

Comments on Mosiah 4

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and behold they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. 2 And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. 3 And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which king Benjamin had spoken unto them.

v1-3 The audience is overpowered by Benjamin's words, the fear of the Lord has come upon them (v. 1). They recognize their carnal condition, and cry out for mercy so the blood of Christ may atone for their sins (v. 2). The result is the Spirit of the Lord comes upon them (v. 3).

Note the way v. 1 and v. 3 are rhetorically connected but contrast one another. In v. 1 it says they physically collapsed because "the fear of the Lord had come upon them". Then in v. 3 they are spiritually lifted up with peace of conscience when "the Spirit of the Lord came upon them". The cause of this change is their confession and request in v. 2.

In reading this it says the people "all cried aloud with one voice". We would assume the quotation in v. 2, and likewise in 5:2, is a general summation of what the people said. It would be difficult to imagine a crowd so large they cannot easily be numbered all shouting out anything in perfect unison. We might go so far as to speculate and say the people were moved by the Spirit to all say the same thing, but v. 3 informs us it isn't until after they utter these words the Spirit generally falls upon them. The result is it is safe to conclude v. 2 is a general summation.

v2 "less than the dust of the earth", cp. Hela. 12:7-8.

"O have mercy...and our hearts may be purified", this is the core statement by the audience, and is what Benjamin responds to in the continuation of his sermon in v. 4-30. They ask that the blood of Christ be applied to them for a remission

of their sins, and he tells them what they must do to both obtain (v. 4-8) and retain (v. 9-30) a remission of their sins.

"apply the atoning blood", see the comments on "remission" for v. 3 below.

v3 "having received a remission of their sins", at this point the people have confessed their lowly state and are pleading with the Lord to forgive them because of the Atonement. And, the people's sins are forgiven on the spot. However, they must retain this remission of sins, and this is what Benjamin addresses next.

"remission", the phrase "remission of sins" is one not found in the KJV OT, it is only found in the NT, cf. Matt 26:28. The same general concept is found in the OT just in the wording "forgiveness of sins", "atonement for sins" or something to that effect, but the underlying language is more complicated.

In the KJV NT the Greek term translated to "remission" is "aphesis" and would be better translated to "pardon" instead of "remission" because it suggests "remit" like remitting a coupon. The Greek terms suggests "pardon by executive authority", so it has a legal context the same way "pardon" does in English.

The OT Hebrew translated to "forgive" or "atone" in the KJV OT is mainly from two terms. The term most often translated to "forgive" is "nasa", and Strong's defines it as follows:

05375 nasa' {naw-saw'} or nacah (Ps 4 : 6 [7]) {naw-saw'} a primitive root; TWOT - 1421; v

AV - (bare, lift, etc...) up 219, bear 115, take 58, bare 34, carry 30, (take, carry)..away 22, borne 22, armourbearer 18, forgive 16, accept 12, exalt 8, regard 5, obtained 4, respect 3, misc 74; 654

1) to lift, bear up, carry, take

1a) (Qal)

1a1) to lift, lift up

1a2) to bear, carry, support, sustain, endure

1a3) to take, take away, carry off, forgive

1b) (Niphal)

- 1b1) to be lifted up, be exalted
- 1b2) to lift oneself up, rise up
- 1b3) to be borne, be carried
- 1b4) to be taken away, be carried off, be swept away
- 1c) (Piel)
- 1c1) to lift up, exalt, support, aid, assist
- 1c2) to desire, long (fig.)
- 1c3) to carry, bear continuously
- 1c4) to take, take away
- 1d) (Hithpael) to lift oneself up, exalt oneself
- 1e) (Hiphil)
- 1e1) to cause one to bear (iniquity)
- 1e2) to cause to bring, have brought

For context, this term is translated to "forgive" in Gen. 50:17, Exod. 10:17, Exod. 32:32.

The term most often translated to "atonement", but occasionally "forgive" is "kaphar", and Strong's defines it as follows:

03722 kaphar {kaw-far'}

a primitive root; TWOT - 1023,1024,1025,1026; v

AV - atonement 71, purge 7, reconciliation 4, reconcile 3, forgive 3, purge away 2, pacify 2, atonement...made 2, merciful 2, cleansed 1, disannulled 1, appease 1, put off 1, pardon 1, pitch 1; 102

1) to cover, purge, make an atonement, make reconciliation, cover over with pitch

1a) (Qal) to coat or cover with pitch

1b) (Piel)

1b1) to cover over, pacify, propitiate

1b2) to cover over, atone for sin, make atonement for

1b3) to cover over, atone for sin and persons by legal rites

1c) (Pual)

1c1) to be covered over

1c2) to make atonement for

1d) (Hithpael) to be covered

This term is translated to "atonement" in Exod. 29:36-37 and to "forgiven" in Deut 21:8 and Ps. 78:38.

It is plain the Hebrew concept is substantially different from the Greek concept. The Hebrew concept forwards the idea of mediation with another carrying or bearing your sins or covering up your sins where the Greek carries the concept of simple legal acquittal.

From this, it is easy to see why in v. 2 the people beg Benjamin to "apply the atoning blood of Christ". The "atoning" blood means the "covering" blood, the blood that covers their sins so they may be "forgiven", or have Christ lift them up and carry them.

4 And king Benjamin again opened his mouth and began to speak unto them, saying: My friends and my brethren, my kindred and my people, I would again call your attention, that ye may hear and understand the remainder of my words which I shall speak unto you. 5 For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state— 6 I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body— 7 I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world. 8 And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

v4-30 is king Benjamin's reply to the people's request in v. 2 that the Lord apply His atoning blood to them so they may have forgiveness of sins. His reply is in two parts with a conclusion. The first part presents the conditions of salvation, wherein they may obtain a remission of their sins (v. 4-8). The second part tells them how they are to retain a remission of their sins, or in other words, how to maintain their forgiven condition (v. 9-30). This second part is divided into two major themes of what they need to do: love God (v. 9-

12), love their neighbors (v. 13-28). Then, the conclusion tells them to keep on their guard against all sins (v. 29-30).

The people want to know what it takes to have their sins forgiven, so Benjamin tells them. And, he tells them how to maintain that forgiven state, namely having a godly walk. If one has a godly walk, then they will not commit sin.

v4-8 Here, king Benjamin tells the audience what the conditions of salvation are. The pathway he presents in v. 5-6 is:

Humility -> Trust -> Obedience -> Salvation

Benjamin calls the people's attention (v. 4). He tells them that once they have recognized their fallen state (v. 5) before God and see that He is longsuffering in dealing with man, then they will trust in the Lord, and be obedient to His commandments throughout their lives (v. 6). Those who do this are the ones who receive salvation, which has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world (v. 7). There are no other means of salvation (v. 8).

Note the pathway of salvation requires humility first. This is clear in light of such passages as 2 Ne. 9:28 where those who profess religion but who are not humble before the Lord do not trust Him or keep His commandments.

v6 In this verse Benjamin presents two lists, first a list of God's attributes and then a list of the attributes of those who receive salvation, as follows:

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of

the goodness of God, and

his matchless power, and

his wisdom, and

his patience, and

his long-suffering towards the children of men;

and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to

him that should put his trust in the Lord, and

should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and

continue in the faith even unto the end of his life,

I mean the life of the mortal body--

This is just an example of some of the underlying structure.

v8 "the conditions which I have told you", referring to 3:17.

9 Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. 10 And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them. 11 And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. 12 And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

v9-28 This block of text can be subdivided into two blocks (v. 9-12 and v. 13-28) based upon subject, but note both blocks have the underlying theme of obtaining and retaining a remission of sins (cf. v. 11-12, 26). Benjamin is pleased the people have accepted Christ and have obtained a remission of their sins in v. 3, but now he wants them to retain this forgiven state by developing a godly walk. Otherwise, they will return to their old sinful ways.

v9-12 Benjamin turns his attention to the necessity of believing in and humbling oneself before God, or in the language of the Law of Moses, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God". Confess that God is more powerful and much wiser than yourself (v. 9). Confess and abandon your sins and ask God to forgive you. And don't just talk about doing it, actually do it (v. 10).

Now, having done these things, you have obtained forgiveness for your sins, so don't forget what it is that got you that forgiveness in the first place. Maintain your humility, pray daily, and keep the faith (v. 11) so you will always maintain that forgiven status. And in doing those

things, you will also grow in your understanding of God and His ways (v. 12).

Benjamin's summary of requirements are, simply put, to have faith (v. 9), repent (v. 10), endure to the end (v. 11), and if you do this you will always be in good standing (v. 12).

13 And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. 14 And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness. 15 But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another. 16 And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. 17 Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just— 18 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God. 19 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind? 20 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins. And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain? Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped that ye could not find utterance, so exceedingly great was your joy. 21 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another. 22 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God, to whom also your life belongeth; and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done. 23 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world. 24 And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give. 25 And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received.

v13-28 Benjamin now turns his attention to the importance of loving your neighbor. He briefly comments on interpersonal behavior (v. 13), and the parental obligation to both physically and spiritually feed children (v. 14-15, cp. Deut. 11:19). But,

his main emphasis is on material possessions and how they affect your daily walk (v. 16-25, Alma 34:27-29, D&C 56:14-17).

This would be expected as a Sukkot theme since one of the major points of leaving their permanent dwellings to live in a booth/hut is to humble them materially, eliminate class distinction, and remind them to de-emphasizing the material in favor of the spiritual. A major Sukkot practice is generous hospitality to anyone who visits your booth, and charitable donations.

King Benjamin's speech addresses the same subject as does Jacob in Jacob 2:12-22, but Benjamin's discussion is much more focused on the spiritual consequences of greed and covetousness (v. 17-25). He goes straight to the core and attacks the psychology of greed, whether you are rich and greedy (v. 17-23) or poor and greedy (v. 24-25). He isn't even interested in commanding the wealthy to donate, he goes straight to the spiritual issue and reminds them all they possess is not their own but is God's, whom they are in fact dependent upon for everything, even their very lives (v. 19-21). In doing so, he cuts across any class distinction and tells them all to change their hearts and give whenever they can.

Verses 26-28 then form a summary and conclusion to v. 13-28 by restating v. 12 in the context of loving your neighbor. He re-emphasizes that they need to look after all of those who cannot look after themselves (v. 26) and be considerate of their neighbor's property as well (v. 28). All of these things are necessary in order to have a guiltless walk, and therefore maintain their forgiven state (v. 26). But, he points out to them they must do all things in order, in diligence, and not to exceed a person's capabilities (v. 17).

v17-23 As was the case in Jacob's time, the time at present is one in which the people have enjoyed a season of peace (cf. 1:1) and presumably prosperity, so wealth begins so accumulate and class distinction based upon wealth is the result.

26 And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants. 27 And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the

prize; therefore, all things must be done in order. 28 And I would that ye should remember, that whosoever among you borroweth of his neighbor should return the thing that he borroweth, according as he doth agree, or else thou shalt commit sin; and perhaps thou shalt cause thy neighbor to commit sin also.

v26 Compare Alma 5:27. It is odd that King Benjamin doesn't call out widows and orphans explicitly, given their being featured prominently in the Law of Moses as being the most vulnerable members of the population who require particular care (cf. Exod 22:22, Deut. 24:20, Ps. 94:6, Isa. 10:2). Perhaps his admonition to care for the poor is all-inclusive, or maybe the widows and orphans are already sufficiently cared for in their society, and the poor are being neglected.

v28 is oddly placed after the subject of v. 26-27. I have to wonder if it is just intended to be a leading example of the multitude of ways to commit sin which should all be wisely avoided, as mentioned in v. 29-30. Or, maybe just to be comprehensive, after addressing charitable donations at length, Benjamin wants to make it clear one should be just as interested in the interest of others in borrowing as well.

29 And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. 30 But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

v29-30 After giving some very explicit comments addressing the psychology of greed and what people ought to be doing to help those in need, Benjamin says he cannot possibly enumerate all possible ways to sin (v. 29). So, instead, he admonishes the audience to be deliberate about their thoughts, words, and deeds. He also tells them to continue in their newly found faith until the end of their lives so they will not spiritually die (v. 30).

Benjamin's intent is to emphasize their recent obtaining forgiveness of sins and their new faith is just the beginning. They now have to maintain this new life. Otherwise, this recent confession and the spiritual events will avail them nothing.

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