

“MY SOUL IS PAINED NO MORE”

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #20

ALMA 25-28,36

by Ted L. Gibbons

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: “Like the Bible, it [the Book of Mormon] is a volume of holy writ that speaks forth the mind and will of the Almighty. Like the Bible, it invites men to forsake the world and live as becometh saints. Like the Bible, it has such an impact upon the hearts of men that they are prepared to die in defense of their beliefs. Already the ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh have left Babylon and come to Zion with songs of everlasting joy because of it. And before the end of the world, which is the premillennial destruction of the wicked, and before the end of the earth, which shall not occur until after the Millennium, the Book of Mormon shall so affect men that the whole earth and all its peoples will have been influenced and governed by it. (“Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, p.170)

INTRODUCTION:

If you were a bookie making bets in Zarahemla between 100 and 92 BC, with the fore-knowledge provided by the Book of Mormon, you could have made a million dollars a day by giving long odds on this proposition: *“I’m willing to wager 10,000 senines that Alma the Younger will one day be President of the Church!”*

Anyone with money would have been delighted to get some of that action. The chance that Alma would one day be President of the Church was about the same as the chance that a curelom would learn to play the clarinet. But in about 91 BC, Alma *became* the leader of the Church, and the Chief Judge as well. All of which leads us to what is a major message of these chapters: *when the Lord says, ‘I will forgive,’ what he really means is, ‘I will forgive!’*

1. LIMHI AND ALMA’S PEOPLE JOIN MOSIAH’S PEOPLE IN THE LAND OF ZARAHEMLA (Mosiah 25)

At the end of Mosiah, the Nephite nation consisted of the Mulekites, the

Nephites of Zarahemla, the people of Limhi, the people of Alma, and the children of the Amulonites (see Mosiah 25:12). These five groups became one group under the leadership of king Mosiah II, son of Benjamin. But “there were not so many of the people of Nephi and of the people of Zarahemla as there were of the Lamanites; yea, they were not half so numerous” (Mosiah 25:3).

The decision of Limhi and Alma and the Amulonites and the Mulekites to join the people of Mosiah is instructive. They had a desire, I suspect, to associate with people led by a prophet of God. They wanted the fellowship of disciples of Christ. The request of the people of Limhi for baptism shows their commitment to this concept.

Lucifer would like to divide us. If he could find a way to drive a wedge between us and the people of the Lord, between us and the prophet, between us and the Spirit, his efforts to make us miserable would be much more effective.

2. MANY CHURCH MEMBERS ARE LED INTO SIN BY UNBELIEVERS (Mosiah 26; 27:1-7)

The challenge of conveying the testimonies of the fathers to the hearts of the children confronts every generation. But some generations seem to have handled it better than others. Many Nephites must have agonized when they saw their children make some of the same mistakes and suffer some of the same consequences as their parents. The dilemma facing the Nephites in Mosiah 26:1-4 is a classic example.

Benjamin’s sermon was instrumental in helping convert a nation (see Mosiah 2-5). Everyone who heard it, believed, repented, and received a mighty change of heart. Is it possible that these converts assumed that their children would acquire the same conversion experience by osmosis? By association? By the trickle-down effect? We do not know, but is it possible that they were so converted that they failed to pay the price to convert their kids, never dreaming that their children would need more than the opportunity to live among believers? Whatever the cause,

it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation

that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers. They did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ. And now because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God; and their hearts were hardened. And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God (Mosiah 26:1-4).

These members of the 'rising generation' had three problems, and the sequence in which those problems are mentioned is critical. First (because they had been too small to understand the words of Benjamin), they did not believe the traditions of their fathers. They did not believe in the resurrection nor in the coming of Christ. Their first problem was **THAT THEY DID NOT BELIEVE** in Christ and his mission.

And "because of their unbelief", the word of God was incomprehensible to them. Their second problem, which came directly as a result of the first, was that **THEY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND**. This increased the problem, for their hearts were hardened.

The result of this lack of understanding was that "they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church . . . they would not call upon the Lord their God (Mosiah 26:1-4). Simply stated, **THEY WOULD NOT OBEY** the commandments.

I believe that this is the way it always happens. When people will not obey the word of the Lord, it is not necessarily because they do not want to obey. It is often because they do not understand. And they do not understand because they do not believe. President Packer spoke of this matter in a Christmas devotional at BYU.

. . . we have every encouragement to adopt the attitude, "seeing is believing." The remarkable thing is that if you hold that spirit, you do not have the hope or the chance of ever finding

Christmas as it ought to be, because, you see, it is just the other way around, "*believing is seeing.*" (Boyd K. Packer, BYU Speeches, December 19, 1962, p.5, *emphasis added*)

People who believe will see—will understand—the meaning behind the commandments; and seeing, they will have an increased inclination to obey.

I have attended some wonderful firesides about the importance of missionary work and temple marriage. Stakes have reviewed their statistics, felt concern, and gathered the youth and some great speakers to proclaim the importance of a gospel behavior that needs attention. We had a missionary fireside a few years ago in my current stake. A returned mission president spoke. A returned missionary spoke. A missionary who had just received his call also spoke. My son was electrified by the meeting. He had never been more excited to go on a mission. But he had *always* planned on going. My guess is that such a meeting will never inspire one who does not believe in Christ to give two years of his life to serve. The solution for those who do not want to serve is to help them believe in Christ. Everything else will come in its place, for when they believe they will understand. And when they understand, they will be more likely to obey.

Of course, one of the best ways to get people to believe in Christ is to get them into the Book of Mormon, *Another Testament of Jesus Christ*. Perhaps part of the condemnation of which President Benson spoke so frequently, a condemnation related to our use of the Book of Mormon, devolved from our failure to use this book to impart belief and testimony to our children.

The problem among the people of Mosiah increased.

For it came to pass that [the unbelievers] did deceive many with their flattering words, who were in the church, and did cause them to commit many sins; therefore it became expedient that those who committed sin, that were in the church, should be admonished by the church (Mosiah 26:6).

This was new ground of course, for “there had not any such thing happened before in the church” (Mosiah 26:10). Alma took the matter to the King who

deferred to Alma, who then went to the Lord, “for he feared that he should do wrong in the site of God” (Mosiah 26:13)

Note that the Lord answered Alma about this matter “after he had poured out his whole soul to God” (Mosiah 26:14) Consider that phrase. What does it mean to *pour out your whole soul* in prayer? This is a phrase that appears 12 times in the Book of Mormon. (Here’s a list: Enos 1:9; Mosiah 14:2; 24:12; 24:21; 26:14; Alma 19:14; 34:26; 46:17; 58:10; Hel. 7:11; 7:14; Morm. 3:12) Even for one as righteous as Alma (In 26:20, the Lord covenants with Alma that he will have eternal life), the effort to obtain light and knowledge is a strenuous one.

As the Lord conveys his will to Alma, he makes a remarkable statement about forgiveness—a statement that is worth a prominent place on every refrigerator in Zion. “And whomsoever you receive shall believe in my name; *and him will I freely forgive.*” (Mosiah 26:22, *emphasis added*) Words such as *eagerly, graciously, readily, and willingly* are synonyms for *freely*. Mark this verse and memorize it. If we come to Christ and believe in his name, he will *eagerly, graciously, readily, and willingly* forgive us. He will freely forgive! Note also that the first step for receiving this forgiveness is that we *believe* in his name. And he also promises “. . . as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me” (Mosiah 26:30)

A related verse in Isaiah teaches this same truth:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for *he will abundantly pardon* (Isaiah 55:7, *emphasis added*).

The Lord’s revealed pattern for dealing with those who sin is still followed by the Church (see Mosiah 26:29-32)

3. ALMA THE Younger AND THE SONS OF MOSIAH ARE VISITED BY AN ANGEL (Mosiah 27:8-31; Alma 36:6-23)

Among the youthful unbelievers tormenting the Nephites were the son of

Alma and the sons of Mosiah. Alma gets special attention in the verses of Mosiah 27, although we may assume that he acted in almost every affair with the support of the King's sons and a few others. Notice the descriptions of the wickedness of this man:

- G (27:8) "very wicked"
- G (27:8) "an idolatrous man"
- G (27:8) "he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities"
- G (27:9) "he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church"
- G (27:9) he was guilty of "stealing away the hearts of the people"
- G (27:9) he caused "much dissension among the people"
- G (27:9) he provided "a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over [the people]"
- G (27:10) "he was going about to destroy the church of God"
- G (27:10) he was "seeking to lead astray the people of the Lord"
- G (27:11) he was "going about rebelling against God"
- G (28:4) he and his companions were "the very vilest of sinners"
- G (Alma 36:14) he had "murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction"

This review of Alma's iniquities is sobering. I have referred to him from time to time as *John the Baptist for Satan*. He helped prepare the way for Lucifer to steal souls. How it must have pained his father's heart to see him in such a condition. We can imagine that a multitude of words had been spoken as the father tried to reason with his son. But the son would not listen and father Alma turned to the only possible source of assistance. Alma the elder might have said what Lincoln said:

"I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go" (cited by Ezra Taft Benson, Conference Report, April 1963, p.109).

Finally an angel appeared to the rebels, telling them the Church was the Lord's (see Mosiah 27:13) and commanding them to leave it alone. The angel reported to Alma the Younger that the provocation for his visit was the prayers of Alma's father and others of the Nephite people:

Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith. (Mosiah 27:14)

Every parent who has a wayward child ought to remember this verse. Prayers have great power! I am convinced that every prayer of faith by an anxious parent for a struggling child is heard and answered. Angels do not often appear, but someone appears—a bishop, a home teacher, a friend, a seminary teacher with a powerful witness of the Church and work of God and of the danger of opposing it. Unfortunately, not everyone is as willing to listen as young Alma was. Also, we would be making a mistake if we insisted that every conversion occur in the way that this one began to occur. President Benson taught us that

. . . we must be careful as we seek to become more and more godlike, that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. The scriptures record remarkable accounts of men whose lives changed dramatically, in an instant, as it were; Alma the Younger, Paul on the road to Damascus, Enos praying far into the night, King Lamoni. Such astonishing examples of the power to change even those steeped in sin give confidence that the Atonement can reach even those in despair.

But we must be careful as we discuss these remarkable examples. Though they are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule. For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. They live quiet lives of goodness, service, and commitment. They are like the Lamanites, who the Lord said, “were baptized with fire and

with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not (3 Nephi 9:20). (Ezra Taft Benson, Conference Report, October 1989, p. 5)

The sons of Mosiah picked up their friend and carried him home. The reaction of the father to the appearance of his comatose son was interesting: “and his father rejoiced . . .” Alma the elder had seen his son come home in a lot of ways, but never in a better way than this.

. . . it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort: For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. (Mosiah 27:23,24)

Unless we are careful, the apparent simplicity of this spiritual rebirth may confuse us. Alma, wicked as he was, did not have an interview with an angel, sleep for three days, and then announce his conversion. He said of the experience his soul had while his body lay unmoving, “after *wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death*, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God” (Mosiah 27:28, *emphasis added*). Does that sound easy?

Alma uses a word—a verb—in Mosiah 27: 28,29, that is most interesting. The verb is *snatch* or *snatched*. Alma praises the Lord who “in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning . . . I was in the darkest abyss . . . My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.” The word was used again in the Book of Mormon in Alma 26:17 by Ammon to describe what the Lord had done for him and his brothers.

Think of that *snatching* from the other side of the veil. Consider the willingness, indeed the *longing* of the Redeemer to apply his atoning blood to the spiritual wounds of these young men. Alma’s witness that he was snatched “out of an everlasting burning” reminds me of a story told by Elder M. Russell Ballard.

I remember reading about a fire fighter in the eastern United

States who ran into a burning house to rescue several children from an arson-induced fire. While his colleagues battled the blaze to keep it from spreading to other structures in the neighborhood, this man dashed into the building again and again, each time emerging with a child in his arms. After rescuing a fifth child, he started into the inferno once more. Neighbors shouted that there were no more children in the family. But he insisted that he had seen a baby in a cradle, and he dove into the intensifying heat.

Moments after he disappeared into the fire and smoke, a horrifying explosion shook the building and the entire structure collapsed. It was several hours before fire fighters were able to locate their colleague's body. They found him in the nursery near the crib, huddled protectively over a life-sized—and practically unscratched—doll.

I'm overwhelmed by that story. I'm touched by the fire fighter's courageous and selfless devotion to duty, and I'm thankful that there are men and women in the world who are willing to put their lives on the line for the sake of others.

As I think about such heroism, however, I'm reminded that the most heroic act of all time ever was performed in behalf of all mankind by the Son of God. In a very real sense, all of humanity—past, present, and future—was trapped behind a wall of flame that was fueled and fanned by our own faithlessness. Sin separated mortals from God (see Romans 6:23), and would do so forever unless a way was found to put out the fires of sin and rescue us from ourselves. (*Our Search for Happiness*, p. 11)

Alma and his friends were not the only ones who have been *snatched!*

As Alma recounted his conversion to his son Helaman, he added significant insights to our understanding of the atonement and the willingness of the Lord to forgive. Perhaps those insights can be best summarized by this statement from President Boyd K. Packer:

You need not know everything before the power of the Atonement will work for you. Have faith in Christ. It begins to work the day you ask (*Ensign*, May 1997, p. 10).

As you know, there are many marvelous comparisons in the accounts of Alma's conversion in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36. One of those, for me, has always been especially moving. As Alma the Younger confronted the horror of his rebellion and sinfulness, and contemplated an appearance before the bar of God in such a woeful condition, he said,

the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror (Alma 36:14).

But after the change, what he called in Mosiah 27 being "born of the Spirit" (Mosiah 27:24), he said this

. . . methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and *my soul did long to be there* (Alma 36:22, *emphasis added*).

Many times in the scriptures we are told that Christ has made possible through his suffering our reconciliation with the Father, for ". . . all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . ." (2 Corinthians 5:18) Alma's transformation from *inexpressible horror* at the thought of God's presence, to *a divine longing* to be there, is among the most powerful witnesses in the scriptures of the reality of the power of that reconciliation.

4. ALMA AND THE SONS OF MOSIAH DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO TEACHING THE GOSPEL (Mosiah 27:32-28:20; Alma 36:24)

Latter-day Saints believe that individuals who are truly born of God gladly give a life of service to their fellow beings—they share the gospel message, sacrifice their own time, energy, and resources for the benefit of others, and in general hold high the Light of Christ, being faithful to all the commandments (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Vol.1, BORN OF GOD).

The only proper response, when we are permitted to view ourselves and our lives in the startling light of gospel clarity is to try to kindle other lights. Having received the witness, we are obligated to share the witness. As the Lord said, "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor" (D&C 88:81).

And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation . . . (Mosiah 27:32)

But there was more to this mission than reflecting the light of Christ.

And they traveled throughout all the lands of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them (Mosiah 27:35).

CONCLUSION:

I was standing by the side of a busy street in Phoenix years ago, my 4-year old son Michael by my side, waiting for a break in traffic. The road had no parking spaces at the sides. The outside lanes ended at the curb where we stood, automobiles racing by just a few feet away from us. Suddenly my son jerked his hand from mine and started across the street. A vehicle swerved and raced by, missing him by the tiniest of margins. As my mind and eyes registered the impending disaster and the narrow escape, my legs gave way. I grabbed my son and sat down on the grass by the thoroughfare. My heart rate had leapt to triple digits in seconds. My legs could not support me. I was trembling in every extremity from the most devastating fear I had ever known.

That experience has come back to me from time to time as I have read about the longing of the Sons of Mosiah and their associates to serve a

mission among the Lamanites. They were motivated by their own rescue, and their own forgiveness. But most of all they were motivated by fear—

Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble (Mosiah 28:3).

What I had experienced at the thought of a physical catastrophe, they experienced at the thought of a spiritual catastrophe. And that is a lesson worth learning. Which is worse? To break an arm or a commandment? To poison a stomach or a spirit? To lose a limb or to lose a testimony. The record in Mosiah makes it quite clear how Alma and his companions would answer that question.

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