

Comments on Alma 33

In this chapter Alma responds to a second question, whether they had to believe in "one God" (v. 1). As the Zoramite priests and teachers had rejected the doctrine of Christ as folly (cf. 31:16-17), these people are now questioning Alma as to its validity. In the typical Law of Moses fashion of every word being established by two or three witnesses, Alma cites Zenos (v. 3-11), Zenock (v. 15-17), and Moses (v. 18-20) as testifying of Christ. He then exhorts them himself to believe in Christ (v. 21-23), and in the following chapter Amulek testifies of Christ. Three ancient Scriptural witnesses and two live contemporary witnesses.

Interestingly enough, Alma skips Isaiah as a prophet who testified of the Messiah. Probably because of the difficulty of the text. The first two examples he uses clearly and unambiguously reference the "Son". Isaiah's texts are not so straightforward.

1 NOW after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith.

v1 This verse suggests that after the crowd hears the sermon from the previous chapter, there was some internal discussion and then they approached with a follow-up question.

2 And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. 3 Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship? 4 For he said:

Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me. 5 Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me. 6 And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer. 7 And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me. 8 Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them. 9 Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations. 10 Yea, and thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction. 11 And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus

merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.

12 And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? 13 Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son. 14 Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

v2-12 Alma responds to the question with an appeal to Scripture, the first witness being Zenos, who prayed at every occasion for every purpose, and who clearly believes in the Son as a Deliverer.

While the Zoramites had rejected the Nephite view of the Law of Moses, they must have still studied the Scriptures and appealed to them as an authority at some level, for Alma to use them in his appeal to this group. If they never had any connection to Scripture, it seems unlikely Alma would have used that in an evidentiary appeal.

v3 "Zenos, the prophet of old", see comments on Jacob 5 for discussion of who Zenos was.

v4-11 A quote of Zenos. In the present context Alma's primary purpose is to point out to them that Zenos makes reference to the Son of God, cf. v. 11. But, Zenos' comments concerning praying over many things in many places also serves to address the subject of the question in the preceding chapter concerning worship strictly limited to synagogues, cf. v. 2.

A careful review of the quotation of Zenos shows it is in two halves, verses 4-7 are the first half and 8-11 are the second have, with v. 7 forming the center. The first half emphasizes Zenos taking the initiative in praying and the Lord hearing him. The second half emphasizes the Lord's action in response to the request. The purpose is to show there is a relationship between the person praying and the Lord, as it says in v. 7, "I..prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me." Prayer is how we have a relationship with the Lord.

v9 "in the midst of thy congregations", in all likelihood this phrase was taken from Ps. 74:4, the only other appearance of that phrase in the Scriptures. The KJV on this passage doesn't do a particularly good job at translating this, so compare the KJV on Ps 74 with the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation of the same passage:

KJV

JPS

3 Lift up thy feet unto	Lift up Your feet because of
the perpetual desolations;	of the perpetual tumult,
all of the outrages	
even all that the enemy	of the enemy
	hath done wickedly
in the sanctuary.	in the sanctuary.
4 Thine enemies roar	Your foes roar
in the midst of	inside
thy congregations;	your meeting place;
they set up their ensigns	they take their signs,
for signs.	for true signs.

It is more plain in the JPS that "in the midst of thy congregations" really means "inside your meeting place", which is in parallel to the "sanctuary". In other words, the Temple. What Zenos is saying in v. 9 is that the Lord has heard his prayers in the Temple. This rounds out the places where Zenos prays in v. 4-9 to include all kinds of places including, but not exclusively, the Temple.

v10 "mine enemies, thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction", while some of the enemies are destroyed in the Lord's anger, some of them do turn to Zenos and they become friends per v. 4.

Who these enemies are is unclear. In Ps. 74 the enemies are those who despoil and profane the Temple, setting up their own form of idolatrous worship there. However, one could easily read Ps. 74 as a lament after the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem.

15 For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things--16 For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son. 17 And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death. 18 But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God.

v15-18 Alma presents the second witness, Zenock, a prophet who testified of the Son of God and was martyred for it.

19 Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. 20 But

few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

21 O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish? 22 If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

v19-22 Alma's third witness is Moses, who held up the serpent in the wilderness (v. 19-20), and says they have a choice just as did ancient Israel in whether they look to the Son and he healed or die in their unbelief (v. 21-22).

23 And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.

v23 Alma closes with a final appeal to try the gospel and see for themselves.

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