

BM#22 "Have Ye Received His Image in Your Countenance?"
Alma 5-7

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I. Introduction

Having resigned the office of Chief Judge and Commander of the military, Alma dedicated his efforts to setting the Church in order throughout the land of Zarahemla. He believed the only way order could be restored was by his visiting the various churches that had been established throughout the land and preaching the word of God.

Alma saw "no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:19). Only the word of God or personal testimony would be sufficient to cause the people to remember the covenants they had made and the necessity of their full repentance. It was his desire to alert them as to their responsibility as members of the Church of God and the example they were to be to those around them. Satan had obtained a strong hold upon the members of the Church and nothing less than their complete repentance would ensure the continuation of their membership in the church.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"Mormon explains that Alma determined to bear down in pure testimony against the people. His expressions were not motivated by anger or spite, nor directed against the people in the spirit of condemnation. Rather, his heart--motivated by the pure love of Christ--was bent upon saving souls. He loved them and simply could not stand by and allow them to destroy themselves." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 25).

Outline of Alma 5-7:

"Alma 5: Alma exhorts the members of the Church in Zarahemla to live in such a way that they are prepared to experience a 'mighty change' of

heart.

"Alma 6: Many people in Zarahemla humble themselves and repent of their sins. Alma and the people establish the order of the Church in Zarahemla.

"Alma 7: In the valley of Gideon, Alma testifies of Jesus Christ. He encourages the people to continue following the Savior."

(Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 98).

II. Alma 5

Prior to Alma, Chapter 5, there is superscription.

Thomas R. Valletta states,

"The superscription to Alma 5 was part of the ancient record translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith and dictated by him to his scribe (see also, for example, 2 Nephi, Mosiah 9, and Alma 21).

"This [superscription] appeared in the 1830 [edition of the Book of Mormon]...It is apparently from Mormon's hand and is intended to introduce a quoted record. The original manuscript is not extant at this point (not for similar introductions at the beginning of our chapter 7 and 9 of Alma).

"The printer's manuscript indicates that these summaries were set off from the rest of the text only by a dash, with the first verse of the text beginning on the same line" (Gardener, *Second Witness*, 4:90).

"The phrase in italics was introduced in the 2013 edition of the Book of Mormon. The 1981 edition had the phrase "Comprising chapter 5." (*The Book of Mormon Study Guide*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2015, 369).

Eric D. Huntsman states,

Outline of Alma, Chapter 5

"Sermon at Zarahemla (5:1-61)

A. The Example of Their Fathers Deliverance (5:1-13)

- B. Call to Spiritual Deliverance (5:14-42)
 - * All must be Born of God (5:14-25)
 - * The Need for Continual Change of Heart (5:26-32)
 - * Hearken to the Call of the Good Shepherd (5:33-42)

- C. Alma's Testimony (5:44-56)
 - * His Call as a Witness (5:44-49)
 - * The Coming of the Son of God, the King, is at Hand (5:50-52)
 - * The Wicked Will Be Destroyed (5:53-56)

- D. Final Plea: Follow the Good Shepherd (5:57-62)"

(Introduction to the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi through Alma 29). Fall Semester, 2005. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, November 25 2005 (5).

S. Kent Brown states,

"[Alma 5 is] a long and carefully articulated address delivered presumably over a period of time and on various occasions...'in the city of Zarahemla,' possibly consisting of seven or more congregations (Mosiah 25:23)" ("Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons," in *Alma, The Testimony of Word, Vol. 6*. Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992, 143).

Alma 5:3

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things,...

Alma, the younger, stated the authority he had received from his father, Alma. He had been consecrated [set apart] by his father to serve as the President of the Church of God in Zarahemla. His father had received this authority from God to act in his name. The purpose for Alma's visit to the Church in Zarahemla was to set the church in order.

He reminded the people of the bondage that the people of King Noah and Alma had experienced as a direct result of their wickedness. It was only through the power of the Lord that they were freed from their enemies and brought to the land of Zarahemla. Upon their arrival, Alma had been

authorized by King Mosiah II to establish the church throughout the land. (see Alma 5:4-5.)

He now asked them three questions: (1) "Have you sufficiently retained in your remembrance the captivity of your fathers?" (2) "Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance his [Lord's] mercy and long-suffering towards them?" and, (3) "Have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that [the Lord]...[had] delivered their souls from hell?" (Alma 5:6).

Neal A. Maxwell states,

"Remembering and counting our many blessings can humble us by reminding us of all the reasons we have to be thankful to God--not just today's reasons, but those relating to all our yesterdays...If we fail to stir remembrance of blessings receive, the human tendency is to say, in effect, whether to one's God or to one's fellows, 'What have you done for me lately?' Indeed, prophets of the Lord have asked directly whether their people had 'sufficiently retained in remembrance 'His deliverances and blessings (Alma 5:6-7). It is best to cultivate our 'remembering' capacity now and to be guided accordingly, since at judgment day we will have 'perfect remembrance' (Alma 5:18)." (*A Wonderful Flood of Light*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990, 51).

S. Kent Brown continues,

"In framing [these] questions, Alma effectively shifted the focus of the listeners from the Exodus and other such events [recent deliverance from bondage] to ...his recounting of the blessings that flow from accepting the Atonement." ("Alma's Conversion: Reminiscences in His Sermons," in *Alma, The Testimony of Word, Vol. 6*. Edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992, 143).

Alma 5:7-9

7 ...Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not. 9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

Despite the fact that they were in bondage being held captive by their enemies, as a direct result of their own wickedness and personal sins, they were spared the chains of hell and everlasting destruction. They were saved.

Alma asks them three questions: (1) "On what conditions are they saved?" (2) "What grounds had they to hope for salvation?" and, (3) "What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?" (Alma 5:10). The answer to these three questions will comprise the balance of his remarks to the Church in Zarahemla.

How were those who were in bondage granted freedom and spared from certain spiritual death and destruction? His father, Alma, believed the words of Abinadi. As a result, a mighty change was brought upon him. (see Alma 5:11-12.)

Alma 5:13

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end, therefore they were saved.

Alma asked them to consider the following questions as they apply to their own lives. (1) "Have ye spiritually been born of God?; (2) "Have ye received his image in your countenance?; (3) "Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? (4) "Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?; (5) Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?" (Alma 5:14-15). Alma continues his inquiry as to the spiritual state of the audience.

He asks, "can you...hear the voice of the Lord, saying...Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness...Or do ye imagine...ye can lie unto the Lord...and say,--Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth--and that he will save you? Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God? I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?...can ye look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?...can ye think of being saved when ye have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?" (Alma 5:16-20).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"One measure of the new birth is the appearance of the new man. Paul described the process of salvation as obtaining 'the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16); that is, learning to think as Christ thinks, believe as he believes, feel as he feels, and do as he would do. Peter described the same thing as partaking of 'the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4), meaning that we must acquire the attributes of godliness. Joseph Smith explained: 'The Savior most clearly show[ed] unto us the nature of salvation, and what he proposed unto the human family when he proposed to save them--that he proposed to make them like unto himself, and he was like the Father, the great prototype of all saved beings; and for any portion of the human family to be assimilated into their likeness is to be saved; and to be unlike them is to be destroyed; and in this hinge turns the door of salvation' (*Lecture on Faith* 7:16). As a child learns by imitating and emulating parents and those older than himself, so we learn godliness by imitating others who have set an example in righteousness, especially Jesus Christ. Alma appropriately describes the process of becoming Christlike as receiving the image of Christ in our countenances." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol. 3. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 30).

It is Alma's desire that his listeners examine their lives in response to the questions that he is asking. Through their self-examination, they will confirm with joy, their state of righteousness or with horror and a desire to

change, their state of wickedness. Alma then stated, unequivocally, the requirement for being saved in the kingdom of God.

Alma 5:21

21 ...no man can be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"We clean our garments by washing them in water. Filth, dirt, germs, odors, and whatever is unclean and offensive is thus removed; our wearing apparel becomes clean and spotless. A saved person is one whose soul is clean and spotless, one who is free from the filth and corruption of sin; and the prophetic way of describing such a person is to say that his garments are clean. Since the only way a human soul can be cleansed and perfected is through the atonement of Christ, it follows that the symbolic way of describing this process is to say that such a one has washed his garments in the blood of the Lamb, we have heard Nephi and Alma did." (*The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978, 251).

It is only through the atonement of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that we can be redeemed from our sins. There is no other way. While the reuniting of body and spirit is a gift to all, in order for an individual to return to the presence of the Father, it requires complete repentance from their sins.

Alma continued his inquiry. "how will...you feel if you stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness?...will they not testify that ye are murderers,...and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?" (Alma 5:22-23). He then asks, "do ye suppose...one [who is filthy], can...sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and spotless, pure and white?...I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning...such can have [no] place in the kingdom of heaven; but...shall be cast out

for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil" (Alma 5:22-25).

It is essential that all within his voice understand if they believe that they will be able to enter into God's presence "with their garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness" (Alma 5:22), they are in error. Instead, they "shall be cast out" for by their refusal to repent from their sins, they have become "the children of the kingdom of the devil" (Alma 5:25).

To those whose hearts are beginning to soften and to see themselves in their current state of wickedness, Alma asks them the following questions:

Alma 5:26-27

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

To those whose hearts have now been softened and have begun to experience a change of heart, he asked them the following three questions regarding their lives: (1) "Are ye stripped of pride?; (2) [Are you] "stripped of envy?, and, (3) [Do you] "make a mock of...[your] brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions? Wo [judgment/punishment from Lord] for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!" (Alma 5:28-31).

Pride, envy, and the persecution of another individual are three character traits that will prevent an individual from entrance into the kingdom of God. It is essential that the individual understand the consequence of not repenting from these traits and not procrastinate the day of their repentance.

Ezra Taft Benson states,

"The antidote for pride is humility--meekness,

submissiveness (see Alma 7:23)...Let us choose to be humble. We can choose to humble ourselves by conquering enmity toward our brothers and sisters, esteeming them as ourselves, lifting them as high or higher than we are...We can choose to humble ourselves by receiving counsel and chastisement...We can choose to humble ourselves by forgiving those who have offended us..We can choose to humble ourselves by rendering selfless service...We can choose to humble ourselves by loving God, submitting our will to His, and putting Him first in our lives." ("Beware of Pride," in *Ensign*, May 1989, 6-7).

Jeffrey R. Holland states regarding envy,

"It has been said that envy is the one sin to which no one readily confesses, but just how widespread that tendency can be is suggested by the old Danish proverb, 'If envy were a fever, all the world would be ill.' The parson in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* laments it because it is so far-reaching--it can resent anything, including any virtue and talent, and it can be offended by everything, including every goodness and joy. As others seem to grow larger in our sight, we think we must therefore be smaller. So, unfortunately, we occasionally act that way." ("The Other Prodigal," in *Ensign*, May 2002, 63).

Thomas S. Monson adds,

"Can we not appreciate that our very business in life is not to get ahead of others, but to get ahead of ourselves? To break our own records, to outstrip our yesterdays by our todays, to bear our trials more beautifully than we ever dreamed we could, to give as we have never given, to do our work with more force and a finer finish than ever--this is the true idea: to get ahead of ourselves." (*Pathways to Perfection*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973, 81).

The third of the three over-looked sins noted by Alma, the younger, to the members of the Church in Zarahemla is persecution of another individual. This trait needs no further clarity as we are familiar with the prevalence of its occurrence. It has recently been identified as "Bullying," but neither the name or the harm that results will lessen its frequency. This will not occur until the witness or witnesses of the action, finally say, "it's enough," and are also willing to stand up to those who

perpetrate this behavior. Only then will change occur. Until then, like a car on the freeway with an impaired driver, it will continue to carmine its way down the freeway of life, leaving behind its wreckage.

Marion G. Romney states,

"I say, no one with the spirit of the Book of Mormon upon him can honestly answer to himself these soul-searching questions without resolving to so live that they can answer them in the affirmative on that great day to which each of us shall come." (*Conference Report*. October 1970, 30).

To those who may feel that the opportunity for repentance has passed them by and the severity of their sins would exclude them from ever obtaining forgiveness, Alma shares these words of encouragement:

Alma 5:33

33 Behold, he [Lord] sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive [forgive] you.

Boyd K. Packer states,

"The gospel teaches us that relief from torment and guilt can be earned through repentance. Save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fullness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness." ("The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," in *Ensign*, October 1995, 19).

Alma turns his focus upon those who may choose not to heed his words.

Alma 5:36

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

Those who make up the group of the wailer and mourners include: (1) "[Those] who are puffed up in the vain things

of the world; and, (2) “[Those who] professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, ...notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after...[them], but...[they] will not hearken unto his voice” (Alma 5:37). The first group consists of those whose attention is focused upon receiving the praises of the world. The second group is made up of those who understand the principles of the gospel, and may even have been members, but have lost their way and separated themselves from activity in the church. Satan cares not where our attention is diverted or even that we become inattentive, and hard of hearing regarding the voice of the servants of the Lord. In both instances, the eyes of the individual are not focused upon Jesus Christ and his teachings.

Alma continues, “if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, ...behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd...And...if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that [if you do not repent]...the devil is your shepherd, and yea are of his fold;...” (Alma 5:38-39).

We are then reminded of this eternal verity, by Alma, the younger, or by Mormon.

Alma 5:40

40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

It is true that God cannot condone that which is evil, nor can the devil give his full support to that which is good. While Satan may tell a half-truth, if it temporarily serves his purpose, his full-time occupation is the captivity and destruction of the souls of man as he carefully drags them down to hell.

Alma 5:41

41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.

Alma has not come to Church in Zarahemla just to meet with the members. He has come on an errand from the Lord.

Alma 5:43-44

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, and have spoken according to the commandments of God.

44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which had been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

Alma comes as a representative of the Lord. He has been commanded to speak to the members of the Church of God, and deliver a message from the Lord. His words are the mind and will of the Lord to his children in Zarahemla. They contain sure promises to the righteous, and a voice of warning to the wicked. The righteous and those who seek repentance will receive their heavenly reward. The wicked will join Satan and become numbered among his followers. It is the desire of the Lord that all hear the voice of the good shepherd and follow him.

Alma bears his testimony regarding his witness and the truth of his words stating, "Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself,...and the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me." (Alma 5:45-46).

He then bears his testimony of Jesus Christ and states to whom his message is directed.

Alma 5:48-49

48 ...I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.

49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the

land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generations; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

Alma bears a strong testimony to those gathered at Zarahemla. He who will come into the world is Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, the only begotten in the flesh. He comes into the world in order to take upon himself the sins of all mankind, and to those who "steadfastly believe in his name" the opportunity of obtaining eternal life. His message is to all, regardless of being servant or free, old or young. His words were for those who heard them then as well as his readers now.

Alma warns those that choose not to repent, "and bringeth not forth good fruit [acts of righteousness] shall be hewn down and cast into a fire" (Alma 5:52). This has reference to the final judgment when these individuals will receive a lesser glory than they would have received, had they repented and brought forth works of righteousness.

Alma states specific sins of which some are guilty that need their repentance. These include: (1) Laying aside the things of righteousness, and "trample the Holy One under your feet;" (2) Being "puffed up in the pride of their hearts;" (3) "Persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?;" (4) "Persist in supposing that ye are better one than anther;" (5) "Persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church,...and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance;" (6) "Will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them? These six sins have been a major reason for Alma coming to address them and would destroy the church if they were left unchecked by the members.

Alma 5:57

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous, that the

word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

"To come out from the wicked, and be ye separate" is to end association with those who have chosen to ignore the commandments of God and to have their names removed from the church records. There comes a time when continued association with those who have rejected the commandments of God can have a detrimental effect upon the individual's spiritual development. It is wise to find new friends when the negative influence of your former friends upon you is greater than your positive influence upon them.

Alma 5:59

59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

While the hand of the Lord is extended to those who seek to follow Him and keep his commandments, he must respect the agency of the wicked who choose to reject his words and his atonement and protect the righteous from their influence.

Alma 5:61-62

61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.

With these words, Alma concludes his admonition to both the members and non-members of the Church in Zarahemla.

III. Alma 6

Alma 6:1

1 And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an

end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church.

Bruce R. McConkie reminds us,

"Book of Mormon prophets gave the title priests to officers known in this dispensation as high priests. That is, they were priests of the Melchizedek Priesthood, or as Alma expressed it, 'the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son.' (Alma 13:1-20.) Since there was no Aaronic Priesthood among the Nephites in Alma's day (there being none of the lineage empowered in pre-meridian times to hold that priesthood), there was no need to distinguish between priests of the lesser and greater priesthoods." (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition, 1966], 599).

Alma 6:3

3 And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church that did not repent of their wickedness and humble themselves before God--I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts--the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous.

Bryan Richards states,

"Pride can be the underlying cause for excommunication when it leads to the breaking of sacred covenants. One of the less common ways than can happen is when the individual will not recognize the authority of the Lord's anointed servants. They become unable to submit to the counsel and recommendations of church leaders because their pride has elevated them, in their minds, above the counsel of the Church. Then and now, the sin of pride, when it leads to the spirit of apostasy, is grounds for excommunication." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-6).

Alma 6:5

5 Now I would that ye should understand that the word of God was liberal unto all, that none were deprived

of the privilege of assembling themselves together to hear the word of God.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"In teaching the gospel there is to be no distinction between the rich and the poor. The word of God is freely and generously given to all, regardless of social standing. 'For if there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay [bright] clothing, and say him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:2-4." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 47).

Alma 6:6

6 Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.

Weekly as the members of the church gather together in small or large congregations, there is a camaraderie that develops. This is founded upon their common beliefs that serves to invite the spirit into their midst. Here the members have the opportunity to be instructed in the principles of the gospel and to lift up one another in word and deed. In the church gatherings, members find strength as their individual testimony is increased by the companionship and support of fellow members.

Alma 6:8

8 And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word which had been spoken by his fathers, and according to spirit of prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come to redeem his people from their sins, and the holy order by which he was called. And thus it was written. Amen

Alma, the younger, having taught the people in Zarahemla and set the church in order, departs for the valley of Gideon where he will preach to the people in the city of Gideon.

IV. Alma 7

At the beginning of Alma, Chapter 7, we find the following transcript:

"The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record. *Comprising chapter 7.*" (See heading, Alma 5, page 2 for reference.)

Thomas R. Valletta states,

"The italicized words "Comprising chapter 7," were not part of the ancient record but were added later to printed editions of the Book of Mormon." (*The Book of Mormon Study Guide*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2015, 380).

Alma, the younger, began his remarks to the members of the Church in Gideon, by indicating that this was the first time he had been able to speak to the members personally as previously he had been preoccupied with his responsibilities as the Chief Judge. It is only that the responsibility of Chief Judge had been given to another, that he was able to be with them that day. (see Alma 7:1-2.)

It was his desire to know that you [members in Gideon] "had humbled yourselves before God, and...had continued in the supplicating of his grace...that ye were blameless before him, [and] not in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla" (Alma 7:3). Alma was pleased to report that by the spirit he learned that "they [members in Zarahemla] were established again in the way of righteousness" (Alma 7:4).

It was Alma desire that the members in Gideon were "not in a state of so much unbelief as were your brethren" (Alma 7:6). He trusted: (1) "Ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts; (2) "Ye have not set your hearts upon riches and the vain things of the world; (3) "You do not worship idols; (4) "Ye do worship the true and living God;

and, (5) "Ye look forward for the remission of your sins, with an everlasting faith [in Jesus Christ who]...is to come" (Alma 7:6).

Alma 7:7

7 For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all--for behold the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

It was Alma's testimony to the people that the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ, would soon come and live among his people on the earth. In advance of his birth, it was important that the people prepare themselves. The message of the Spirit to Alma is:

Alma 7:9-12

9 ...Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

10 And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Jeffrey R. Holland states,

"[Succor] is used often in the scriptures to describe Christ's care for and attention to us. It means literally

'to run to.' What a magnificent way to describe the Savior's urgent effort in our behalf. Even as he calls us to come to him and follow him, he is unfailingly running to help us." ("Come unto Me," in *Ensign*, April 1988, 22).

Alma 7:13

13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

In these verses we gain some important insights. The prophets taught the people of the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ, including the purpose of his atonement many years prior to his coming. It was important the members be prepared for this sacred event, by repenting of their transgressions, preparing the way by sharing his coming with others, and walking in his paths by daily keeping the commandments that they may be prepared for further guidance and direction from the Holy Spirit.

Christ was to be born of Mary at Jerusalem, a general reference to the suburb named Bethlehem, just six miles to the south of the larger city. His mortal mother was to be Mary, being a virgin. His conception was to occur as she would be overshadowed by the power of the Holy Ghost, so that the son born would then come to earth as the Son of an Eternal God yet born of a mortal woman. Despite his divine birth, as a mortal, the Son of God would be subjected to "pains and afflictions and temptation" so that as he took upon himself all their infirmities, he would know "how to succor [run to] his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

Tad R. Callister states,

"No mortal can cry out, 'he does not understand my plight for my trials are unique.' There is nothing outside the scope of the Savior's experience...As a result of his mortal experience, culminating in the Atonement, the Savior knows, understand, and feels every human condition, every human woe, and every human loss. He can comfort as no other. He can lift burdens as no other. He can listen as no other. There is no hurt he cannot soothe, rejection he cannot

assuage, loneliness he cannot console. Whatever affliction the world casts at us, he has a remedy of superior healing power." (*The Infinite Atonement*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2000, 209).

Alma then taught the members in Gideon regarding the Savior's atonement. The Savior will suffer "according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance" (Alma 7:13). As the Son of God, he made payment in full for the sins committed by all of mortal men so that he would be able to deliver them from the everlasting physical death that all would have experienced as a result of the sins of Adam and Eve. Because of Jesus Christ, all will be resurrected, their bodies and spirits being united forever, He being "the firstfruits of them that slept...For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22).

Alma 7:14-16

14 Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

15 Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

16 And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life, according to the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which testifieth in me.

Alma having addressed the physical death, or separation of body and spirit, that came upon all who were born into mortality as a result of the sins of Adam and Eve, now

addressed the spiritual death, or our separation from God, that occurred as the result of our own personal sins. The removal of our sins can only occur as a result of our personal repentance and the atonement of Jesus Christ. Regardless of our good works and persistent efforts to keep all the commandments, we would yet come short. Without the atonement of Jesus Christ, we would not, on our own, be able to return to the presence of Our Father in Heaven. Only through our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Mediator, and our willingness to enter in a covenant with Him, will his atonement then make up the difference of our sincere but incomplete efforts. Without his grace, our return to the Father would occur. The request of the Savior of us is: (1) Faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer; (2) Repentance from our sins; (3) Submitting to baptism by immersion by one who holds the proper authority; (4) The receipt of the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands; and (5) Our continual obedience to his commandments as we strive throughout our life to become more like Jesus. As we continue in our progression, we will become born again or changed from our carnal and sensual desires to becoming a man or woman of Christ. As we do so, we "shall...[receive]eternal life" (Alma 7:16).

Alma is assured, according to the Spirit, that the members of Gideon believed his words. (see Alma 7:17.)

Alma 7:19

19 For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

Dennis L. Largey states,

"What does it mean to make his paths straight? An idiom denoting preparation. John the Baptist used this phrase in parallel with his cry to 'prepare the way of the Lord' (1 Ne. 10:8; Matt.3:3; cf. Isa.40:3). Alma 2 taught the Gideonites that they were 'making his paths stright' by walking in 'paths of righteousness.' It is this path 'which leads to the kingdom of God' (Alma 7:19)...In order therefore, to 'make his paths straight,' one must remove all obstacles that create detours. Alma identified repentance as the principal means of doing so (Alma 7:9; cf. Matt. 3:1-3)" (*Book of Mormon Reference Companion*).

Dennis L. Largey, General Editor. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2003, 383).

Alma 7:21

21 And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God; therefore I say unto you the time shall come, yea, and it shall be at the last day, that he who is filthy shall remain in his filthiness.

Alma reminded the members in Gideon as a result of the purity of the Savior, without our repentance and acceptance of him as our Redeemer, we will be unable to return to live with Our Father in Heaven, but will be instead be assigned to a lesser glory.

Alma exhorts the members in Gideon to "awaken to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God" (Alma 7:22).

What is our "duty to God" as members of the Church? It is to meet the qualifications necessary to enable us to get on the path leading to eternal life. Once we are on the path, it is exercise "pure dogged determination, perseverance, application...[to our covenants], zeal, industry [and giving] heed to counsel. Continuing diligence [duty] in church service is a mark of testimony, conversion, and spiritual stability. 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only (James 1:22).'" (Bruce R. McConkie. *Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition], 197).

Alma 7:23

23 And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

24 And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner state,

"These verses summarize the whole of the gospel; they are the master list of Christlike qualities that all true disciples should pursue and emulate. Similar lists of Christlike attributes appear in 2 Peter 1:4-7; Alma 13:28-29; D&C 4:5-6; 107:30. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36 calls these attributes the 'principles of righteousness.' By working hard and being obedient, we eventually acquire these divine attributes as part of our character. They are the 'fruits' of the Spirit of the Lord working in our lives." (Verse by Verse The Book of Mormon. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2011, 402-403).

Alma 7:25

25 And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.

One of the qualifications to be able to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets" is to have "your garments spotless" (Alma 7:25). If your garments are not "cleansed, and are spotless, pure and white," (Alma 5:24), we will not be able to sit down with the prophets of old.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"*Garments* are various articles of clothing used to dress the body. They may be worn for utilitarian or religious purposes or both...Clean garments are a sign of cleanliness, perfection, and salvation. To gain salvation men must wash [symbolically] their garments in the blood of the Lamb." (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1966, [Second Edition], 303-304).

The cleansing of one's garments also involves being qualified to enter into the Temple of the Lord. It is here where the individual is able to participate in sacred ordinances that have been restored in these latter days.

Alma 7:26

26 And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word.

The degree of righteousness that was present with the members in the valley of Gideon was greater initially than with those in the Church in Zarahemla. Through the message delivered by Alma, the younger, in his calling as the President and Prophet of the Church of God, each group were now steadfastly on the road to repentance.

Alma 7:27

27 And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flock and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.

As Alma concluded his remarks to the members in the valley of Gideon, he left a blessing of the Lord upon them. This blessing, conditional upon their continued faith and good works, is that they may enjoy continued peace and prosperity.

V. Conclusions

We are privileged to have the words and counsel given by Alma, the younger, to the saints in Zarahemla and Gideon. It would be of value for us to also respond to the series of questions that he asked. It may serve to guide us to areas in our lives where improvement needs to be made.

In Alma, Chapter 5, Alma highlights the connection between wickedness and bondage. This may occur to a group or individual. He spoke of the atonement and its effects upon our lives. He unlined the importance of our undergoing a change of heart and the special blessing that it will bring in our lives. He also addressed the importance of our garments being washed clean. Part of this process involves our personal repentance, coupled with the blessings of the atonement. When we, however, choose not to repent and put

our lives in order, we then risk becoming children of the devil. May we now take the steps to insure that this is not our fate.

In Alma, Chapter 6, we are again reminded of the effects of pride in our lives. It may even lead us to ignore the counsel of our inspired leaders, believing that we know better. If we continue on this course, we will someday find ourselves on the outside of the Church looking in. We will find that humility and submissiveness are excellent antidotes to this malady and can bring us back on course.

In Alma, Chapter 7, Alma speaks regarding Christ's atonement. We learn how He overcame the physical death which, due to his suffering, insures that all mankind will live again. The sting of death will be gone. All graves will be empty.

The spiritual death, however, requires our effort in order to receive the maximum blessings available. We begin by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior, repenting, willingly entering into baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. We seek to undergo a change of heart as we strive to become men and women of Christ. As we continue on this path, striving each day to improve our lives, we will continue to become closer to being like Our Savior. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, we will be able one day to live with Our Father in Heaven and gain eternal life.

It is a life--changing process to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ. It will require a lifetime to accomplish, but it is worth our best effort. The best part is that we are not alone, He is there to assist us along the way.

Our next lesson, [BM#23], will focus upon the continued efforts of Alma to bring the members of the Church of God into full activity. Through the direction of the Lord, Alma will be given a companion to assist him in this effort. First, he will go to Melek and then to Ammonihah.