

BOOK OF MORMON LESSON #24
**“GIVE US STRENGTH ACCORDING TO OUR
FAITH . . . IN CHRIST”**

ALMA 13-16
by Ted L. Gibbons

AUTHOR’S NOTE: You must understand that these lessons are not designed to replace the experience you should have in your ward or branch Gospel Doctrine class. I am hopeful that they will expand your understanding of the scriptures and (if you are teaching) your ability to help your students know and love and use the scriptures. But it would be awful if anyone were to neglect that classroom experience in favor of these lessons.

The manual (which I always have before me as I write these lessons) is wonderful. It was prepared by inspired and dedicated members, under the direction of members of the Seventy and the Twelve. It carries the certificate of their approval. If you must choose one or the other—these lessons or the real lessons—discard these and run—don’t walk, run—to Sunday School.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: Without reservation I promise you that if you will prayerfully read the Book of Mormon, regardless of how many times you have previously read it, there will come into your heart an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord. There will come a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to his commandments, and there will come a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God. (Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, *Faith, the Essence of True Religion*, p. 64)

INTRODUCTION: These chapters are about many things: about priesthood and pre-existence and patience and power, but mostly about power. Moroni declared, “And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.” (Moroni 7:33)

This power that grows out of faith would be crucial in the ministry of Alma

and Amulek, but only when the time was right.

And they had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither was it possible that any man could slay them; nevertheless they did not exercise their power until they were bound in bands and cast into prison. Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his power in them. (Alma 8:31)

1. ALMA GIVES A POWERFUL DISCOURSE ON PRIESTHOOD AND FOREORDINATION (Alma 13)

The Book of Mormon is full of mysteries, meaning things I don't understand. Yet. One of those mysteries is why what seems to me to be the deepest, most difficult chapter in the Book of Mormon, Alma 13, was given as a sermon to the degenerate folks of Ammonihah. I think I have spent as much time pondering this chapter as any chapter in the book, and I still have about three zillion questions. How did the people of Ammonihah handle it?

But that is not the concern of these present meditations. We ought to look for a moment at the message of this chapter for us.

Alma 13 teaches that the blessings of the high priesthood, especially the calling of *high priest*, come by a *holy calling*. That phrase appears seven times in Alma 13.

But the concept of holiness receives further emphasis in Alma 13.

Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a *holy calling*, and ordained with *holy ordinance*, and taking upon them the high priesthood of ~~the~~ *holy order*, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—(Alma 13:8).

The calling to the Melchizedek Priesthood is more than a ~~calling~~ *holy calling*: a *holy calling by a holy ordinance to a holy order*. This suggests clearly

an inescapable obligation of those who receive this priesthood: they must be holy!

The calling comes in part because of preparation in the pre-earth life.

Why were some spirits sent to earth among the Amalekites, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, while others at the same moments found birth in the house of Israel? Why was Antipas sent as the son of a debauched and evil Herod, while John the Baptist came into the home of a priestly Zacharias and a saintly Elisabeth?

All of these things operate by law; they are the outgrowth of long years of personal preparation in preexistence on the part of each individual; they come to pass according to the laws that the Lord has ordained. This second estate is a continuation of our first estate; we are born here with the talents and capacities acquired there. Abraham was one of the noble and great spirits in the premortal life. He was chosen for his mortal ministry and position before he was born, and as with the father of the faithful so with all of the spirits destined to be born as his seed.

The greatest and most important talent or capacity that any of the spirit children of the Father could gain is the talent of spirituality. Most of those who gained this talent were chosen, before they were born, to come to earth as members of the house of Israel. They were foreordained to receive the blessings that the Lord promised to Abraham and to his seed in all their generations. This foreordination is an election, Paul tells us, and truly it is so, for those so chosen, selected, or elected become, in this life, the favored people. Though all mankind may be saved by obedience, some find it easier to believe and obey than others. Hence the concept, taught by Jesus, that his sheep know his voice and will not follow the dissident voices of the world. (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.512 - p.513)

Why was it that “the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order . . .”? These two reasons appear in Alma 13.

- 1. “That thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to [the] Son” (Alma 13:2)**
- 2. “To teach his commandments unto the children of men” (Alma 13:6)**

And why were some chosen while others were not?

- 1. “According to the foreknowledge of God” (Alma 13:3)**
- 2. “In the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good . . .” (Alma 13:3)**
- 3. “Exercising exceedingly great faith . . .” (Alma 13:3)**

And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren. Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared— And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—(Alma 13:4-6).

The calling is an eternal one, “which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood. Is without beginning or end. Thus they become high priests forever . . . (Alma 13:8,9) just like Melchizekdek “who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.” (Alma 13:14)

Alma, having explained the nature of his calling and authority in Ammonihah, appealed one last time to the people to repent.

And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would

hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance . . . (Alma 13:27)

2. ALMA, AMULEK, AND OTHER BELIEVERS ARE PERSECUTED FOR THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Alma 14)

As I mentioned in the *introduction*, our spiritual power is linked to our faith in Christ. Joseph Smith, speaking of faith, said this:

Let us here observe, that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation.

First, the idea that he actually exists.

Secondly , a correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.

Thirdly , an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to his will. For without an acquaintance with these three important facts, the faith of every rational being must be imperfect and unproductive; but with this understanding it can become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness, unto the praise and glory of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Lectures on Faith, Lecture Third, para. 2-5, p. 33)

In order to simplify the application of these principles, I have reworded these three things into four, as follows:

1. Believe in God
2. Understand his nature
3. Find out what he wants you to do
4. Do it

Like all the rest of us, Alma and his companion believe in God and understand his nature. Most of our struggles come with the third and fourth steps. Alma 14-16 teaches great lessons about those two steps

and the power that comes when we apply them.

Notice the results of this missionary effort:

AND it came to pass after he had made an end of speaking unto the people many of them did believe on his words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures. (Alma 14:1)

Even though many were moved in the direction of repentance, most were not.

But the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek . . . (Alma 14:2)

These missionaries were finally bound and delivered to the chief judge (see Alma 14:4,5). Zeezrom, whose heart had been touched, tried to intervene, but “they spit upon him, and cast him out from among them, and also all those who believed in the words which had been spoken by Alma and Amulek; and they cast them out, and sent men to cast stones at them.” (Alma 14:7)

A careful reading of this passage and others makes it seem that only the men were cast out. (See Alma 14:8; 15:1,2) The women and children were retained for a more diabolic purpose.

And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire. (Alma 14:8)

Remember what we read in Alma 8:9? Here we see a heart-rending proof of that verse. What kind of people would throw women and their children into a fire? And not satisfied with the expulsion and destruction of those who had believed Alma and Amulek, they

took Alma and Amulek, and carried them forth to the place of

martyrdom, that they might witness the destruction of those who were consumed by fire. (Alma 14:9)

These are truly awful people!

I cannot help but wonder about Amulek's family. We read in Alma 9:11 about the women and children of Amulek. Unless Alma sounded an early warning and they escaped, or they rejected the truths taught by Alma before the burning, they might have been among those being consumed before Alma and Amulek.

Amulek [had] forsaken all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God, he being rejected by those who were once his friends and also by his father and his kindred . . .(Alma 15:16).

We also learn here that Amulek came and lived with Alma and that Alma "did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord" (Alma 15:18).

Amulek is nearly overcome by the scene:

And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames. (Alma 14:10)

Under almost any circumstance, righteous men who had the power would act instantly to prevent further suffering. But there is this other consideration for those of great faith *find out what God wants you to do*. Sometimes the thing that God wants us to do is to do nothing.

But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they

may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day. (Alma 14:11)

I think it would have been easier for both of them to leap into the fire and die with their converts than to observe and do nothing, when God had given them such great power. This is an important lesson. We must always be ready to act (or not act) in accordance with the will of the Father and the Son, no matter how much it might contradict our own will.

At least the two witnesses had this assurance: the martyrs would be exalted, for “the Lord receiveth them up unto himself in glory . . .” And what an inditement the record of this event would be against those heartless murderers on the day of judgement.

When the innocent and the scriptures were consumed, the chief judge approached the captives. “After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?” (Alma 14:15)

And then he began to talk about power: “Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire . . .” (Alma 14:15) Well, since power is invisible, how would he know? Like all men destitute of the Spirit, he could not comprehend men with power who were unwilling to use it.

Like many others, I have had the experience of being restrained by the Spirit in the exercise of priesthood power. On one occasion *could not* give a blessing and on another I was restrained from making promises I had longed to make as I gave a blessing. The key that transforms faith into power is this willingness to be obedient, for there is a direct correlation between obedience and faith.

Faith is a gift of God bestowed as a reward for personal

righteousness. It is always given when righteousness is present, and the greater the measure of obedience to God's laws the greater will be the endowment of faith. Hence the Prophet says that to acquire faith men must gain the actual knowledge "that the course of life which they pursue is according to the will of God . . ." (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.264)

During this and subsequent visits by the judicial leaders of Ammonihah, Alma and Amulek were smitten repeatedly (see Alma 14:14,17,20,22,24,25). In addition, they endured gnashing of teeth, spitting (14:21), mockery, hunger, thirst, nakedness, being bound with strong cords, and confinement (see 14:22), all the while being challenged about their power (see Alma 14:15, 20, 24).

How long did all this last? Alma 14:23 tells us that the final day of their incarceration was the twelfth day of the tenth month of the tenth year of the reign of the judges . Alma returned to Ammonihah on the fourth day of the seventh month (see Alma 10:6). Thus, three months and eight days have passed since Alma and Amulek met. We are not certain how long Alma stayed with Amulek nor how long their preaching lasted, but much of this time must have been spent in prison, because their deliverance only occurred "after they had thus suffered for many days . . ." (Alma 14:23).

Overshadowing the time of this abuse and indignity was the question asked by the chief judge and many others. "If ye have such great power, why do ye not deliver yourselves?" (Alma 14:20; see also 14:24).

The only possible answer to this question, based on the final outcome of their experience, is that they were tarrying so that they could find out what God wanted them to do. They were waiting on the will of God.

It happened on the date mentioned above.

And the chief judge stood before them, and smote them again, and said unto them *if ye have the power of God deliver yourselves* from these bands, and then we will believe

that the Lord will destroy this people according to your words.
(Alma 14:24, *emphasis added*)

Everybody in the chief judge's party had a go at them. "They all went forth and smote them, saying the same words . . ." (Alma 14:25)

. . . and when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet. And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength [power] according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them. (Alma 14:25,26)

What would you pay for a video tape of the faces of those men when Alma and Amulek stood up and snapped ~~the~~ *strong cords (14:22)* with which they were bound? Talk about a Kodak moment!

No one in the prison survived, of course, except our two heroes, who had received strength –power–according to their faith, which was in Christ.

The fear felt by those in the prison was experienced by the people of the city as well. Imagine the circumstance ~~The~~ *the people of the city are just sitting down for a quiet meal when the earth begins to shake. The all race to the doors of their homes and see a great cloud of dust billowing into the air over the location of the prison. From all directions they run together to see what has happened. When they are close enough, they see the prison destroyed, the walls fallen to the earth. And then, from the rubble of the prison, wearing their birthday suits, walk two men. Like those in the prison, these citizens were struck with great fear. They fled from the presence of Alma and Amulek even as a goat fleeth with her young from two lions; and thus they did flee from the presence of Alma and Amulek.*" (Alma 14:29)

Why did it happen? What made possible the destruction of the prison and their escape? "The Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ." (Alma 14:28)

Our ability to deliver ourselves from the prisons of sin and self-gratification, or to overcome the Goliath-like giants of impure thoughts and family contention, or to defeat the armies of carnality and immorality can come only in the same way it came to Alma and Amulek. We must obey in the little things—our prayers, our scripture study, our callings and appointments. Then when the great challenges come, we will have sufficient faith in Christ to find the power we need to overcome. Other examples of this principle at work can be found in Moses 7:13; 1 Samuel 14:6-16; 1 Samuel 17; 3 Nephi 7:18, and others. As your review these examples, watch for the four steps by which faith becomes power.

- 1. Believe in God**
- 2. Understand his nature**
- 3. Find out what he wants you to do**
- 4. Do it**

3. ZEEZROM IS HEALED AND BAPTIZED (Alma 15)

Notice in Alma 15:1 why Alma and Amulek left Ammonihah. ~~They were~~ *commanded to do so*. I am left with the feeling that if they had not been commanded, they might have remained a bit longer in hope of bringing a few more souls to repentance, but they must have seen that “the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually . . .” (Mormon 2:15) for, in spite of what had happened to the prison and their leaders,

. . . the people that were in the land of Ammonihah, . . . remained a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people; and they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek to the devil; for they were of the profession of Nehor, and did not believe in the repentance of their sins. (Alma 15:15)

And so they departed to the land of Sidom where they found the outcasts from Ammonihah and “related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children.” (Alma 15:2)

They found Zeezrom suffering greatly because of his wickedness. After

an interview about faith,

Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ. And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk . . . (Alma 15:10,11)

Zeezrom was baptized, “and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.” (Alma 15:12)

This reorganization of priorities is typical of all true converts. Notice in Alma 15:16 what Amulek was willing to do because of his conversion. What are you willing to place on the altar? What will you give to know him and serve him? What an awful day of judgement awaits those who cling to their sins like the people of Ammonihah.

4. THE WORDS OF ALMA ARE FULFILLED AS THE LAMANITES DESTROY AMMONIHAH (Alma 16)

Early in the eleventh year, the Lamanites came “into the borders of the land, even into the city of Ammonihah, and began to slay the people and destroy the city.” (Alma 16:2)

. . . and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness. But behold, in one day it was left desolate; and the carcasses were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness. (Alma 16:9,10)

CONCLUSION:

They said it couldn't be done. They refused to believe the words of Alma (Alma 9:4). What person or God had the power to do what Alma had said would be done. The people of Ammonihah had forgotten the nature of God, and that he and his worthy servants *hpdwer*.

Reading this, I was reminded of the worlds of Nebuchadnezzar to the

three Hebrews who would not worship his golden image. After warning them of the consequences of refusing to worship his new god, he declared, “and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Daniel 3:15) Nebuchadnezzar was acquainted with metal gods who just stood there. Like the Ammonihahites, he did not realize that God and his worthy servants had power.

The story of Ammonihah, and the words of Joseph Smith, teach us how to partake of that power.

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