

**BM#24 "Give Us Strength According to Our Faith...In Christ"
Alma 13-16**

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I. Introduction

We begin this lesson with the conclusion of Alma's address to the people of Ammonihah. Alma finishes with a powerful discourse on the priesthood and foreordination.

There are those who confuse the terms "foreordination" and "predestination." Foreordination means that before coming to mortal earth, each spirit was given an opportunity to progress and demonstrate their obedience to God's laws. There were those who were able to advance at an increased rate and thereby demonstrated their ability to hold positions of responsibility in God's kingdom. Two individuals were the firstborn Son of God, Jesus Christ and Lucifer, who was known also as "Son of the Morning" (**Lucifer:** Bible Dictionary. *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 726).

Both had qualified to be the Savior and Redeemer in the Father's plan. Jesus sought the will of his Father; Lucifer sought for the Father's glory. Jesus was selected; Lucifer, due to his opposition, was cast out. It was from his faithful children, the Father chose those who would serve as his prophets and leaders in his kingdom here on earth.

Webster's New World Dictionary states,

"Predestination. *Theo.* the doctrine that a) God foreordained everything that would happen b) God predestines certain souls to salvation and, esp. in Calvinism, others to damnation." (*Webster's New World Dictionary: Third College Edition*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988, [1994], 1061).

"Predestination" is a term that states an individual is elected by God to salvation, and others to damnation. This decision is made excluding the agency of the individual.

The major difference between the two terms is agency. In foreordination, the individual has been pre-ordained to serve in the kingdom of God on earth, but his/her final calling is predicated upon both the individual being worthy and his/her acceptance of the call.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"...there is not the slightest hint of compulsion...By their foreordination the Lord merely gives them the opportunity to serve him and his purposes if they will choose to measure up to the standard he knows they are capable of attaining." (*Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition], 290).

Outline of Alma 13-16:

"Alma 13: Alma gives a powerful discourse on the priesthood and the doctrine of foreordination.

"Alma 14: Alma, Amulek, and other faithful believers are persecuted for their righteousness. The Lord delivers Alma and Amulek from prison because of their faith in Christ.

"Alma 15: Zeezrom is healed and baptized. Many people in Sidom are baptized.

"Alma 16: The words of Alma are fulfilled as the Lamanites destroy Ammonihah. The Lord prepares people's hearts to receive the word preached by Alma, Amulek, and others." (*Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999, 107).

I. Alma 13

We now focus on the conclusion of Alma's address to the people of Ammonihah.

Alma 13:1-2

1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto the children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests,

after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"Book of Mormon prophets gave the title 'priest' 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 the 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], 599).

The priests who were ordained to teach the people by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Alma (2 Nephi 5:26; Mosiah 6:3; Alma 4:7), held the Melchizedek priesthood, and officiated in that office similar to those ordained to be High Priests in the Melchizedek priesthood today. Their calling as teachers was to prepare the people, who were then living the Law of Moses, to look for the coming of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice.

Alma 13:3-6

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained--being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called to a holy calling, yea with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

4 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.

5 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--

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach the commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest--

Through these introductory verses, our understanding of the pre-existence is increased. As noted, through the foreknowledge of God, individuals, prior to birth, were called to serve in the kingdom of God on earth. The candidates were selected according to exercising "exceeding faith and good works" (Alma 13:3). As part of their foreordination, they would receive the priesthood or authority to act for God. All had the opportunity for earthly service, however, some lost this privilege "on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds" (Alma 13:4). It is imperative to understand, that the callings to which the individual spirits were foreordained, were dependent upon their worthiness and faithfulness during their mortal lives. If not, their callings were not realized.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet add,

"All doctrines, ordinances, and powers associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ assume force and meaning only in and through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Such was the plan prepared before the foundation of the earth. Men are called to receive the priesthood to assist in the redemption of souls." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 95).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet note four different definitions of the meaning of "enter into the rest of God,"

The definition which Alma makes reference is "to enter the rest of the Lord is to enter into what some scriptures call the Church of the Firstborn, the Church of the exalted,

that organization beyond the veil whose membership is composed of those who have received the promise of eternal life." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 91).

The ultimate goal of our keeping the commandments and teaching "his commandments unto the children of men" (Alma 13:6), is for all to be able to obtain eternal life with our Father in Heaven.

Alma 13:9

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity and truth. And this it is. Amen.

It is important to understand that those who receive the priesthood, after the order of the Son of the Only Begotten of the Son, and are ordained, hold this priesthood on the condition that they honor it through their continued worthiness. The reference in this scripture is to the "priesthood [that] is without beginning or end" (Alma 13:8), that will endure forever, not to an individual.

Alma 13:11-12

**11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.
12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and they were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.**

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"Sanctification in the process of becoming clean, pure, and spotless before the Lord. That process involves faithful service, which in turn is essential to the remission of sins and the refining of our souls." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 98).

Spencer W. Kimball adds,

"This passage [Alma 13:11-12], indicated an attitude which is basic to the sanctification we should all be seeking, and thus to the repentance which merits forgiveness. It is that the former transgression must have reached a 'point of no return' to sin wherein there is not merely a renunciation but a deep abhorrence of the sin where the sin become most distasteful to him and where the desire or urge to sin is cleared out of his life." (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, [13th Printing, 1972], 354-355).

Alma 13:14-15

14 Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.

15 And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.

Alma directs us to become humble like Melchizedek who held the holy priesthood and to whom Father Abraham paid tithes.

Alma 13:17-19

17 Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people waxed strong in iniquity and abominations; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness;

18 But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith...did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father.

19 Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"In these verses [Alma 13:17-19], Alma establishes Melchizedek as a type for Christ: (1) "Like Christ, he was

a king...my king of righteousness...As Melchizedek ruled his king in righteousness, so Christ will eventually rule and reign upon this earth; (2) "Melchizedek ruled over the city of Salem...In like manner, Christ will reinstitute the glory of David's day when nought is known but peace among the Lord's people; (3) "Both Melchizedek and Christ were known as the 'great high priest.'...It was by virtue of the priestly functions that the nations of Israel were reconciled to their God; (4)"Both were men of 'mighty faith' who taught 'repentance' to their people. [Like the city of Enoch, Salem, under Melchizedek's leadership became so righteous, it was taken into heaven (JST, Gen. 14:34), just as Christ through his atonement shows us the way to eternal life]; (5) "Both bore the title Prince of Peace, being teachers of that gospel by which peace and joy come; (6) "Melchizedek...'did reign under his father,' as does Christ, who professes no authority save that of his Father (John 5:30); and, (7) "Though many prophets before Melchizedek, and many after him, Alma described [him as] 'none were greater.' Thus this great prophet, priest, and king stood as a classic type of the Promised Messiah, of who it is true not only that none were greater, but also that none have been as great." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 102-103, numbers added).

Alma 13:20

20 Now I need not rehearse the matter; what I have said may suffice. Behold, the scriptures are before you; if ye will wrest them I shall be to your own destruction.

Webster's New World Dictionary states,

"wrest. to twist violently. 1. to turn, bend, twist. 2. to struggle in opposition, strive; contend." (*Webster's New World Dictionary: Third College Edition*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988, [1994], 1542).

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

"It is wrong to take one passage of scripture and isolate it from all other teachings dealing with the same subject. We should bring together all that has been said by authority on the question. If we were to make a photograph, it would be necessary for all of your rays of light to be

focused properly on the subject. If this were not done then a blurred picture would be the result. This is the case when we try to obtain a mental picture, when we have only a portion of the facts dealing with the subject we are considering." (*Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. 2*. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955, [20th Printing, 1978], 95).

When we fight against the words of the Lord, and twist or distort them, in an effort to limit or minimize their meaning, we do so at the risk of our own salvation. Only as we receive them in humility and give them daily application in our lives, repenting when necessary, will we be strengthened in our ability to understand the Lord's will.

Alma 13:21-24

**21 ...Alma...cried with a mighty voice, saying: Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh;
22 ...the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations;...even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth; wherefore they have come unto us.
23 And they are made known unto us in plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err; and these because of our being wanderers in a strange land..
24 For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.**

The instruction Alma received from the angel was to return to the city of Ammonihah and tell them "except they repent the Lord God will destroy them" (Alma 8:16). His words of counsel and admonishment have been in fulfillment of this decree by the angel of the Lord. He had spoken with plainness so that the people would not misunderstand. The message from the Lord is to prepare "the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in glory" (Alma 13:24). Not only will Christ come a second time, prior to the commencement of the Millennium, but He will also visit the children of Nephi following his resurrection, which will be preceded by a great destruction of the wicked. (see 3 Nephi 9-11.) Each of his appearances will be to those who are righteous.

Alma 13:26-27

26 And it shall be made known unto the just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them.

27 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;

The return of the Lord will be made known in advance to those who are receptive to the word of the Lord. To those who are righteous, it will not come as a surprise. To the wicked, however, it will be as a thief in the night. Having procrastinated "the day of [their] repentance" (Alma 13:27), it will then be too late. Their day of judgment will have arrived.

Alma 13:28-29

28 But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering.

29 Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.

Some misunderstand the words of Alma, "that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear," (Alma 13:28). They understand it to mean that they can comfortably ignore the promptings of the spirit, go where evil exists and they will not be tempted. Nothing could be more false. When we knowingly place ourselves in those areas where the spirit of evil prevails, we will suffer accordingly. The promise of the Lord only applies to those individuals who are living lives in order to qualify to hear the whispering of the spirit. They consciously avoid all areas where the devil may be present. If they should mistakenly fall into

his domain, they may then rely on the protection of the Lord to get them out of such surroundings without harm.

Alma's words of admonition are not only to those whose hearts are hard, but also to those who are teachable. Here he outlines the steps each of us must take if we are to find favor with God and qualify for his grace. Only as we come to him with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Nephi 2:7), can we be assured of his protection and blessings.

Alma 13:30-31

30 And may the Lord grant unto you repentance, that ye may not bring down his wrath upon you, that ye may not be bound down by the chains of hell, that ye may not suffer the second death.

31 And Alma spake many more words unto the people, which are not written in this book.

With these last words recorded in the Book of Mormon, Alma spells out to his audience that if they choose not to repent, they will: (1) "Bring down his wrath upon you; (2) "Be bound down by the chains of hell;" and, (3) "Suffer the second death" (Alma 13:30). They will suffer destruction; become servants of the devil; and lose their opportunity for exaltation in the world hereafter. Given the consequences, the choice is theirs.

III. Alma 14

The response of the citizens of Ammonihah to the words of Alma and Amulek are mixed.

Alma 14:1-3

1 And it came to pass after he [Alma] 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.

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

3 And they were also angry with Alma and Amulek; and because they had testified so plainly against their wickedness, they sought to put them away privily.

To those who are humble and patient and seek to know the word of the Lord, the words of the prophets are sweet unto them and lead them to repentance. To the wicked, the words are often offensive to their permissive lifestyle and, like the devil whose servants they are becoming, they seek to silence the servants of the Lord in any way possible, including imprisonment and death.

As Alma and Amulek are brought before the chief judge, and false accusations are brought against them, there is one who has been converted. He testified before the people, regarding the innocence of Alma and Amulek.

Alma 14:6-7

6 And it came to pass that Zeezrom was astonished at the words which had been spoken; and he also knew concerning the blindness of the minds, which he had caused among the people by his lying words; and his soul began to be harrowed up under a consciousness of his own guilt; yea, he began to be encircled about by the pains of hell.

7 And it came to pass that he began to cry unto the people, saying: Behold, I am guilty, and these men are spotless before God. And he began to plead for them from that time forth; but they reviled him, saying: Art thou also possessed with the devil? And 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.

Dean L. Larsen states,

"An important lesson seems to emerge from the experience of Zeezrom and the other repentant transgressors who have been mentioned. It is never safe for us to judge a person to be beyond the reach of the Lord's merciful hand. Even those whose lives have been tainted by corruption and apparent rebellion against the things of God can, through sincere repentance, become forces for great good in the accomplishment of the Lord's purposes.

"We do know that Zeezrom's life was dramatically redirected. It appears that in spite of his having yielded to the influence of the environment in which he had gained notoriety, a spark of spiritual light must have endured in

his soul." (*Heroes From The Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995, [Seventh Printing, 1998], 116).

Those in the majority cannot tolerate to even hear the words of the minority, especially one who had previously been their advocate against the servants of the Lord. Not only did they cast Zeezrom out, but others who were sympathetic to the words of Alma and Amulek. Then they sent men to cast stones at them. It is important to note that many of the men, who were receptive to the words of Alma and Amulek were able to leave the city of Ammonihah and travel to the city of Sidon. (see Alma 15:1.) However, those who had wives and children were not able to take them with them. The record is unclear if any of the wives or children were able to escape to Sidon. However, there were many of the wives and children as well as others who were prevented from departing.

Alma 14:8-9 [underline added]

8 And they [wicked people] brought...their [the believers] 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.

9 And it came to pass that 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.

Not only women and children, but all who had "believed or been taught to believe," (Alma 14:8), were brought forth to be burned by fire and also their holy scriptures. And Alma and Amulek were bound and forced to experience this tragedy of inhumanity.

Alma 14:10-11

10 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.

11 But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constaineth 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.

When we see pain, injustice, illness, abuse, or physical or mental limitations, in truth, any suffering of any kind, we want the perpetrators of these deeds to be immediately punished. Like Amulek, we want to call down the wrath of God upon these individuals. We, whose vision is so limited, do not understand the dealings of God, especially when it comes to the suffering of those close to us or ourselves. Often we compound our lack of vision, by passing judgment upon God himself! We forget that God, who is all knowing and all caring, sees so much more than we see. He always does what is in the best interest of his children, even if doesn't seem best, at the moment, to us! I believe that he also feels greater pain than we do, for in truth all are his children, both the victim and the assaulter. Fortunately, for all of us he, despite his pain, does what is best, not what is expedient in the moment. Someday, when we too will see more clearly, we will know that his actions at all times were in the best interest of all his children.

Alma 14:12-13

12 Now Amulek said unto Alma: Behold, perhaps they will burn us also.

13 And Alma said: Be it according to the will of the Lord. But, behold, our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not.

It must have been a relief to Amulek to be reassured that he and Alma were not going to suffer death. This was however, not the case previously for the Prophet Abinadi. He had been called upon to suffer "death by fire...having sealed the truth of his words by his death" (Mosiah 17:20).

Marion D. Hanks states,

"The right question to ask is not why good people have trials, but how shall good people respond when they are tried?...God does not deny us the experience we came here to have. He does not insulate us from tribulation or guarantee immunity from trouble. Much of the pain we suffer and inevitably impose upon others is self-induced through our bad judgment, through poor choices [but not all]...But most that happens to us in this life we cannot control; we only respond. Knowing what God has promised can provide courage and faith we need...[T]he promise is that in times of sorrow and affliction, if we endure and remain faithful and put our trust in him and are courageous, the Lord will visit us in our afflictions, strengthen us to carry our burdens and support us in our trials. He'll be with us to the end of our days, lift us at the last day to greater opportunities for service, and exalt us at last with him and reunited loved ones, and he will consecrate our afflictions to our gain." ("A Loving, Communicating God," in *Ensign*, November 1992, 64).

The abuses given to Alma and Amulek continued at the hands of their tormentors.

Alma 14:14-15, 17

14 ...the chief judge of the land came and stood before Alma and Amulek, as they were bound; and he smote them with his hand upon their cheeks, and said unto them: After what ye have seen, will ye preach again unto this people, that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone?

15 Behold, ye see that ye had not power to save those who had been cast into the fire; neither has God saved them because they were of thy faith. And the judge smote them again upon their cheeks, and asked: What say ye for yourselves?

17 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek answered him nothing; and he smote them again, and delivered them to the officers to be cast into prison.

George Reynolds and Jeanne Sjodahl state,

"One of the most difficult feats of self-subjugation is that of holding one's tongue when righteous judgment

otherwise requires one to speak. To stand unmoved and mute while facing wicked accusations is the supreme test of self-control. Just as God had withheld the hand of justice during the burning of the innocent women and children (Verse 8) so He now constrained Alma to withhold his hand a little longer, in order that iniquity's cycle might run its full course.

"It is out of the impact of evil upon good, like sledge upon anvil, that the qualities of saintliness are forged, and hammered into shape. Alma was being tried, as have few of history's other saints, but the result of the impact of these frightful experiences upon this great man 'were good.'" (*Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3. Amplified and Arranged by Philip C. Reynolds and David Sjodahl King. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, 221*).

In Alma, Chapter 14, verses 18-24, Alma and Amulek, while in prison and in bounds, are subjected to further abuse by those who were responsible for their imprisonment.

Bryan Richards states,

"In the preceding...verses, Mormon records that Alma and Amulek were struck by their accusers on at least seven different occasions. Yet they suffered in complete silence. They...[were] mocked, humiliated, stripped of their clothing, spat upon, bound, confined and suffered hunger and thirst." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-14).

Alma 14:25-27

25 ...when the last had spoken unto them the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose and stood upon their feet.

26 And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength 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.

27 And it came to pass that so great was their fear that they fell to the earth, and did not obtain the outer door of the prison; and the earth shook mightily, and the walls of the prison were rent in twain, so that they fell to the earth; and the chief

judge, and the lawyers, and priests, and teachers, who smote upon Alma and Amulek, were slain by the fall thereof.

The prison has been destroyed. Those who had abused Alma and Amulek lay dead. Alma and Amulek had been freed by the Lord from the prison.

Alma 14:28

28 And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison, and they were not hurt; for the Lord had granted unto them power, according to their faith which was in Christ. And they straightway came forth out of the prison; and they were loosed from their bands; and the prison had fallen to the earth, and every soul within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, was slain; and they straightway came forth into the city.

It was the faith of Alma and Amulek in Jesus Christ that freed them from their imprisonment and brought about the death of their accusers and others who were prisoners in the prison. Through the power granted to them by the Lord, their lives had been preserved.

Alma 14:29

29 Now the people having heard a great noise came running together by multitudes to know the cause of it; and when they saw Alma and Amulek coming forth out of the prison, and the walls thereof had fallen to the earth, they were struck with great fear, and 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.

Why did the people flee from Alma and Amulek? Unlike the two lions, referenced by Mormon, they presented no physical danger to them. The collapse of the prison and the survival of Alma and Amulek, however, bore witness to them that they were servants of God. If they truly were servants of the Lord, then the words they had spoken to them and the judgments they had pronounced were also true. If they did not repent, they too would suffer destruction by the hand of the Lord.

In True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference, we read,

"Agency. [Just as in the pre-existence], [i]n mortality, you continue to have agency. Your use of this gift determines your happiness or misery in this life and in the life to come. You are free to choose and act, but you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions. The consequences may not be immediate, but they will always follow. Choices of good and righteousness lead to happiness, peace, and eternal life, while choices of sin and evil eventually lead to heartache and misery." (**Agency.** *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004, 12).

Just as agency is a gift of God, likewise so is the gift of repentance. Repentance means that when we commit sin, the consequences need not be permanent. Because of the atonement of Jesus Christ, changes can occur if the individual is willing to exercise faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Redeemer, repent, be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. As we apply the principles of repentance in our lives, we can receive forgiveness from our sins. It can also be true for the people of Ammonihah. Faith and obedience to the words of the Lord can replace their fear.

IV. Alma 15

Alma 15:1-2

1 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that city [Ammonihah]; and they departed, and came out even into the land of Sidom; and behold, there they found all the people who had departed out of the land of Ammonihah who had been cast out and stoned, because they believed in the words of Alma.

2 And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children, and also concerning themselves, and of their power of deliverance.

It seems reasonable to conclude that not all the women and children of those who believed had been burned, but that some had escaped to Sidom. It does appear that men, who had been separated from their wives and children, are now informed of the fate of their families. It is tragic what occurred at the hands of barbaric individuals regarding

"whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God" (Alma 14:8), all in the name of religion. It was not the first time believers had been put to death as a result of their religious beliefs, nor will it be the last. We must pray that if it comes to us or those we love, we will place our trust in God and be faithful in the cause of truth.

Alma 15:3-4

3 And also Zeezrom lay sick in Sidom, with a burning fever, which was caused by the great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness, for he supposed that Alma and Amulek were no more; and he supposed that they had been slain because of his iniquity. And this great sin, and his many other sins, did harrow up his mind until it did become exceedingly sore, having no deliverance; therefore he began to be scorched with a burning heat.

4 Now, when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage; and he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.

Boyd K. Packer states,

"There is another part of us, not so tangible, but quite as real as our physical body. This intangible part of us is described as mind, emotion, intellect, temperament, and many other things. Very seldom is it described as spiritual.

"But there is a *spirit* in man; to ignore it is to ignore reality. There are spiritual disorders, too, and spiritual diseases that can cause intense suffering.

"The body and the spirit of man are bound together. Often, very often, when there are disorders, it is very difficult to tell which is which...All of us experience some temporary physical sickness. All of us now and again may be spiritually ill as well." ("The Balm of Gilead," in *Ensign*, November 1977, 59).

Zeezrom had escaped persecution from his enemies in Ammonihah, but he was not at peace. The possibility that his actions had led to the death of two of the Lord's servants caused him great physical pain of conscience. He

was, as it were, "a damned soul" and he had been both judge and executioner. His physical pain was real though its cause was spiritual. He knew that Alma and Amulek could heal him and he reached out to them.

The scriptures record, "And it came to pass that they went immediately." They found him "upon his bed, sick, being very low with a burning fever; and his mind also was exceedingly sore because of his iniquities." "When he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him" (Alma 15:5).

Alma asked him a question with a promise, for the purpose of determining his faith: "Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation,?" followed by, "If thou believest in the redemption of Christ thou canst be healed" (Alma 15:6-9). Zeezrom responded in the affirmative.

We may assume that then Alma and Amulek, after anointing him with consecrated oil, laid their hands upon his head, and pronounced a blessing upon him. The summation of which was, "O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ" (Alma 15:10).

The results were miraculous.

Alma 15:11

11 And when Alma had said these words, Zeezrom leaped upon his feet, and began to walk; and this was done to the great astonishment of all the people; and the knowledge of this went forth throughout all the land of Sidom.

The record continued regarding Zeezrom's conversion. He was then taught the gospel of Jesus Christ by Alma and Amulek. He confessed his sins and having felt the confirming witness by the Holy Ghost, was ready to be baptized.

Alma 15:12

12 And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; and he began from that time forth to preach unto the people.

Dean L. Larsen states,

"He [Zeezrom] is baptized by Alma, and, just as was the case with Paul, he immediately begins to preach among the people, later becoming a trusted companion of Alma and Amulek. It is perhaps not adding too much to reality to suppose that Zeezrom's healing, his conversion, and his testifying of Christ contribute much to the missionary success enjoyed by these three servants of the Lord. The record tells us that the people 'did flock in from all the region round about Sidom, and were baptized' (Alma 15:14).

"That Zeezrom proves himself in the eyes of his mentor, Alma, is confirmed by the fact that he regularly appears in the accounts of Alma's ministry as one of his most trusted and reliable companions and fellow servants. Years after the events in Ammonihah and Sidom, when Alma undertakes one of the most difficult challenges of his life's ministry--conversion of the Zoramites--Zeezrom is chosen along with Ammon, Omner, Amulek and two of Alma's sons to be a part of this seasoned missionary force (see Alma 31:6)."
("Zeezrom," in *Heroes of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995, [Seventh Printing, 1998], 118).

Zeezrom, an unlikely investigator, joins the Church of God and becomes one its strongest and most faithful missionaries. Who would have anticipated that such individuals as Amulek and Zeezrom would be found amongst those in the wicked city of Ammonihah. And there were also unnamed others who embraced the gospel as taught by Alma and Amulek. Despite its wickedness, Ammonihah had among its residents those who accepted the teachings of the gospel and joined the Church of God.

Alma 15:15

15 But as to the people that were in the land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and very 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.

George Reynold and Jeanne Sjordahl state,

Many of the people of Ammonihah "were of the profession of Nehor, and did not believe in the repentance of their sins.

The seductive appeal of Nehorism was that it promised a prize with a price; a victory without effort; an eternal glory without goodness. It ignored the eternally present fact of cause and effect in spiritual phenomena. By holding that a man's misuse of his free agency was but an inconsequential element in his qualifying for exaltation, Nehor was inferentially questioning the very existence of that Free Agency. The tragedy that besets nations who repudiate responsibility for their evil conduct, and the moral decadence which inevitably follows such repudiation, are unforgettably portrayed in chapters 14 through 16 of this great Book of Alma.

"Nehor is dead, but Nehorism lives on. Dressed in a variety of philosophical habiliments and religious disguises, its influence is found almost everywhere...they absolve mankind from any moral culpability for individual wrongdoing, and thus pave the way to spiritual corruption and death."
(*Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3. Amplified and Arranged by Philip C. Reynolds and David Sjodahl King. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, 229-230*).

Alma 15:16

16 And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek, Amulek having 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;

For many, membership in the Church of God is not easy. It not only requires that we give up all of our sins, but make other changes in our lifestyle. This may also include, as it did for Amulek, a decrease in their worldly wealth, loss of close friends, and even family members. Is it worth it? The answer is a resounding "Yes." The peace of mind that comes to the repentant individual is a great blessing as Zeezrom learned. One comes to understand clearly: Where did I come from?; Why am I here?; and, Where am I going after this life? Not only does one have a spirit of peace and joy when they are doing the will of the Father, this in turn, leads to further happiness during their life. They also, through making and keeping sacred covenants, can be with their family forever. To those who have experienced the death of a child or spouse, this is a great blessing. They also know that God loves them and sent his Son to free

them, through his atonement, not only from the chains of hell, but He offers the opportunity for them to return to live with their Father in Heaven again. To know that following their baptism by one who holds the priesthood of God and then to receive the Holy Ghost as your constant companion, is worth more than money can buy. It was true that Zeezorm and Amulek suffered loss of wealth, prestige and family, when they joined the Church of God. Like most who also join the Church, they got more, much more, than they lost.

Alma established the church at Sidom and put all in order regarding the members, including checking the pride of their hearts, humbling themselves before God, assembling themselves in sanctuaries to worship God, and watching and praying continually so that they may be delivered from Satan. (see Alma 15:17). Having established the Church in Sidom and putting all in order for the blessing and benefit of the members, Alma returned to his home in Zarahemla with a guest.

Alma 15:18

18 Now as I said, Alma having seen all these things, therefore he took Amulek and came over to the land of Zarahemla, and took him to his own house, and did administer unto him in his tribulations and strengthened him in the Lord.

V. Alma 16

After a period of peace, once again the Lamanites have breached the borders of the land.

Alma 16:2-3

2 ...the armies of the Lamanites...[had come] even into the city of Ammonihah, and began to slay the people and destroy the city.
3 And now it came to pass, before the Nephites could raise a sufficient army to drive them out of the land, they had destroyed the people who were in the city of Ammonihah, and also some around the borders of Noah, and taken others captive into the wilderness.

The city the inhabitants had declared could not be destroyed (see Alma 9:4.), had been destroyed in one day

(Alma 16:9-10), just as Alma had prophesied. (see Alma 9:18.)

What are some of the reasons why the city of Ammonihah was destroyed?

Bryan Richards states,

- "1) They reviled, spat upon, and cast out Alma when he first came to them (Alma 8:13).
 - "2) They tried bribery to get Amulek to reject the Lord (Alma 11:22).
 - "3) They had rejected warnings and cries of repentance from both Alma and Amulek (Alma 9:15,18; 10:9).
 - "4) They spat upon and cast out the repentant Zeezrom (Alma 14:7).
 - "5) They stoned and cast out the male believers (Alma 15:1).
 - "6) They burned the wives and children of the believers in order to mock the power of Alma and Amulek (Alma 14:8-10).
 - "7) They mocked, bound, and tortured Alma and Amulek (Alma 14:14-24)."
- www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-16).

In Alma 16:4-8, Mormon includes an important message for us. Following the destruction of the city of Ammonihah, the Lamanities army also attacked other nearby areas, destroying some and taking others captive. (see Alma 16:3-4). The leader, Zoram, knowing that Alma was the head of the Church and hearing that he had the spirit of prophecy, sought his counsel as to where they might intercept the Lamanites and secure the lives of the Nephites who had been taken captive. Alma, upon inquiring of the Lord, gave them the exact location of the Lamanite army and told the military leader "the Lord will deliver unto thee thy brethren who have been taken captive by the Lamanites" (Alma 16:6). They found the Lamanites and scattered them, and "took their brethren who had been taken captive by the Lamanites, and there was not one of soul of them had been lost that were taken captive" (Alma 16:8).

Herein is yet another illustration of the love the Lord has for his children. In accordance with his will and timing, those who had been taken captive were rescued. Through his gospel, he also helps us to become free in other areas where we may be held captive. These may include, being weighed down with sin; addictions that encumber our lives and prevent us from reaching our true potential, even physical or emotional illness. Just as He cares for the "fowls of the air [and] the lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:26, 28), He cares for us even more. While he may not physically remove our pain or adversity, he will strengthen us and make our backs stronger so we can bear the pain and be healed by it. He will also send his servants to give us words of encouragement and comfort during our time of need. He will not leave us alone in our infirmities. This is His promises.

After the city of Ammonihah was destroyed, it received the following epitaph.

Alma 16:11

11...their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth, and they were covered with a shallow covering. And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate.

Bryan Richards states,

"A desolation is a punishment from God for wickedness."
(www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-16).

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

"How perfect the type--Ammonihah, a city pretending religion, a religion perfectly tolerant of any action save it be the preaching of the gospel of repentance! To preach repentance, to testify of Christ, to speak of the necessity of good works--there were sins too grievous to be borne. Their effect was to unite in wrath and bitterness the diversified factions within the congregations of this ever-tolerant religion. These missionaries of righteousness must be mocked, ridiculed, beaten, and imprisoned. Their adherents must be stoned, driven from the community, or

burned at the stake. Such were the seeds they planted and such was the harvest they reaped in the desolation of Nehor. We are left to wonder to what extent Ammonihah is a prophetic foreshadowing of that which the scriptures denominate as the 'desolation of abomination' (D&C 84:114, 117; D&C 88:85), events that will precede and attend the coming of our Lord and Master that will bring again that peace once known to the faithful of the Nephite nation." (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 119).

Alma 16:13

13 And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance to the people in their temples, and in their sanctuaries, and also in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.

After a period of rest and refreshment, Alma and Amulek continue their service to the Lord preaching repentance to the people and bringing order to the congregations of the Church.

Bryan Richards states,

"The Nephites used many words to describe their meeting places. The word, "church," is not one of them. In the Book of Mormon, the word "church," is used to describe the organization but not the building. Thus, members of the church met not in churches, but in sanctuaries and synagogues. We know little of the difference between Nephite sanctuaries and synagogues. Both were apparently places of common worship. In this verse [Alma 16:13], we learn that they were built after the manner of the Jews, and in the last chapter, we learned that they had altars in their sanctuaries which were used for worship (Alma 15:17)." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-16).

Alma 16:16-17

**16 And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming--
17 That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to**

destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

"There was no inequality among them" (Alma 16:16). Alma had previously taught the members of the church the following doctrine,

Mosiah 18:27

27 And again Alma commanded that the people of the church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he had; if he have more abundantly he would impart more abundantly; and of him that had but little, but little should be required; and to him that had not should be given.

Bryan Richards states,

"Whether this means that Alma's people had all things in common or not is debatable, but the point is that they were living the essence of [the] celestial law of consecration. Apparently, they were less attached to their material possessions than we are today.

"It is no coincidence that the Lord responded to their equanimity by pouring out his Spirit on all the face of the land." (www.gospeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-16).

While the celestial law of consecration was suspended, replaced temporarily by the law of tithing, the following remains the Lord's directive to the members of his church regarding being generous, even today.

Doctrine and Covenants 70:14

14 Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld.

It is important, if we desire to receive the fullness of the Spirit of the Lord in our lives, we are generous with our means to those in need.

Alma 16:20

20 And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness.

Byran Richards states,

"...five years prior, Alma...said, "the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people...(Alma 7:7). Apparently, Alma subsequently learned through the Spirit that he would appear after his resurrection.

"The time among the Nephites was a time to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming (v. 16). The doctrine of His impending visit seems to be essential to that preparation. Appropriately, this the people did hear with great joy and gladness." (www.gosepeldoctrine.com/contents/Alma-16).

Alma 16:21

21 And now after the church had been established throughout all the land--having got the victory over the devil, and the word of God being preached in its purity in all the land, and the Lord pouring out his blessings upon the people--thus ended the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi.

We will learn in our next lesson [BM#25] that as Alma is returning "from the land of Gideon southward, away to the land of Manti,..." (Alma 17:1), he will meet some special friends.

VI. Conclusions

The Lord loves his children, however, he will not indefinitely tolerate their wickedness. Because He loves them, He called prophets and his servants to give them a voice of warning. If they respond, the promised penalty will be rescinded. If they choose instead to ignore his voice of warning, and continue in their wickedness, they will reap destruction. This is one of the messages of BM#23 as well as this lesson.

In Alma, Chapter 13, we address the last part of Alma's speech to the people of Ammonihah. He taught the concept of foreordination that occurred prior to our coming to earth. Those who would serve as the leaders of his kingdom on earth, had qualified themselves by exercising "exceeding faith and [doing] good works" (Alma 13:3). Others had the opportunity of being chosen, but they forfeited these blessings "on account of the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds" (Alma 13:4). Alma also taught the importance of our sanctifying our lives so that we may have the opportunity of entering into God's presence.

Alma spoke of Melchizedek of whom little is noted in the Old Testament. We learn that when he was the King of Salem, the people were wicked. He preached repentance to them and they repented and became a righteous people. Father Abraham paid his tithes to Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a type of Christ and was seen by Alma as being none greater among God's servants. Alma warns the people of Ammonihah, and us, not to wrest [twist, bend] the words of the scriptures or it will result in our destruction. (see Alma 13:20.) The message to the people of Ammonihah was to repent from their sins or be destroyed as a city.

In Alma, Chapter 14, we learn that in spite of the prevailing wickedness, they were those who heeded the message of Alma, repented from their sins, and received the gospel, including Amulek and Zeezrom. The greater number of the citizens, however, put to death by fire, the women and children and others who had "believed or had been taught to believe...[along with the] holy scriptures...[to] be burned" (Alma 14:8). They forced Alma and Amulek to observe their death. Following this horrible action, which Alma and Amulek were prevented by God from stopping, they were then placed in prison. While there, they were subject to continued abuse by the leaders of the city. As a result of their faith in Christ, the prison was destroyed along with the tormentors and other prisoners, and the lives of Alma and Amulek were spared.

In Alma, Chapter 15, Alma and Amulek were cast out of the city and they went to the land of Sidom. Here they were united with the believers who had escaped from Ammonihah, and learned of the suffering of Zeezrom. He, upon learning that Alma and Amulek were still alive, requested they come and administer to him. Zeezrom was miraculously healed and was then taught the gospel. He gained a testimony and

following his repentance, received baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Amulek, due to the loss of his family, went as Alma's guest to Zarahemla.

In Alma, Chapter 16, we learn of the destruction of the city of Ammonihah by the Lamanites as Alma had prophesied. (see Alma 9:18.) Seven reasons are offered as to why it was destroyed. The Lamanities had taken several Nephites captive as they ravaged the area and the military leader sought Alma's counsel as to their rescue. The Lord, through Alma, gave his precise directions and their lives were spared. We learned that just as God physically rescued his children, he also strengthens and blesses us regarding the pain and adversity we experience in our lives. While he may not remove our pain, he does strengthen and bless us so that we are able to endure it. He also sends his servants to give us words of encouragement and strength during our trials. He never leaves us alone in our infirmity, that is his promise.

Alma teaches us that "there was no inequality among [the Nephites]" (Alma 16:16). We must follow their example and also share with those who are in need today. As we do so, we will experience further blessings from the Lord.

When the Savior returns to the earth, it will be the righteous who will be blessed to receive him. As we continue to search the scriptures, they will strengthen us in our ability to resist temptation and draw closer to the Lord.

In our next lesson, [BM#25], we learn about the mission of the sons of Mosiah II to the Lamanites. We will also learn of their challenges and joy.