

Comments on Alma 37

Alma passes on the plates, and probably the Urim and Thummim and Liahona as well (cf. v. 47), to Helaman. The discussion is meant to convey the spiritual meaning and symbolism of these artifacts. They aren't just curiosities, they are important devices meant to guide and help the Lord's people.

Alma doesn't leave until ch. 45, probably some months later, and the text doesn't explicitly state that Alma makes Helaman high priest at that point, but all of the evidence points to that being the case. Here, Alma is clearly preparing him to take over. Why the delay? Alma is probably traveling to the churches in and around Zarahemla to set things in order and say goodbye.

1 AND now, my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me; 2 And I also command you that ye keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi, and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them; for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept.

3 And these plates of brass, which contain these engravings, which have the records of the holy scriptures upon them, which have the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning-- 4 Behold, it has been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon. 5 And now behold, if they are kept they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness; yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ.

6 Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise. 7 And the Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.

8 And now, it has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved; for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls. 9 Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them

unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer. 10 And who knoweth but what they will be the means of bringing many thousands of them, yea, and also many thousands of our stiffnecked brethren, the Nephites, who are now hardening their hearts in sin and iniquities, to the knowledge of their Redeemer? 11 Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear. 12 And it may suffice if I only say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God; for he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works, and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

v1-12 Alma gives the plates of Nephi to his oldest son Helaman and requires him to keep the plates as he did himself (v. 1-2). He tells Helaman to keep the Plates of Brass as well, so the prophecies concerning them will be kept (v. 3-5). It may seem like a small and foolish thing, but it is actually very important that the record be preserved for future generations (v. 6-7). These records were essential in the conversion of the Lamanites (v. 8-9), and they may play the same role in bringing the Nephites to repentance as well (v. 10), as they will likely need it (v. 11). The Lord requires it to bring about His work (v. 12).

Alma's intent is to require Helaman to take over the care and maintenance of the plates, but he wants Helaman to know this isn't a requirement from himself, but is part of the Lord's larger purposes in reclaiming the Lehites when they apostatize.

v11 Alma knows the future of the Nephites (cf. 45:9-14), but not all of it, so he holds off making predictions at the present time.

13 O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land--but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence. 14 And now remember, my son, that God has entrusted you with these things, which are sacred, which he has kept sacred, and also which he will keep and preserve for a wise purpose in him, that he may show forth his power unto future generations.

15 And now behold, I tell you by the spirit of prophecy, that if ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan, that he may sift you as chaff before the wind.

16 But if ye keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you, (for you must appeal unto the Lord for all things whatsoever ye must do with them) behold, no power of

earth or hell can take them from you, for God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words. 17 For he will fulfil all his promises which he shall make unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers. 18 For he promised unto them that he would preserve these things for a wise purpose in him, that he might show forth his power unto future generations.

19 And now behold, one purpose hath he fulfilled, even to the restoration of many thousands of the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth; and he hath shown forth his power in them, and he will also still show forth his power in them unto future generations; therefore they shall be preserved. 20 Therefore I command you, my son Helaman, that ye be diligent in fulfilling all my words, and that ye be diligent in keeping the commandments of God as they are written.

v13-20 Alma warns Helaman that the plates are part of the covenant blessings and curses associated with Israel in general (v. 13-14). Alma warns Helaman that if he fails to take this seriously, they will be taken away from him and he will suffer serious eternal consequences (v. 15). But, if he takes them seriously, the Lord will support and protect him and fulfill all of the promises made to him (v. 16-17), because the Lord must preserve the records for future people (v. 18). Just as the records help restore the Lamanites, so will they be preserved for future generations who need to be restored (v. 19). This is why Helaman has to take this calling seriously (v. 20).

v15 This is a strident warning against his own son. He is telling him plainly that failure to follow through on taking care of the plates will result in his physical and eternal destruction. Alma is not mincing his words.

21 And now, I will speak unto you concerning those twenty-four plates, that ye keep them, that the mysteries and the works of darkness, and their secret works, or the secret works of those people who have been destroyed, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, all their murders, and robbings, and their plunderings, and all their wickedness and abominations, may be made manifest unto this people; yea, and that ye preserve these interpreters. 22 For behold, the Lord saw that his people began to work in darkness, yea, work secret murders and abominations; therefore the Lord said, if they did not repent they should be destroyed from off the face of the earth. 23 And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.

24 And now, my son, these interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying: 25 I

will bring forth out of darkness unto light all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land. 26 And now, my son, we see that they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed, and thus far the word of God has been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us. 27 And now, my son, I command you that ye retain all their oaths, and their covenants, and their agreements in their secret abominations; yea, and all their signs and their wonders ye shall keep from this people, that they know them not, lest peradventure they should fall into darkness also and be destroyed.

28 For behold, there is a curse upon all this land, that destruction shall come upon all those workers of darkness, according to the power of God, when they are fully ripe; therefore I desire that this people might not be destroyed. 29 Therefore ye shall keep these secret plans of their oaths and their covenants from this people, and only their wickedness and their murders and their abominations shall ye make known unto them; and ye shall teach them to abhor such wickedness and abominations and murders; and ye shall also teach them that these people were destroyed on account of their wickedness and abominations and their murders. 30 For behold, they murdered all the prophets of the Lord who came among them to declare unto them concerning their iniquities; and the blood of those whom they murdered did cry unto the Lord their God for vengeance upon those who were their murderers; and thus the judgments of God did come upon these workers of darkness and secret combinations. 31 Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe.

32 And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; trust not those secret plans unto this people, but teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity. 33 Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. 34 Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls.

35 O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. 36 Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever. 37 Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

v21-32 Alma wants Helaman to keep and preserve the plates of Ether and the Urim and Thummim, but he does not want Helaman to make known the details of their secret combinations, only that the wickedness caused by those secret combinations resulted in the destruction of their entire civilization and population (v. 21-27). Alma wants Helaman to teach the Nephites to abhor the wickedness of secret combinations, because there is a curse on this land that anyone who does these things and doesn't repent will be entirely destroyed (v. 28-31).

Helaman is to preach the opposite of what the Jaredites did. They are to be humble and faithful followers of Jesus Christ (v. 33), always doing good works, so they can live happily (v. 34).

Alma then admonishes Helaman to learn the importance of keeping the commandments while he is young (v. 35), and to rely on the Lord in everything he does, so he will be successful (v. 36-37).

Given Alma's considerable experience dealing with unrepentant Nephite apostates, his concern over revealing the entire contents of the plates of Ether is not unfounded. He absolutely does not want secret combinations among the Nephites. Unfortunately, Alma's grandson Helaman has to deal with it anyway when the Nephites start them up on their own without the records (cf. Hela. 2).

v21 "that ye preserve these interpreters", this clearly suggests Alma is giving Helaman both the plates of Ether and the Urim and Thummim. Alma explains the purpose of the Urim and Thummim is to reveal to future generation what caused the destruction of the preceding generations, so they will not repeat their mistakes.

38 And now, my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director--or our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. 39 And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel in the wilderness. 40 And it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day.

41 Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and

then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; 42 Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

43 And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass (now these things were temporal) they did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual. 44 For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land. 45 And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise. 46 O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever. 47 And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye look to God and live. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober. My son, farewell.

v38-47 Alma discusses the Liahona with Helaman. The Lord prepared the Liahona to lead Lehi in their travels according to their faith, which was a miracle (v. 38-40). But, when they didn't recognize the miracle of the device was because of their faith, the Liahona stopped working, and they got lost and went hungry (v. 41-42). Alma explains this physical device has spiritual symbolism, because it is like the word of Christ. If you exercise faith in the word of Christ, then it will lead you to eternal life (v. 43-46). Alma closes by admonishing Helaman to take good care of the things he passes to him (v. 47).

v39 Alma's description of the Liahona suggests first-hand examination by both himself and Helaman. He isn't merely referring to it, he is talking about how it is a device of peculiar construction that exceeds the capacity of human skill.

v40-42 "those spindles should point the way they should go... did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst", this suggests the two spindles had two different functions, one pointed the direction to travel in a direct course, and the other pointed to food and water.

v47 "take care of these sacred things", note the plural, suggesting the three things discussed, the plates, the Urim and

Thummim, and the Liahona were all passed from Alma to Helaman. Perhaps the "plates" are the plural reference, but the plain conversation about the other artifacts clearly suggests they were part of what is handed off as well. No sword of Laban is referenced, so perhaps that was passed along to the kings named after Nephi and not the high priests.

Copyright © 2020 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.