate that Alma should be “taken up by the Spirit,” for from the time he was converted, even until the day of his apparent translation, he spent all his days trying to lift others to Jesus Christ through the power of his testimony, a testimony borne of the Spirit. Alma’s continual bearing of pure testimony brought a purity to his own soul which wrought a forgiveness of his sins. As we follow Alma’s pattern of testifying, we will not only save the souls of many to whom we witness, but we will also gain a forgiveness of our own sins (D&C 62:3).

The record of Alma has taught us the prophetic pattern of the principles governing testimony. These principles include the necessity of bearing pure testimony, the procedure for bearing witness, the law of witnessing, and the consequences which occur in the lives of all concerned when we bear pure testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These principles of testimony can and should be applied in every facet of church teaching.

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