

ALMA 5–7

John W. Welch Notes



Alma 5

Alma 5:1 — The Historical Setting

If you count the years between King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–6 and Alma's speech in Alma 5, there were 42 years, which makes the year of the speech, not so coincidentally, to be the sixth Sabbatical year after Mosiah had become king, then ruled for 33 years (Mosiah 29:46), and Alma then spoke at the beginning of the 9th year of the reign of judges (Alma 4:11, 20). The ancient Israelites had not only the seven-day week, but they had a seven-year cycle for agricultural purposes and also for covenant renewal. At the end of Deuteronomy in 31:10–11, one of the last things Moses said to the children of Israel was that once every seven years they needed to gather all the men, women, and children, in a Feast of the Tabernacles, "in which thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing." So, the ninth year of the judges was year 42 from Benjamin's Speech, which itself may have been given during a sabbatical or jubilee year. Thus, Alma and his people would have been observing a covenant renewal, hearing the law and reflecting again on how they could best be keeping their obligations as God's covenant people. And so, Alma's great speech was most likely given on a special occasion.

Appropriately, Alma gave this in Zarahemla, the same place where Benjamin had given his covenant speech as well. Many of the themes found in Benjamin's speech are right here in Alma 5 too. The few themes that are not here have been superseded by the fact that they have a new regime of government, and Alma is speaking as the High Priest, not as the Chief Judge, let alone as a king. The setting of Alma 5 also must have included the seating of the new Chief Judge, Nephihah. We do not hear his inaugural speech. He

must have accepted the responsibility, and the voice of the people would have sustained that action, and thus some ceremonies were probably involved. But all that we hear of that occasion are the words of Alma. After all, it is Alma's book that we have, and this is Alma's record of his own words. Covenant renewal was on his mind, and there had been no more powerful, prophetic, and governmental manifesto in Nephite history than Benjamin's speech. It is alluded to here as the basis of the Nephites' understanding of their covenant obligations, their theology, and their understanding of themselves, individually and as a people.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 3: "Because the Book of Mormon tells us the original setting and purpose of this speech, we can confidently understand and interpret its words in context. It is not a philosophical discourse. It is not an esoteric or abstract treatise. It was delivered as ecclesiastic instruction from the highest priesthood leader of the Church. It was aimed at unifying and regulating the whole body of the Church by inspiring and enabling the righteousness and worthiness of each individual member. It is through that lens that Alma 5 can most authentically and effectively be read and applied today."

Szink, Terrence L., and John W. Welch. "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals." In *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*, edited by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, 147–223. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998.

Alma 5:1 — The Wisdom of Reading the Law

Reading the law is a good policy. In America and in the world generally, we send people to Congress, Parliament, and other governing institutions, and they enact many laws—so many that we have whole law libraries, and we sometimes have trouble figuring out what the laws are. One thing that would help law enforcement and civil obedience would be if there were better general understandings of the law among all people. I suppose nobody may want to listen to the Internal Revenue Code read out loud once every seven years, but there are other parts of the law that are generally applicable and universally important. At least the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and a few other things would be nice to read or hear read every seven years. It would become a kind of ritual, a renewal, a recommitment, and people would know the law. If you do not know the law, you have less chance of keeping it all the time. The Nephites were wise enough to read and renew the covenant character of their law. They tell us that they were strict in observing the Law of Moses, and doing this was part of the Law of Moses.

Alma 5:1 — Renewing Their Covenants

Once every seven years, besides reading the law, Israelites would renew their covenants. After they heard the Law of Moses, they would then “choose ye this day” as they did when Joshua had all of Israel together for their covenant renewal at the end of Joshua’s life (Joshua 24:15). Indeed, we will see those same words, “choose ye this day,” seven years later, in the eighteenth year of the reign of judges, which is the fiftieth year from Benjamin’s covenant, in Alma 30:8, where those very covenant words were quoted.

Other indications of covenant renewal are found in places where Alma drew on Benjamin’s speech in this covenant connection. As the names were recorded in the book of Numbers, Benjamin recorded the names of his covenant people in Mosiah 6:1. The names of Alma’s covenant people were likewise recorded in the official’s book of life (Alma 5:58). What did Benjamin say would happen if they were wicked? Their names would be blotted out (Mosiah 5:11). The same idea appears in Alma 5:57. Alma then assures his people that “if a ravenous wolf comes in...” the Good Shepherd will protect the flock (Alma 5:59–60). Benjamin had also talked about his people being in the flock and knowing the voice of the master to whom they belong, and if you do not enter into the covenant and keep the covenant, you will be driven out (Mosiah 5:14). This is Benjamin’s and Alma’s way of reminding people of the importance of being faithful and of remembering the name (Alma 5:38).

Alma 5:1 — Delivering the Word of God to Several Different Audiences

“Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people first in Zarahemla and thence throughout all the land.” Alma did not give this same speech everywhere he went, but he delivered the word of God at each location. He referred to his obligation to cry repentance and preach the coming of Christ as a duty under the holy order of the Son of God—in other words, a priesthood responsibility. He went on to speak for this same purpose in in Gideon (6:7), in Melek (8:3), and probably elsewhere as well.

As he spoke in Zarahemla in Alma 5, he was speaking to a somewhat ambivalent audience. There was a dilemma there, even an “awful dilemma” (Alma 7:3). There were some people who were righteous and very good, and some people who were not. In Gideon, however, he was speaking to a very righteous audience. Then the next place he went to was Ammonihah. So there was a wide range of people and audiences to whom he spoke. While the bottom-line message to each was very similar, the way he delivered it, how he talked, and what points he emphasized in each case were very different. As he delivered the word of God throughout all the land, he adapted his teachings and testimony to various needs and circumstances while he kept the core message the same.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 2: "For at least twenty-five years, Alma spoke to countless people, teaching the doctrines of Christ and preaching repentance. He spoke encouragingly about the Atonement of Christ to the righteous people in Gideon. He called the wicked people in Ammonihah to repentance and deliverance, and in a last-ditch effort to turn them away from their Nehorite ways, Alma spoke to them urgently about spiritual death, probation, and the plan of redemption, followed by his testimony about the high priesthood after the holy order of the Son of God."

Alma 5:2, 21–23 — The Condition of the People of Zarahemla.

By the time Alma spoke to his people in chapter 5, the people of Zarahemla had strayed quite a bit, as evidenced by Alma's later speech to the people of Gideon. In Alma 7:3–5 he compared the righteousness of the people of Gideon to "the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla." In Alma 4, he spoke of contentions, pride, and wickedness entering into the church, and in chapter 5, he told the people of Zarahemla to repent.

In verse 21, he said, "Ye cannot be saved, except your garments are washed white," so presumably, not all their garments were white yet. In verse 23, he called at least some of them murderers, and said they were guilty of all manner of wickedness.

It seems as though there were a lot of people sitting on the fence in Zarahemla. The population was not as cohesive as it had been 42 years earlier under Benjamin, and Alma sought to get back to that kind of unity, to find some way to get people all back together again.

Alma 5:3–59 — Alma's Greatest Public Speech

I have called Alma 5 Alma's greatest public speech. Do you think that is an apt description of this talk after reading it several times? What makes it great? What struck you about it?

He called everybody to repentance. He called them to examine their activities and how they lived, but what was great about the way he called them to do that? He makes us think about our lives. He did not just say, "Here is the list," he really brought the listeners into the process.

He asks a lot of questions, but only answers some of them. Why does he not answer all of them? Remember that they had created this new system of equality. The people were

equally accountable and responsible. Do you think Alma is making people accountable and responsible by these questions that he leaves open-ended?

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma's Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 2: "Alma tried to do all he could to reclaim his people from straying from the covenant path. Alma 5 records what is, for many reasons, Alma's greatest public speech. That's quite a statement; this is a prophet who taught and prophesied and preached repentance for somewhere between two and three decades." (See chapter 1, "Introducing Alma's Greatest Speech.")

Book of Mormon Central "[Why Did Alma Ask Church Members Fifty Probing Questions?](#)" *KnoWhy* 112 (June 1, 2016).

Alma 5:3–59 — Was Alma's Speech Spontaneous or Prepared in Advance?

think Alma prepared his speech in advance. At the very least, if he did not, he would have caused it to be written down afterwards. It is possible he had scribes recording his words since he was the presiding high priest, just as King Benjamin had his speech recorded. Alma was also the current record keeper, so he knew the value and the importance of keeping records. There will not be in the Book of Mormon another speaker like Alma.

We have—as we encounter, Alma 5, Alma 7, Alma 9, 12, 13 to Alma 30, 32, 33—the words of Alma speaking 21 chapters of original material. This is impressive, and maybe his lawyering and recordkeeping combined to help him. He was very, very conscientious as a record keeper, and I think he wrote these speeches himself. I do not think he had a ghostwriter doing it. We do not know how much of this was said to him by the spirit. He may have had an outline. He may have had some ideas. He may have also given talks like this in smaller settings. Then he unleashed a lot of questions.

I think he sensed that the people of Zarahemla were a very tricky audience to work with. He knew that they were in a dilemma (Alma 7:3), and so he certainly came prepared. One of the things about teaching with the spirit, is that we tend to over-prepare, but we know that the Lord is not going to prompt us to use everything that we have prepared. Alma may have had a hundred questions, and then these are the fifty that he ended up using. Fifty may be just a coincidental number. He is keeping the large plates—the small plates are full—and every year he is putting some kind of a record in as to what he did. If he was writing on metal, you know he would have wanted to inscribe very carefully. By that time, he had probably polished it to have the speech the way he would have

wanted it to go down for eternity. It is interesting to think about how that all might have come about.

It is also interesting that Mormon chose to include this speech in Alma's own words. It does not appear that he abridged Alma's inaugural speech as High Priest. Like King Benjamin's speech, Alma 5 is a jewel. It stands the tests of time.

Alma 5:3–59 — Teaching with the Spirit

One of the most important things we try to do in the Church, no matter where we are called to serve, is to teach with the Spirit. Do you think that Alma spoke with the Spirit on this occasion? What was it about his sermon that conveyed that Spirit effectively? Did you learn anything about how to speak with the Spirit from the way in which Alma delivered his message? For one thing, he told his audience that he was speaking under the influence of the Spirit. In Alma 5:50–61, Alma said "the spirit sayeth unto me." That may have been something he was feeling right then, as inspiration. He was certainly open to that. Or perhaps the Spirit told him those things while he was preparing this speech. When King Benjamin reported what the angel had said to him, he stated that sometime prior to his speech an angel had awoken him from his sleep, and then he delivered that message as he had received it (Mosiah 3:2).

Alma 5:3–12 — Prologue

Alma began by reviewing past blessings. The past is a good way to teach with the spirit since it built on their common traditions and blessings from God. Using the past as his springboard, he taught simple principles and progressed to more complicated ones. He walked them through a problem and gave a solution, and showed where choices would inevitably lead one way or another. It is logically constructed, guided by and leading to the influence of the spirit.

Alma 5:5–59 — Alma's Questions

Alma asked fifty questions in this speech, split into 8 main groups of questions (see Figures 1, 2, 3, 4). To determine the number of questions in Alma's speech, you cannot simply count the question marks, because sometimes there are compound questions, and because the questions marks were inserted later by the typesetter of the Book of Mormon. When the Book of Mormon was translated, Oliver

Cowdery, and whoever happened to be the scribe on some of the later parts, wrote word for word, without punctuation. The original manuscripts of the Book of Mormon had no periods, no commas, no question marks, no dashes, and hardly any capital letters; it was just a steady stream of words. One of the young men working in Grandin's print shop

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 1-17

Question	Verse
Remembering God's Acts for His People	
1. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?	6
2. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance God's mercy and long-suffering towards your fathers?	
3. Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?	
4. Were your fathers destroyed?	8
5. Were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled your fathers about, were they loosed?	9
Knowing the Essential Logic of the Gospel	
6. On what conditions were your fathers saved?	10
7. On what grounds had they to hope for salvation?	
8. What is the cause of your fathers' being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?	
9. Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi?	11
10. Was Abinadi not a holy prophet?	
11. Did Abinadi not speak the words of God?	
12. Did my father Alma believe them?	
Being Personally Converted	
13. Have you spiritually been born of God?	14
14. Have you received his image in your countenance?	
15. Have you experienced this mighty change in your heart?	
16. Do you exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?	15
17. Do you look forward with an eye of faith?	

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 18–29

Question		Verse
	Imagining the Judgment Day	
18.	Do you view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?	15
19.	Can you imagine to yourself that you hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me you blessed, for behold your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?	16
20.	Or do you imagine to yourself that you can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, my works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?	17
21.	Or otherwise, can you imagine yourself brought before the tribunal of God with your soul filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that you have set at defiance the commandments of God?	18
22.	Can you look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?	19
23.	Can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenance?	
24.	Can you think of being saved when you have yielded yourself to become subject to the devil?	20
25.	How will you feel if you shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness?	22
26.	What will these things testify against you?	
27.	Will they not testify that you are a murderer?	23
28.	Will they not also testify that you are guilty of all manner of wickedness?	
29.	Do you suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?	24

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 30-40

Question		Verse
Assessing One's Spiritual Condition		
30. If you have experienced a change of heart, and if you have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, can you feel so now?		26
31. Have you walked, keeping yourself blameless before God?		27
32. Could you say, if you were called to die at this time, within yourself, that you have been sufficiently humble?		
33. Could you say that your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ?		
34. Are you stripped of pride?		28
35. Is there one among you who is not stripped of envy?		29
36. Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?		30
Identifying with a "Fold"		
37. If you are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are you?		39
38. The devil is your shepherd, and you are of his fold; and now who can deny this?		
Obtaining Spiritual Knowledge		
39. Do you not suppose that I know of these things myself?		45
40. How do you suppose that I know of their surety?		45

50 Questions of Alma 5

Questions 41–50

Questions	Refusing to Repent	Verse
41. Can you withstand these sayings?		53
42. Can you lay aside these things and trample the Holy One under your feet?		
43. Can you be puffed up in the pride of your heart?		
44. Will you still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your heart upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?		
45. Will you persist in supposing that you are better than another?		54
46. Will you persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance?		
47. Will you persist in turning your back upon the poor and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?		55
48. The names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. What have you to say against this?		58
49. What shepherd is there having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock?		59
50. If a wolf enter his flock doth the shepherd not drive him out?		

Figure 1, 2, 3, 4 John W. Welch and Greg Welch, "50 Questions of Alma 5," in Charting the Book of Mormon, charts 62-65.

punctuated the Book of Mormon, so the number of question marks is not a reliable way to count the questions.

Punctuation marks are an invention of the middle ages. No ancient manuscript has any punctuation, so for example, when you look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, you would notice that they are just a steady stream of words, and the older ones do not even put spaces between the words. When we speak, we just speak in a steady line, and if you know where the words break, you can follow it. But we do not stop between each word when we speak, and so the very early writings do not even break between the words. That is enough to say that we have a little bit of flexibility in counting how many questions there are.

Why do you think he asked so many questions? How do you answer each of these questions? How can you apply his questions to your daily life?

- What questions does he ask about remembering God's acts for his people? (5:6-9)
- What questions does he ask about knowing the essentials of the Gospel? (5:10-11)
- What questions does he ask about being personally converted? (5:14-15)
- What questions does he ask about imagining the judgment day? (5:15-24)
- What questions does he ask about assessing one's spiritual condition? (5:26-30)
- What questions does he ask about identifying with one fold or another? (5:39)
- What questions does he ask about obtaining spiritual knowledge? (5:45)
- What questions does he ask about refusing to repent? (5:53-59)

Alma 5:5-59 — Alma Asks Questions to Share His Message Effectively

Remember that one of the things that everyone had to do during the Feast of Tabernacle season was to confess, so these questions that Alma was asking may have had something to do with helping people to be introspective, to repent, to recognize what they needed to do as a part of preparing themselves for the covenant to be renewed. This was so that the Day of Atonement could be celebrated properly, so that the blood of the sacrifice would purify and cleanse everyone and wash their garments clean. Are those all phrases in Alma 5? You bet. So, in Alma 5, again we are going to another level of why it is a great speech. It taps into all of the really fundamental concepts of ancient Israelite religion, the revealed law that they were living (and supposed to be) keeping. Indeed, it taps into the Law of Moses as revealed by Moses.

Moreover, Alma's questions were drawn directly from his experiences. He knew what he was talking about. Another way that we teach with the Spirit is when we talk about things that we "know whereof we speak." When he asked "have you had his image on your countenance?" or when he asked about being born of God, he had experience in

these areas. He asked about being born again, and undoubtedly as people heard him asking those questions, they knew and accepted what he was saying because they knew his story. They had probably heard it many times and they knew how sincere he was about these things.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central "[Why Did Alma Ask Church Members Fifty Probing Questions?](#)" *KnoWhy* 112 (June 1, 2016)

Alma 5:5–59 — If One Deletes All the Questions, What Remains of This Speech?

In a way this is a humorous question, but it helps readers to focus on what Alma affirmatively declared, proclaimed, or testified of in this great speech. What is left are *words of testimony*. He did not leave people wondering.

I marked in my Book of Mormon, highlighting the things that Alma testified of. You might want to do that. For example, he certainly declared, not in a questioning mode, when he said, "I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father Alma to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God" (5:3). He declared that unequivocally. He did not say, "Who has any authority around here?" Then, in verse 4, he said, "Behold I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of King Noah by the mercy and power of God." He testified of that.

So, it is important to imagine hearing these words aloud. They were meant to be listened to. If you don't hear them as strong assertions or as drawn out questions, it is easy to click past all these questions and declarations without really letting them sink in. But imagine the inflections, the intonations, and listen for the cadence of this great speech.

Alma 5:5–59 — Strategic Pauses

Was there a strategic pause after these questions? When he said, "Can you imagine yourselves that ye hear the voice of God saying unto you in that day, come unto me ye blessed?" (Alma 5:16), did he just let that hang for a few seconds? Or, "Do you imagine to yourself that you can lie unto God in that day? And say Lord, our works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?" (17). Did he then let that sink in just a little?

There are some very poignant moments of silence in scripture. For example, when the voice of God was heard from heaven and Christ descended at the temple at Bountiful, everyone awaited profoundly silent. Just imagine how that silence would be; nobody dared to say anything. They were frozen with anticipation and wonder at what had happened. Silence can be very powerful. Sometimes, conveying the spirit requires not talking as much and letting people ponder.

There are other techniques Alma used. For example, many of Alma's testimony statements began with the word *behold*. Look at verse 13, "And *behold*, he preached the word unto your fathers and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts and therefore they were saved." That is a clear statement of testimony. This is not hypothetical. When Alma said he was bearing down in testimony, he certainly was.

Further Reading

Jon D. Green, "The Paradox of Silence in the Arts and Religion," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1995-1996): 94-131.

Alma 5:6-9 — Remembering God's Acts for His People

The first five questions asked the audience if they could remember God's great acts for his people, their heritage, and God's deliverance. I like the way Alma asked these questions in a kind of lawyerly way, with some nice qualifiers. He didn't only ask if they had remembered; he asked if they had "*sufficiently* remembered."

Have we remembered enough? Have we remembered sufficiently the captivity, or the problems that Joseph Smith faced, or that our ancestors were plagued with as they came to settle this valley?

In verse 9, he asked, "Were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled your fathers about, were they loosed?" Do you think God acted in their lives? Do we even know enough about our ancestors, about our heritage, to answer that question?

Each of the first three questions begins with the phrase, "Have you sufficiently retained *in remembrance*...." In Hebrew, the word for remember is *zchr*, and it does not just mean to remember in the sense of *recalling*. It means to remember in the sense of *obeying*. When your mother said, "Remember what I have taught you," she wasn't asking if you could pass a recall test. When she said "Remember it," she meant, "Do what I have taught you." And that is what we see in the Book of Mormon. The word *remember* does not just mean *to think about it*, but *to do it*.

In the fourth question, Alma asked, "Were your fathers destroyed?" They were not. They were delivered from captivity. Perhaps Alma's people were worried about being destroyed; Zarahemla was not impervious to attack. Just a few years before this speech there had been a bloody civil war. The Lamanites were just now beginning to put pressure on the Nephites again. Perhaps Alma sought to put his people's minds at peace so that they knew that they could rely on God.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does Abinadi Use the Phrase 'the Bands of Death'? (Mosiah 15:8)," *KnoWhy* 93 (May 5, 2016).

Louis Midgley, "The Ways of Remembrance," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–176.

Louis Midgley, "'O Man, Remember, and Perish Not' (Mosiah 4:30)," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 127–129.

Alma 5:10–11 — Knowing the Essential Logic of the Gospel

In verses 10 to 11, Alma asked seven more questions. He took his audience through them—again, in kind of a lawyerly way—in an ordered step by step process of understanding some of the most basic principles of the gospel.

"What was *the cause* of your fathers being loosed?" (5:10). He was asking about the conditions, about the cause and effect of spiritual blessings. We need to think about that too. Part of the essential logic of the gospel is that there are consequences. Because of that, we can rely on certain outcomes, and we can therefore have hope. Alma did not stop and explain here, but he was not just asking his people to think on what conditions those others were saved. Of course, he wants us to be thinking and asking ourselves, on what conditions will I be saved?

Does God require us to hope for things that are without foundation? No. True faith is believing in things that are true, and we have a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). And that understanding is the next thing that we learn from thinking about these conditions. On what *grounds* did they have hope for salvation? That God will come into their lives, and will cause them to be loosed from the bands of death and of hell. That happens when Satan is driven out of our lives. That is the next step in Alma's instructions.

In question nine, Alma asked, "Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered from the mouth of Abinadi?" (5:11). They were expected to believe the words of the prophet. Not only to believe the words—the next question was, "Was Abinadi not a *holy* prophet?" We also must not only believe that he was a prophet and believe in his words, but we also must believe in his holy calling as an authorized messenger and agent of God who would deliver those blessings.

Question number eleven, the sixth question in this set, is, “Did Abinadi not speak the words of God?” (5:11). No one in that audience was going to doubt that Abinadi spoke the words of God; they saw his prophecies fulfilled, thus defining him as a true prophet. They would have known the law about prophets in Deuteronomy 18:21 asks how one may know a true prophet from a false one, “And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?” The key for knowing is then provided, “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22).

In Alma’s audience on this solemn occasion were still some of the people who followed Alma’s father as they fled from King Noah. In this audience also were people who had come from the city of Nephi with Limhi. They and everyone there knew these stories, and all of them would have to agree that Abinadi was a true prophet.

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[How Does Prophecy Shape the Book of Mormon’s Content and Structure?](#) (Words of Mormon 1:4),” *KnoWhy* 498 (January 15, 2019).

Alma 5:14–15 — Being Personally Converted

The next five questions dealt with being personally converted. We each have to be personally converted; this is where the importance of every single person embracing the gospel comes into play. These are the questions that I am sure hit many of you as they did me. First in this set Alma asked, “Have you been spiritually born of God?” Second, “Have you received his image in your countenance?” and third, “Have you experienced this mighty change in your heart?” (5:14). Benjamin also mentioned a mighty change in the heart, in Mosiah 5:2 when the people fell down and said, “We have experienced this mighty change of heart.” All these questions were asked so that Alma can then testify of the things that he wants them to know and to believe. He wants to get us thinking, and believing, and changing!

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 19: “Of the life-altering questions posed by Alma, those touching on three specific topics seem particularly connected: repentance, conversion, and a mighty change of heart. As we ponder, ... we are led to ask questions of our own: Which comes first in this mighty trifecta?”

Alma 5:15–24 — Imagining the Day of Judgment

The eleven questions that start in verse 15 and go to verse 24, ask, “Can you imagine the judgment day?” Do we often imagine what it will be like when we stand before God to be accounted, to be judged according to the deeds that we have done in this mortal body? Do we think about being accountable?

Think about the 19th question, “Can you imagine yourself that you hear the voice of the Lord saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold your works have been works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?” (5:16). Can you imagine that? Can you think of that? Do you think of hearing, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant?” Does that come to your mind as you hear those questions?

Getting the people to think about judgment day and to realize “I am going to be held accountable” is a very powerful spiritual motivator. On the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites celebrated God’s kingship. The king eventually was the judge, and on the Feast of Tabernacles—supposing that is when this occurred—the people would have come expecting to give an accounting of how they had done. In effect, they would have expected to go through a fiery furnace of judgment before God, so that they could repent and renew their covenants. They would have been able to walk out of that important hearing-and-renewal of the law reconciled with God and placed where they could progress. This theme of judgment, then, is a powerful one in the context of what is happening here.

As I read these verses, I really like remembering that Alma was a judge by career. For eight years he had served as the chief judge of the Nephite court system. We do not know how many cases he tried, but probably quite a few. I am sure as he sat on the bench looking down on these people, he probably heard them making up excuses and pleading for mercy and saying, “Oh I really did not do it,” and Alma was likely thinking, “There was not a one of them that I could not see through.” We do not fool the judge, and we are not going to fool God. When Alma thought about himself as a judge, and the position of God at the judgement, he was likely thinking: “On that judgment day, do you think you are going to be able to fool him any better than any of these people have fooled me?” We are getting the voice of a person who has been there. It would have made sense to them, and it resonates with us.

Was Alma actually alluding here to his own conversion experience? I think so. He did not say explicitly, “You’d better believe, because this is what happened to me,” but he knew, and he could speak with conviction because he had been there, and he had experienced the things that he was teaching. As I read verse 21, I imagine being brought before the tribunal of God. Perhaps that was one of the things that happened to Alma

during his three days of stunned silence. He said of that experience that he feared that he was going to become banished and extinct. His soul was filled with guilt and remorse, racked with eternal torment. He had a perfect recollection of his guilt. I suppose he had told that story of his own conversion enough times that his audience would have felt and said, “Alma knows what he is talking about and I ought to really take this to heart.”

Often, when we hear Alma 5 mentioned, we just think of one verse, “Have you received his image in your countenance?” (5:19). But Alma did not let them off so easily. It’s not just a matter of receiving. There will also be things testifying against them, and against us. Did that hit you? He asked, “What will these things that you have done, what will they testify of? Will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?” (5:22–23). To whom was he talking here? There may have been people in his audience who had committed murders, but nobody had been there to witness it, and so nobody could convict them. If a judge could not prove that someone had committed murder, because it was done in secret, they sometimes thought they could get away with it.

But more than that, Alma once referred to himself as having murdered many people (Alma 36:14), meaning that he had seriously damaged them spiritually. However, whether literally or spiritually, Alma said that no one was going to get away with it. He was addressing the most crucial, the most wicked of all crimes—murder. He did not let his audience off easily.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), chapter 7 “Standing before God at the Judgment Day.”

Alma 5:16–20 — Teaching to Envision Personally

He asked “can you imagine yourselves . . .” in three different situations:

“can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed” (v. 16)

“Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say— Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth” (v. 17)

“Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt” (v. 18)

He paints a picture of the sinner at the last day, before the tribunal of God, and beholding their own countenances. What makes these words so impressive is that there is a visual dimension to them all. He is saying “Can you visualize this?” It is very concrete. We speak with the spirit when we are not so abstract but are very specific.

Alma 5:26–30 — Inviting Us to Assess Our Spiritual Condition and Repent

In these verses, Alma called his people to repentance. They needed to be stripped of pride, stripped of envy. The main physical manifestation of pride in this world was costly apparent, and so that needed to be stripped off. However, this admonition was also figurative, because if you also need to rid yourself of the emotions of pride and envy.

In verse 30, Alma asked, “Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?” This was and is a real problem. We must be very careful never to belittle anyone. How hard that is! We live in a world where most of the elementary school students do a lot of teasing, if not bullying, and our children grow up with it. We have to strip ourselves of this, and we have to be really careful as parents and in our families to be sure that we do not ever tear anyone down.

Why is mocking or belittling so problematic? Have you ever been mocked? Been laughed at? I remember my professor Robert K. Thomas once saying, “The reason that mocking and laughter is so pernicious is because there is no answer for it.” When so attacked, you cannot rationally reply. And of course, you cannot laugh or even mock back. That just makes matters worse. Maybe we can laugh at ourselves, and deflect the mocking a little bit, but laughter is something that you cannot respond to, it stops the conversation, and people who mock know that. Once the damage is done, there is no way to recover from it, so we must be really careful. It can be so devastating. People feel belittled or mocked, even over something small or silly, and they leave the Church over that. They feel like they are not valued. There is no way they can redeem their self-esteem, let alone themselves, except, of course, with the help of the Savior.

These words and questions of Alma bring to our hearts and minds a lot of things for us to think about—things that are sad, things that show us the way things should not be, but also other things that help us to be strong and that help us to know that we are on the right path. That is the spirit of Alma here!

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 75: “Having received Christ’s image in our countenance, and having been delivered from captivity and bondage, we want nothing more than to be received by

Him, to go and be where He is. The Lord has made that possible through His infinite Atonement. But it is up to us to take advantage of His ultimate sacrifice by repenting.”

Alma 5:26 — Can We Sing the Song of Redeeming Love?

He asked us whether we can sing the song of redeeming love. I want to have some singing. I do not know what part Alma sang in the Zarahemla Tabernacle Choir, but I think he knew what it meant to sing as his soul sang with joy and goodness, I am sure, on many occasions.

A sister who led a Young Women’s choir for a long time said, “The way you praise God is how you live.” She would tell the girls that all the time, “If you want to be able to sing this so they know that you truly have a testimony, you sing your testimony. You sing your conversion. The way you sing is how you live.” That is a great message. Do you think Alma would have agreed with it? What makes you believe that? He lived the life. He walked the walk. He exuded this kind of enthusiasm and the dedication that shows that he lived what he testified. It is also a part of the Young Women’s theme, that we testify of him at all times and in all places. Well how do we do that? By the way we live.

When Alma described his conversion to Helaman in Alma 36:22, singing came up again. When he feared that he was going to be destroyed, he said, “I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.” He wanted to be in the choir! I think that was part of the *song of redeeming love* that he was referring to in Alma 5.

Further Reading

LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, “*Alma 5: The Song of Redeeming Love*,” in *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2011), 520–537.

Alma 5:39 — Identifying with a “Fold”

Whereas mocking tends to drive people away, the gospel brings people together. As Alma said, “ye are of his fold.” Having a flock, a community that believes in Jesus Christ, the shepherd to be followed, matters. It strengthens us. We do not make it alone. We have to work together, and the Good Shepherd will protect his fold.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 61: “since Alma taught that there are ultimately only two flocks, it stands to

reason that there are only two shepherds. The doctrine of the Two Ways, which can be found repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon, constantly invites all people to choose to belong to the flock of the Good Shepherd.”

Alma 5:45–47 — How We Obtain Spiritual Knowledge

The next step is that you must obtain spiritual knowledge. In this passage Alma testified, “Do you not suppose that I know of these things myself? And how do you suppose that I know of their surety?” Interesting that Alma uses this word *surety* here. “To know of a *surety*.” When he first experienced his conversion, he knew! He said, “I have been born of God. I know.” And in Alma 36 later said, “For ye ought to know as I do know” (Alma 36:30), but that was not all that Alma ever learned.

The Holy Ghost reinforced and taught Alma more, as he fasted and prayed many days, kept the commandments, served, and lived righteously. There came a greater level of knowledge. He gained an assurance, a surety, and he knew at more than just the experiential level of having been called to repentance.

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), chapter 8 “Receiving Personal Revelation.”

Alma 5:53–59 — Refusing to Repent

Alma knew what would have happened if he had not repented, but now he knew with an even greater assurance than before. He was, at this time, bearing a very powerful testimony of the truthfulness of his knowledge as a prophet of God, as one who had received a very, very powerful conviction of the truthfulness.

Alma 5:5–59 — Application of the Speech

Put yourself in the audience listening to Alma’s speech in Alma 5. How would the speech have affected you if you were

- One of the 3,500 recent converts who had just joined the church (3:4)?
- A soldier who had been seriously wounded in the battle against Amlici?
- A widow of a soldier who had fought for Amlici and against Alma?
- An old-time faithful member of the church of Alma the Elder?
- A Mulekite friendly toward Alma but who still felt politically excluded?
- A member of the church who was still leaning toward the teachings of Nehor?
- A faithful father and mother with a rebellious teenage son?
- A senior citizen who had entered the covenant following Benjamin’s speech?

Alma was addressing all of these people. So, try to put yourself in the audience here. Think, first of all, “What if I am just a recent convert? I have just joined the church; that battle with Amlici was pretty bloody and I have decided to turn over a new leaf in my life; I have been pretty bad in the past and I am now a member in this church, and I listen to Alma. How do I react?” How would you react as you hear what he is saying? Is there anything there that you would really resonate with as a recent convert?

Would someone who had just recently joined the group have been overwhelmed with the questions that he was asking? He certainly does unload a lot on people here. But does he also reassure them? Does he speak of anything that they might have recently experienced, in which they would say, “Yes, there is hope. There is goodness here.”

Throughout all these chapters there comes out loud and clear the importance of repentance and cleansing oneself, preparing oneself, and I think Alma, by all the questions and everything else, is saying that. So, he is giving great hope to the recent convert. He is speaking pretty harshly and very directly to longer time members. He is getting after them, and I think the new convert may have been saying to himself, “Hey, I have repented. I have cleansed myself. I am here,” and I think that gives a new convert great hope, especially if they have just recently been baptized.

I do not know about you, but I remember coming home right after being baptized. It was a Saturday night, and I was eight years old. I felt a wonderful feeling of being perfectly cleansed, and I remember the thought, “All I have to do is hang on for about 80 years and I am okay.” Well, that’s easier said than done, but that freshness does give us all as new converts optimism. On a couple of occasions, such as in verses 7 and 13, Alma talks exactly about that mighty change that has happened. It is an echo to Mosiah chapter 5, in which Benjamin talked about the mighty change that had happened in those people and the covenant, and being sealed unto God and unto the promise of eternal life (Mosiah 5:15).

Further Reading

Ed J. Pinegar and John W. Welch, *Experiencing a Mighty Change of Heart: Alma’s Guide to a Deep, Lasting Conversion* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2020), 129: “Alma asks us, as he asked his audience in Zarahemla, a sobering question: could we say, if we were called to die at this time—*right now*—that we have sufficiently prepared, that our ‘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).”

Alma 6

Alma 6:4 — Alma Re-established the Church in Zarahemla

Alma the Elder established a covenant community around 140 BC at the Waters of Mormon in the land of Nephi (Mosiah 18:17–18). When his group rejoined the Nephites in Zarahemla after 120 BC, King Mosiah “granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19). Soon “there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 25:23). By about 83 BC, however, Alma the Younger had to once again “establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla” (Alma 6:4). Initially, “many of the rising generation” in the land of Zarahemla had forgotten or “could not understand the words of king Benjamin” and several of them would not be baptized (Mosiah 26:1, 4). Dissensions arose “among the brethren,” and some people, eventually including Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, “deceived many with their flattering words” (Mosiah 26:6; 27:8). Some dissenters were excommunicated (Mosiah 26:36), and the unbelievers began persecuting members of the church (Mosiah 27:1).

Further Reading

Book of Mormon Central, “[Why Did Alma Need to ‘Establish the Order of the Church’ in Zarahemla Again? \(Alma 6:4\),”](#) *KnoWhy* 113 (June 2, 2016).

Alma 6:7–8 — The City of Gideon

Gideon, the city that Alma visited next, was named after the great Limhite warrior that was killed by Nehor (Alma 6:7); “There having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword.”

It was a city where the people had kept themselves clean and unspotted from the world. In Alma’s speech to the people of Gideon, he made no reference to Nehor’s preaching and death. One might think that Alma would have made something of a political speech out of this, reminding them that he had executed their hero. However, that was not Alma’s purpose or “errand from the Lord” (Jacob 1:17).

Alma 7

Alma 7:1–27 — Joy in Speaking to the People of Gideon

In verse 4, Alma used the phrase “exceedingly great joy,” and again in verse 26, “my soul doth exceedingly rejoice.” The words *joy* and *rejoicing* are modified by *exceedingly*.

What a relief! He finally had an audience of people who were righteous and good. They had waited a long time, as he explained, “having had much business that I could not come unto you.”

In Alma 5, Alma’s focus of attention was calling the people to repentance and enabling a mighty change of heart. In Alma 7, the focus was on rejoicing. Maybe he knew the people in Zarahemla all too well, but here in Gideon, in Alma 7, he was talking to some people who have never heard him speak before. He was glad to finally be able to come and speak to them in his own voice. I suppose he had sent some other people—messengers and others—but now he is finally there himself. What an experience that would have been for them finally to hear Alma speaking to them in person.

When our Church leaders speak to a smaller group, for example, at a Stake Conference, they tailor their comments to the group at hand. When Elder Oaks spoke in our Stake Conference a few years ago, he expressed great personal joy in being able to talk to us. We could tell he cared for who we are, and we could sense what he felt we needed. We get that same feeling from Alma as he begins speaking to the Gideonites. He calls them his “beloved brethren” and he says, “Seeing that I have been committed to come to you.” It is very gracious. Imagine how they might have felt. They probably did not get General Authorities visiting very often.

Alma 7:1–27 — A Different Speech for the People of Gideon

In Alma 5, there were 50 questions. How many questions can you count in Alma 7? There is not one! What a shift in terms of voice register. We have a completely different style here. If biblical scholars who specialize in hypotheses about authorship were to analyze these two texts, I wonder if they would tell us that they were written by two different people. But authorship attribution is not that easy. When people generally are talking to different audiences they communicate in different ways. In Alma 5, Alma was bearing down on the people and he did not want to answer the questions he posed because he wanted *them* to answer those questions. In Alma 7, he just laid out the doctrine. He could open up and give them the straight teachings.

Alma 7:4 — A Righteous People

In Verse 4, Alma remarked, “I trust according to the spirit that I shall have joy over you.” He is full of trust, faith, and confidence in Gideon. There were four core things in verse 6 that he firmly and positively believed about these people:

- I trust that ye are not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren;
- I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; yea,

- 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.

This sincere statement of trust likely engendered a relationship of confidence between Alma and this audience, so that these people realized that he knew and cared about them. When we hear speakers address us in this generous fashion, even if we know that we are not all one hundred percent worthy of those compliments, we want to believe these good things about ourselves. As Alma expressed his confidence in them before he began his discourse, when we talk to our children or grandchildren or people we minister to, we would do well to express that same confidence. We could say such things as “I trust that you are doing these things,” or “I trust that you have read your scriptures this week and have come to this class prepared.”

Alma 7:7–13 — What Does Alma Teach about the Atonement?

The setting of this speech was clearly a sacred one. The written part of the sermon is very short and concise, but it is very unlikely that Alma would have gone there to teach for only fifteen minutes, which is about as long as it takes to read Alma 7 out loud. Mormon explains that more was involved on this occasion. The record says, “Having taught the people of Gideon many things that cannot be written, having established the order of the church according as he had done before in the Land of Zarahemla . . .” (Alma 8:1). The words “many things that cannot be written” may indicate that the Lord restrained him from writing or recording these great things that were said or done with these faithful people.

Alma’s speech or sermon on this occasion contained a classic statement of the coming of Christ and of the Atonement. He testified that Christ would come to earth, but we should notice that he did not know whether Jesus would come to these people or not (Alma 7:8). He had apparently received no revelation about whether Christ would come to this land or not. He knew that the Savior would be born in (or near) Jerusalem to a person named Mary, and that he was the Son of God. But apparently he did not know everything about how or whether Christ would get to his land, and if he did, how he would appear. Perhaps he knew more than he told the people on this occasion, but we don’t do the text any favors by reading things back into the text that haven’t yet been learned. When Jesus finally did appear in 3 Nephi 11, it was more amazing and wondrous than they had, or ever could have, expected.

After talking in verse 10 about the miraculous birth of Jesus who would come as the Son of God, Alma said, “And the Son of God shall go forth suffering pains and afflictions and

temptations of every kind” (7:11). Here, Alma appears to be drawing on Isaiah 53, which Abinadi had quoted when speaking to the priests of Noah: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2); “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7); and “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). Alma would have connected these words with the people of Gideon, because their parents and grandparents were among the people of Noah and his son Limhi, just as Alma was the son of Alma the Elder, who had been converted by Abinadi. So, it is fitting that Alma would have emphasized the suffering dimension of the Atonement in speaking to these people.

Alma said that the Son of God would do this so that, “*the word* might be fulfilled which saith: ‘He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people’” (Alma 7:11). If these words are an exact quotation, as they appear to be, we do not have the prophecy from which it was quoted. Or these words about Jesus taking upon him our pains and sicknesses may be Alma’s paraphrase of either Isaiah 53 or of some parts of King Benjamin. But, in either event, here Alma intensifies this prophetic information in two very important ways. First, Alma mentions pains, afflictions, and temptations of *every kind*. That is a stronger statement of the expansive reach of the Atonement than we can find anywhere else in scripture. And second, Alma says that all that will be accomplished in order for the prophetic word of God to be fulfilled.

In this regard, our minds rightly turn to the words found in Luke 22:44, which says that Jesus was in “an agony.” The English word “an” here is a bit puzzling. What does it mean to be *in an agony*? He certainly was *in agony*, in unimaginable pain and affliction. However, in the Greek, Luke was actually saying that He was in an *agon*, which means a battle, a conflict, or a contest. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ fought and won the final battle, the ultimate conflict, between the Son of God and the Son of Darkness. And what was at stake was our eternal existence. He took up this battle; he took on death, and He won, so that He loosed the bands of death. Without having defeated the forces of death, He could not loosen us from those bands.

In addition, Alma says, “And he will take upon him their infirmities.” And indeed, Christ has already taken our infirmities upon Himself, so that all we have to do is have enough faith to come to Him and draw upon the reservoir of credit that He has already put in the bank for us. If we can do what is right and if we will ask—and Alma gives plenty of instruction here that we must and should ask and pray for these things of which we stand in need—they will be granted to us.

It is a wonderful blessing that He has done this for us. Not only has He absorbed all of those infirmities, but He learned something in that process. In Hebrews 5 it says that the

Son of God will learn *obedience* by the things that He suffers. But in Alma 7 we learn something unique to scripture, namely that He will also learn something in this extreme struggle as well: that His bowels may be filled with mercy. He had need to be filled up with mercy. Being full of mercy and empathy, there is no room for criticism or judgment on His part. You do not have to fear, that when you come to Christ, that He will be judgmental or critical. He will not turn you away or be disappointed that you have done such a thing or had such a problem, because He is *full* of mercy. There is no room there for anything else but loving kindness. He has learned mercy because He was somehow vicariously able to experience all of our infirmities, which gives Him a power, a real force, and a connectivity, that he otherwise would not have had.

And what does this word succor mean? To succor is to strengthen, but the root of the word “-cor,” also means “to run.” A courier is a runner. And the prefix “suc-” comes from the preposition “sub,” meaning from beneath or below, as in the word “support,” meaning “to carry or bear (port) from beneath (sub).” “To succor,” therefore, means *run* to a person to give strength and help from a foundation below. Having descended below all things, the Savior now is so full of mercy that He knows how to run to us when we are in our moment of need and to bear us up. He won’t hold back. He will rush to our side. What a wonderful way of seeing and expressing the openness of the Atonement. Alma is the only one in scripture who emphasizes this aspect of Christ’s sustaining power. And Alma himself, in his own conversion, has had first-hand experience with Christ’s succoring power. His words in Alma 7:11–12, therefore, should be understood as Alma’s autobiographical testimony that this is what the Savior will do and how He is able to do these things. Because of all of this, Alma can truly say, “Now the spirit knoweth all things” (7:13). Christ experienced it all and has been filled with the knowledge of all things. Thus, Alma personally testifies, “that he might take upon Him the sins of his people, that He might blot out their transgressions according to the power of His deliverance. And now, behold, this is the testimony which is in me” (7:13). This is a humble, understated testimony here, but most certainly a clear and true one.

In 2009, President Eyring said in General Conference that it is perfectly clear and assuring that our Heavenly Father and Savior live and that they love all humanity and that “the very opportunity for us to face adversity and affliction is part of the evidence of their infinite love.” It is interesting that God gave us the gift of living in mortality, so we could be prepared to receive the greatest of all the gifts of God which is eternal life in the heavenly kingdom of God, as Alma repeatedly mentions (7:14, 16, 19, 21). As President Eyring continued:

In this education we experience misery and happiness, sickness and health, the sadness from sin and the joy of forgiveness. That forgiveness can come only through the infinite Atonement of the Savior, which He worked out through pain we could not bear and which we can only faintly comprehend.

It will comfort us when we must wait in distress for the Savior’s promised relief that He knows, from experience, how to heal and help us. The Book of Mormon gives us the certain assurance of His power to comfort. And faith in that power will give us patience as we pray and work and wait for help. He could have known how to succor us simply by revelation, but He chose to learn by His own personal experience.

And then he goes on and quotes Alma 7:11–13. I think that is very powerful. It means Christ could have received this knowledge of suffering by revelation, because we know we can know things by the spirit. However, he *chose* to suffer. To me this is the Savior going the second mile. Alma emphasized that Jesus would know all this, not only by the Spirit, but also “according to the flesh” (7:12, 13). To make that choice, Jesus wanted to know exactly how it would feel, not just an impression of the spirit, what it would be like, and how we too, in a mortal state, would feel.

Further Reading

Henry B. Eyring, “Adversity,” General Conference April 2009, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

Alma 7:14–15 — Alma Invites the People to be Baptized

In these verses, Alma encourages these people to come and be baptized unto repentance, that they can be washed of their sins, that they can witness to God that they will keep his commandments and basically enter into the entire baptismal covenant that his father Alma had instituted at the Waters of Mormon.

They are probably going to be baptized in a river or natural body of water. We don’t know where this could have taken place, but anywhere in the Western Hemisphere in Alma’s day, there could have been danger in these waters. These converts could have encountered alligators, water moccasins, slippery banks, or river currents. I doubt that many of these people could swim. Lakes and springs were thought, in most ancient civilizations, to be openings into the underworld. I remember being in a small boat on the Usumacinta River in southern Mexico looking at huge alligators on the sandy beach as we went by, and I sat very still in the middle of the boat and hoped that it didn’t spring a leak! Going down into the water might well have been fearsome to these people, and so being baptized was a serious matter.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, in fact, if you were challenged as an accuser or as a witness in court, and there were conflicting testimonies or a lack of decisive evidence, so that the judges couldn't really tell who was right or wrong, the *river ordeal* was the way in which Babylonian law resolved the matter. In such a case, one of the people—the one who seemed to be the weakest as a witness—would be required to submit to the *river ordeal* which consisted of being taken out in the middle of the river and thrown in. If the person was able to get to shore, this was a sign that the gods had favored you and your testimony would then be believed. But if you were a false witness telling a lie, you would be swallowed up and swept away by the wild river.

The people in Gideon were surely still of mixed faithfulness. Undergoing baptism would show and strengthen their spiritual determination and would be a strong testimony, witnessing to God, that they were telling the truth as they said that they wanted to enter into a covenant and be true and faithful in keeping the commandments. But at the same time in that world, once you were baptized, it made sense, symbolically and legalistically, that you owed your allegiance to God, who had sustained you through this test. That allegiance would be owed to the church which Alma was establishing, regardless of the consequences. And in Alma's world, being a member of the church was not a casual matter. Besides alligators and the wildness of the river, persecutions of believers was intense in places like Ammonihah. I don't think we should downplay the word "fear," when Alma tells these people to "come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, . . . which doth bind you down to destruction" (7:15).

Alma 7:21–24 — The Spirit Cannot Dwell in Unholy Temples

This statement in Alma 7:21 reminds me of the great qualities that King Benjamin talked about in Mosiah 3:19, in saying that "the natural man is an enemy to God, has been since the Fall of Adam, and will be forever and ever until he yields to the enticing of the Holy Spirit and becometh a saint through the atonement." The natural conditions of wickedness include "filthiness" which cannot be received into the kingdom of God. Being pure and clean would not have been a common daily occurrence for most of these people, who did not have bathtubs or showers in their homes.

Some of the things that Benjamin lists in Mosiah 3:19 are repeated here by Alma in this passage: humble, submissive, gentle, patient, long-suffering and being easy to be entreated (7:23). It is interesting to me that patience is included here. Patience is included in Alma 9:26 where Alma talked about the characteristics of the Savior. We don't often think of how patient God is with us, as He puts up with us despite all that we do. What in your mind makes patience such a Godly virtue?

Alma 7:27 — Alma Pronounces a Concluding Blessing on the People

In the ancient Israelite sacrificial system, there were different kinds of sacrifices. *Atoning* sacrifices reconciled and brought man and God back together where there had been a separation between them because of sin or impurity. The words, *sin, guilt, transgression,* and *peace,* are present in Alma 7. Those words represent the full panoply of all of the types of sacrifices in the Law of Moses, under which there were sin offerings, guilt offerings, atoning sacrifices, and peace offerings. Alma, as the High Priest, who had probably just performed the special sacrifices on the Day of Atonement during the season connected with the Feast of Tabernacles, would have been especially sensitive of the great power and purposes of living the laws of sacrifice and obedience. As the High Priest, Alma had particular duties to keep the temple pure and holy, to cleanse it on the Day of Atonement, so that it could symbolize to the people the complete workings of the Law of Moses, welcoming Jesus as the one who fulfills all of these forms of sacrificial offerings and of atoning reconciliation for us.

In Verse 27, Alma concludes with a blessing efficaciously echoing the peace offering, and what a blessing it is: “May the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever.” Perhaps you have been present in situations where you’ve had an apostolic blessing pronounced upon an audience—how encouraging and faith building that is. Here, in Alma 7:27, we have the prophet and high priest Alma pronouncing a blessing in Gideon upon these wonderful people, who are just as wonderful and blessed as you are.