

General Comments on Alma 40-42

These chapters share a common theme of Resurrection and Judgement, which appear to have been doctrinal points Corianton had some problems understanding. Chapter 40 makes it clear the spirit's departure from the physical body is not what the Scriptures refer to when they speak of resurrection. Chapter 41 then explains the Doctrine of Restoration, meaning whatever a person was in life is what they are in death and in the resurrection as well. And ch. 42 closes the address with Alma discussing the interplay of Mercy and Justice when it comes to Judgement.

Alma's teachings on Resurrection and Judgement, both here and in the earlier chapters preaching with Amulek, have significant influence over the theology of our Church. Alma's clarity of thought and speech on these matters is exceptional. In verse 11 it is clear Alma's understanding was divinely inspired, but, still, Alma put it together and explained it very well.

Whether Corianton just didn't understand these doctrines or if he didn't want to understand them isn't entirely clear. Alma's closing comments in 42:29-30 and his characterization of Corianton's position in 41:9 and 42:1 certainly suggest the latter, even if Alma never states it outright.

Comments on Alma 40

1 Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead. 2 Behold, I say unto you, that there is no resurrection--or, I would say, in other words, that this mortal does not put on immortality, this corruption does not put on incorruption--until after the coming of Christ. 3 Behold, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. But behold, my son, the resurrection is not yet. Now, I unfold unto you a mystery; nevertheless, there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth them save God himself. But I show unto you one thing which I have inquired diligently of God that I might know--that is concerning the resurrection. 4 Behold, there is a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows; but God knoweth the time which is appointed. 5 Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case--that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

v1-5 Alma states that none will be resurrected until Christ is resurrected (v. 2-3), and that eventually all people will be resurrected whether it is at the same time or not (v. 3-5).

Alma's concern, and apparently Corianton's as well, at the present isn't the when of the resurrection, but the fact all people are resurrected. Perhaps Corianton's worry (v. 1) was over whether the resurrection was universal to mankind or if it was only for the righteous.

6 Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection. 7 And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection? 8 Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not; all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men. 9 Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know. 10 And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man. 11 Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection--Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life. 12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow. 13 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil--for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house--and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. 14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection.

v6-14 Here Alma comments on what happens to the spirits of the deceased when they die. Since spirits aren't resurrected as soon as they die there must be some time in between these two events (v. 6-7). Furthermore, not everyone dies at the same time (v. 8), so there has to be a time between death and resurrection (v. 9). When this time of resurrection is nobody really knows, but they will know when they are resurrected, and then they will know all of God's designs as well (v. 10).

What happens to the spirits after mortal death is they all go back into the presence of God (v. 11) with the righteous enjoying peace and rest (v. 12) while the wicked are racked by guilt and fear of Judgment (v. 13-14).

v8 "all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men", I would take this to mean God is eternal and men are temporal, so to God it is not relevant when a man dies because His interests are in eternal things like Judgement, Justice, Mercy, and so on. Taking this to mean God doesn't perceive or experience time in a linear fashion as we do simply doesn't fit the context. Alma is discussing the irrelevancy of when a person dies. He isn't discussing the nature of God and eternity. Alma's point of view in v. 8 is that the time of resurrection is irrelevant because not everyone dies at the same time, so there must be a waiting period between death and resurrection.

v11 "behold it has been made known unto me by an angel", this is all we hear of this angelic visitation, as there is no other record available to us mentioning or discussing it.

"the spirits of all men...are taken home to that God who gave them life", where exactly this "home" is located isn't clear. Alma may simply be referring to the spirit world, or he may be referring to the Celestial Kingdom. It is plain from D&C 137:5-6 the unresurrected spirits of postmortals who qualify for Celestial Glory enjoy being in that kingdom prior to resurrection. Joseph Smith stated:

There has been much said about the word hell, and the sectarian world have preached much about it, describing it to be a burning lake of fire and brimstone. But what is hell? It is another modern term, and is taken from hades....

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

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

The great misery of departed spirits in the world of spirits, where they go after death, is to know that they come short of the glory that others enjoy and that they might have enjoyed themselves, and they are their own accusers. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 310)

This "world of spirits" obviously has some division in it as to where the righteous are and where the wicked are, cf. v. 12-14. As for it being a "world", which we might interpret to be a discreet geographic entity such as a planet, both Alma and Smith probably mean something more along the lines of passing out of the earthly condition where we mortals cannot perceive spirits into a spiritual condition where spirits are discerned. This stands to reason as a fleshed spirit cannot perceive other spirits particularly well, but once the spirit is released from the flesh then it would be free to perceive other spirits.

15 Now, there are some that have understood that this state of happiness and this state of misery of the soul, before the resurrection, was a first resurrection. Yea, I admit it may be termed a resurrection, the raising of the spirit or the soul and their consignation to happiness or misery, according to the words which have been spoken. 16 And behold, again it hath been spoken, that there is a first resurrection, a resurrection of all those who have been, or who are, or who shall be, down to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. 17 Now, we do not suppose that this first resurrection, which is spoken of in this manner, can be the resurrection of the souls and their consignation to happiness or misery. Ye cannot suppose that this is what it meaneth. 18 Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but it meaneth the reuniting of the soul with the body, of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ.

v15-18 Alma now addresses the issue of misinterpreting what the resurrection, more specifically the first resurrection, really is. He notes the release of the spirit from the mortal body could be considered a sort of resurrection (v. 15), and there has been mention of a "first resurrection" which covers those from Adam to Christ (v. 16), but this release of the spirit from the body is not what the Scriptures are talking about when they speak of resurrection (v. 17-18).

These verses shed some light on what Corianton's misunderstanding might have been. If he had thought the "first resurrection" was the release of the spirit from the flesh and returning to the "world of spirits", as mentioned in v. 15-16, then he would not have seen any need for spirits to go anywhere between mortal death and Christ's resurrection. And, he might have concluded the "first resurrection" did not deal with obtaining a perfected physical body, as v. 19-26 discuss.

v18 Compare D&C 133:52-56.

19 Now, whether the souls and the bodies of those of whom has been spoken shall all be reunited at once, the wicked as well as the righteous, I do not say; let it suffice, that I say that they all come forth; or in other words, their resurrection cometh to pass before the resurrection of those who die after the resurrection of Christ. 20 Now, my son, I do not say that their resurrection cometh at the resurrection of Christ; but behold, I give it as my opinion, that the souls and the bodies are reunited, of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven. 21 But whether it be at his resurrection or after, I do not say; but this much I say, that there is a space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works. 22 Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets. 23 The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame. 24 And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets-- 25 And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God. 26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup.

v19-26 Alma restates and distills the subject of v. 2-14 (v. 19-21, 25-26) and equates it with Scriptural sources commenting on the subject (v. 22-24).

He says that whether the wicked and righteous all get resurrected at the same time, it doesn't matter because they all will be resurrected (v. 19). And while he supposes the righteous will be resurrected at the same time Christ is (v. 20), what he is certain of is the condition of the spirit between death and resurrection, and that resurrection brings about the Judgement (v. 21).

This is the restoration spoken of by the Prophets (v. 22, 24), that the spirit and physical bodies will be reunited in perfection (v. 23). Then Judgement will cause the righteous to shine with glory (v. 25) and the wicked to cast away from God and suffer for their deeds (v. 26).

v24 Isaiah 26:14-19 speak of the dead who do not rise with the Lord (cf. Isa. 26:14) and the dead who do rise with the Lord (cf. Isa. 26:19) in the day of Israel's redemption. Hosea 13:14 says the Lord will redeem Israel from hell and death. In 1 Sam. 2:6 Hannah the mother of Samuel prays and pronounces the Lord as One who takes life and gives it and places people in the grave and lifts them out of it again. Of course Ezekiel also spoke of

the resurrection (cf. Ezek. 37), but that would have post-dated Lehi's departure from Jerusalem.

None of the OT Prophets available to us at present use "restore" or "restoration" in reference to anything akin to resurrection (when searching the KJV English). Alma could be making reference to Abinadi's speech concerning the First Resurrection (cf. Mosiah 15:24), or perhaps some pre-christian era prophet documented on the Brass Plates but not available to us today.

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