

Comments on Alma 18

1 AND it came to pass that king Lamoni caused that his servants should stand forth and testify to all the things which they had seen concerning the matter. 2 And when they had all testified to the things which they had seen, and he had learned of the faithfulness of Ammon in preserving his flocks, and also of his great power in contending against those who sought to slay him, he was astonished exceedingly, and said: Surely, this is more than a man. Behold, is not this the Great Spirit who doth send such great punishments upon this people, because of their murders? 3 And they answered the king, and said: whether he be the Great Spirit or a man, we know not; but this much we do know, that he cannot be slain by the enemies of the king; neither can they scatter the king's flocks when he is with us, because of his expertness and great strength; therefore, we know that he is a friend to the king. And now, O king, we do not believe that a man has such great power, for we know he cannot be slain. 4 And now, when the king heard these words, he said unto them: Now I know that it is the Great Spirit; and he has come down at this time to preserve your lives, that I might not slay you as I did your brethren. Now this is the Great Spirit of whom our fathers have spoken.

v2 "is not this the Great Spirit", obviously, Lamoni cannot be referring to a spirit in the sense of a disembodied spirit as Ammon is quite corporeal. Lamoni's comments here and in v. 5 plainly indicate that their concept of spirits is that they can become incarnate and it is even possible for this Great Spirit to become fleshed.

Those unfavorably disposed to the doctrines of the LDS Church occasionally use the contents of v. 26-28 and 22:9-11 to say the BofM contradicts the LDS doctrine that God the Father is an exalted person with a resurrected body because here it allegedly says that God is a Great Spirit. It is clear from Lamoni's comments here that their strict definition of a spirit without flesh and bone does not fit their concept of what the Great Spirit is.

Even aside from this, according to LDS doctrine it was the Son who performed the Creation with the Father's authority and the son was a spirit without flesh and bone at that point, so their argument has no merit as there is no contradiction.

5 Now this was the tradition of Lamoni, which he had received from his father, that there was a Great Spirit. Notwithstanding they believed in a Great Spirit, they supposed that whatsoever they did was right; nevertheless, Lamoni began to fear exceedingly, with fear lest he had done wrong in slaying his servants; 6 For he had slain many of them because their

brethren had scattered their flocks at the place of water; and thus, because they had had their flocks scattered they were slain. 7 Now it was the practice of these Lamanites to stand by the waters of Sebus to scatter the flocks of the people, that thereby they might drive away many that were scattered unto their own land, it being a practice of plunder among them.

v5 "Lamoni began to fear exceedingly", Ammon killed the scatterers of the sheep for their making sport of bringing about the execution of the king's servants. Now, Lamoni fears he is next in line for punishment. He himself fears he will be killed by Ammon, hence his unusual silence at the subsequent confrontation in v. 12-17.

8 And it came to pass that king Lamoni inquired of his servants, saying: where is this man that has such great power? 9 And they said unto him: Behold, he is feeding thy horses. Now the king had commanded his servants, previous to the time of the watering of their flocks, that they should prepare his horses and chariots, and conduct him forth to the land of Nephi; for there had been a great feast appointed at the land of Nephi, by the father of Lamoni, who was king over all the land. 10 Now when king Lamoni heard that Ammon was preparing his horses and his chariots he was more astonished, because of the faithfulness of Ammon, saying: surely there has not been any servant among all my servants that has been so faithful as this man; for even he doth remember all my commandments to execute them. 11 Now I surely know that this is the Great Spirit, and I would desire him that he come in unto me, but I durst not.

v9 "horses and chariots", references to horses and chariots are rare in the Book of Mormon, and are never mentioned in the context of war or military action. In the Bible, horses and chariots are synonymous with the military. In the Book of Mormon they are only referenced as livestock and transportation (cf. 19:9-12, 20:6, 3 Ne. 3:22, and it seems likely Lamoni's father, the king of the Lamanites was either horseback or on a chariot as well in 20:8). There is clear fossil evidence of prehistoric horses in the Americas and there is fragmentary evidence of horses in pre-Columbian times. The assumption among historians is that horses were introduced into the Americas by Westerners, but there is building evidence of native populations of horses prior to Columbian times

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curly_Horse).

12 And it came to pass that when Ammon had made ready the horses and the chariots for the king and his servants, he went in unto the king, and he saw that the countenance of the king was changed; therefore he was about to return out of his presence. 13 And one of the king's servants said unto him, Rabbanah, which

is, being interpreted, powerful or great king, considering their kings to be powerful; and thus he said unto him: Rabbanah, the king desireth thee to stay.

14 Therefore Ammon turned himself unto the king, and said unto him: what wilt thou that I should do for thee, O king? And the king answered him not for the space of an hour, according to their time, for he knew not what he should say unto him. 15 And it came to pass that Ammon said unto him again: what desirest thou of me? But the king answered him not.

16 And it came to pass that Ammon, being filled with the Spirit of God, therefore he perceived the thoughts of the king. And he said unto him: Is it because thou hast heard that I defended thy servants and thy flocks, and slew seven of their brethren with the sling and with the sword, and smote off the arms of others, in order to defend thy flocks and thy servants; behold, is it this that causeth thy marvelings? 17 I say unto you, what is it, that thy marvelings are so great? Behold, I am a man, and am thy servant; therefore, whatsoever thou desirest which is right, that will I do.

v12-17 Verse 18 informs us "he marveled again...but notwithstanding this, king Lamoni did open his mouth", If he is here "marvel[ing] again" then v. 12-17 he must be marveling for the first time but the first time he remains silent. To marvel means to wonder over or be astonished at something. And, we are informed in v. 5 that he is fearful as well. So, Lamoni is overpowered by his fear and awe at the apparent invulnerability of Ammon and his apparent mission of vindication.

v26-28 See the comments on v. 2 above.

18 Now when the king had heard these words, he marveled again, for he beheld that Ammon could discern his thoughts; but notwithstanding this, king Lamoni did open his mouth, and said unto him: who art thou? Art thou that Great Spirit, who knows all things? 19 Ammon answered and said unto him: I am not.

20 And the king said: How knowest thou the thoughts of my heart? Thou mayest speak boldly, and tell me concerning these things; and also tell me by what power ye slew and smote off the arms of my brethren that scattered my flocks-- 21 And now, if thou wilt tell me concerning these things, whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee; and if it were needed, I would guard thee with my armies; but I know that thou art more powerful than all they; nevertheless, whatsoever thou desirest of me I will grant it unto thee.

22 Now Ammon being wise, yet harmless, he said unto Lamoni: wilt thou hearken unto my words, if I tell thee by what power I do these things? And this is the thing that I desire of thee.

23 And the king answered him, and said: Yea, I will believe all thy words. And thus he was caught with guile.

24 And Ammon began to speak unto him with boldness, and said unto him: Believest thou that there is a God? 25 And he answered, and said unto him: I do not know what that meaneth. 26 And then Ammon said: Believest thou that there is a Great

Spirit? 27 And he said, Yea. 28 And Ammon said: This is God. And Ammon said unto him again: Believest thou that this Great Spirit, who is God, created all things which are in heaven and in the earth? 29 And he said: Yea, I believe that he created all things which are in the earth; but I do not know the heavens. 30 And Ammon said unto him: The heavens is a place where God dwells and all his holy angels. 31 And king Lamoni said: Is it above the earth? 32 And Ammon said: Yea, and he looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning.

33 And king Lamoni said: I believe all these things which thou hast spoken. Art thou sent from God? 34 Ammon said unto him: I am a man; and man in the beginning was created after the image of God, and I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true; 35 And a portion of that spirit dwelleth in me, which giveth me knowledge, and also power according to my faith and desires which are in God.

v18-35 Ammon establishes a common baseline for their religious conversation by defining terms, so as to reduce or eliminate semantic problems between them. Once he does this, Ammon launches into a lengthy, all encompassing discourse on Israelite religion and Lehite history in v. 36-39.

36 Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem. 37 And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth. 38 And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time. 39 But this is not all; for he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.

v36 "he began at the creation", Aaron does likewise in teaching Lamoni's father, cf. 22:12.

40 And it came to pass that after he had said all these things, and expounded them to the king, that the king believed

all his words. 41 And he began to cry unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hast had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people. 42 And now, when he had said this, he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead. 43 And it came to pass that his servants took him and carried him in unto his wife, and laid him upon a bed; and he lay as if he were dead for the space of two days and two nights; and his wife, and his sons, and his daughters mourned over him, after the manner of the Lamanites, greatly lamenting his loss.

v42 Lamoni's reaction is similar to that described in Dan. 8:27, Acts 9:4-19, 1 Ne. 1:6-7, 1 Ne. 19:20, Mos. 27:19, Moses 1:9-10, JS-H 1:20. In modern medicine, events like this would be labeled vasovagal syncope or a psychogenic blackout. Wikipedia says, "Vasovagal syncope is typically triggered by seeing blood, pain, emotional stress, or prolonged standing." Ammon and Lamoni's conversation must have lasted hours from v. 36-40. If they didn't stop to eat or drink or take a break, the prolonged physical experience added to the emotional turmoil of having your entire world view upended would have caused a reaction like this. Now, Lamoni's experience is clearly connected to his conversion and he experiences revelatory events (cf. 19:13, 19:34), so this goes well beyond a simple case of fainting due to physical exhaustion.

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