

Book of Mormon Study – Mosiah 29-Alma 4

Online zoom Sunday School, 31 May 2020

Timeline:

Year	Event	Age of Alma the Elder	Age of Mosiah	Age of Alma the Younger
Around 160 BC	Zeniff confers kingdom on his son, Noah.	13		
Around 148 BC	Abinadi begins to prophesy.	25	6	
124 BC	King Benjamin addressed his people.	49	30	
118 BC (Mon 27 Mar)	Alma to Zarahemla.	55	36	15-25
Around 100 BC	Alma the younger sees angel and is converted.	73	54	33-43
Around 91 BC	First year of reign of Judges. Alma Elder and Mosiah die.	82	63	42-52
Around 87 BC	Alma fights Amlici.			46-56
Around 83 BC	Alma gives up judgement seat.			50-60
Around 73 BC	Alma taken up.			60-70

Mosiah 29:1

Why did Mosiah send out to know the will of the people on who should be their king when the obvious answer (as he lays out in his response below) is Aaron, who is gone to the land of Nephi and who he knows would not accept the kingdom anyway?

Choose judges.

Mosiah 29:25

Under law of Moses, judges were to be appointed (see Deut 16:18). Then why were Nephites under rule of Kings? (see Deut 17:14-15)

Mosiah 29:30-31

With system of judges sins of people are upon their own heads. Under kings, sins are upon the head of the king.

Christ is our true king. Did he take upon him the sins of his people? Christ is the example of what a king should be.

Are prophets in this sense kings? If a prophet does not warn the people, then the sins of the people will be upon his head (see Ezekiel 3:16-19). Prophets are also referred to as "servants". How does this relate to what it means to be a righteous king?

And this land shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land, who shall raise up unto the Gentiles. 2 Ne 10:11

God commands there shall not be kings on this land, and if you raise one up, God will destroy him.

What kind of person can become a successful king upon this land without being destroyed? See example of King Benjamin - Mosiah 2:11-17.

Those who will establish Zion must reject even the idea of a king. We have embedded in the doctrine of the Restoration the notion that we're going to become "Kings and Queens, Priests and Priestesses." I suggest that when Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and he gird himself with a towel, and he knelt down, and he washed the feet of those that he was ministering to, implicit within that act is the kind of conduct of our real King (John 13:4- 16). Those who are His kings and priests will do likewise. They, too, will kneel and serve. They will not be "Strongmen." They will be meek servants to the Gentile's way of reckoning. If He says, "My kingdom is not of this world," and He came merely to be a servant, how much more gratefully should we look at the opportunity to kneel and to serve rather than to say, "I want the chief seats" (Matthew 23:6), rather than say, "I want to be upheld and sustained and lauded and praised." We are not here to be flattered and extolled. We are here to serve in any way we can.

Mosiah 29:39

they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them.

Contrast with how we treat our liberties today.

Mosiah 29:42

Alma is appointed chief judge, he being also the High Priest. The separation from secular and spiritual leader that was implemented in the last chapter is now re-united in one man again here. This lasts 9 years, as Alma ends up giving up the judgement seat to Nephihah in Alma 4:20.

Alma 1:3-4

Nehor taught priests should be supported by the people and all mankind should be saved at the last day. We will see this doctrine causing problems throughout the rest of the book of Alma.

These teachings prevail in churches today. Universalism is gaining popularity, even inside the CJCLDS. Take a look at what Nephi prophesied about our day:

"And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God...

"And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for

there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.” (2 Nephi 28:8,21-22)

Sure enough, we see a rise in teachings in the LDS church suggesting as much. “*Odds Are You're Going to Be Exalted*” by Alonzo L. Gaskill (available from Deseret Book) is one book that is rising in popularity in Mormonism. This title looks uncannily like a Mormon version of a book that is popular in other Christian circles titled “*That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation*” by David Bentley Hart.

Alma 1:12

This teaching from Nehor is what Alma calls "priestcraft".

Priestcraft is a new message that does not include knowledge about how the audience may come to God themselves; the primary intent is always to make others dependent on the messenger. It is foolishness to separate information about what the Lord is doing from instruction on how to become redeemed. It is vanity to spread new and personal revelation about the afterlife, God, man, prophecy, visionary encounters, and spiritual experiences if the primary reason does not focus on instructing how the audience can come to God themselves. It is dangerous to trust teachings that fail to give man guidance on how to find God for himself. Pandering for popularity is at the heart of priestcraft. Priestcrafts are where people seek approval of the world but not the best interest of Zion (see 2 Nephi 26:29-33). Any man who tries to put himself between another person and heaven, claiming that he alone should be the source of religious beliefs and education, is practicing priestcraft and will, in the end, lead both himself and his followers to damnation. All churches, if the Book of Mormon is true, are filled with corruption and priestcraft. The obligation to hold up a light is circumscribed by His direction that [He is] the light which ye shall hold up (3 Nephi 18:24-25) — nothing and no one else. He is the lifeline. Therefore, when anyone offers to preach, teach, exhort, and expound, He must be at the center of this prophesying, or they are engaging in priestcraft.

Can the Book of Mormon be used just as easily as the Bible in engaging in priestcraft if it is used to pursue any end other than establishing Zion?

Alma 1:26-27

*And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they **were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.** And **they did impart of their substance,** every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; **and they did not wear costly apparel,** yet they were neat and comely.*

You see they prospered in this, and they were blessed because of it. We should learn from their example, when they were prospering, about what it was they did that was right to bring it about. The ideal is never to have a professional class of clergyman. The ideal is to have every one of us as equals. In our own day, in a revelation given through Joseph, D&C 52:39 says: “*Let the residue of the elders watch over the churches, and declare the word in the regions round about them; and **let them labor with their own hands** that there be no idolatry nor wickedness practiced.*” To “labor with their own hands” means

they are not professionals receiving compensation for preaching, because as soon as you turn them into a professional clergy, people idolize them...

"And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple." Isn't it interesting, that both in the case of Alma, talking about how their system worked with their priests, and in the modern revelation, talking about how things should be among us, the first principle is "there is no such thing as professional clergy," followed immediately by, "remember the poor, remember the needy," in both instances. That is not happenstance.

They did not wear costly apparel. What is it with "costly apparel" in the Book of Mormon? Note it does not say lavish or showy, but "costly". Can you tell the difference between an expensive suit or dress and one that is not? If I am frugal and I keep my eyes open I may be able to find a great deal on an otherwise "costly" suit at DI or at a yard sale. But if money is tight for me, why do I need to be so concerned with finding such a deal to keep up with expectations of what I should wear to church?

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: (Matt 6:25,28)

[Alma 1:32](#)

*For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in **sorceries**, and in **idolatry or idleness**, and in **babblings**, and in **envyings** and **strife**; **wearing costly apparel**; **being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes**; **persecuting**, **lying**, **thieving**, **robbing**, **committing whoredoms**, and **murdering**, and **all manner of wickedness**; nevertheless, the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible.*

Here we find a *list*. The list appears to give a progression of sins in an order from lesser to more serious degree. It's worth looking at these in order, and taking a minute to consider at the meaning of some of these:

sorceries: Originally, divination from the casting of lots; hence, the use of supernatural knowledge or power gained in any manner, especially through the connivance of evil spirits; magic art; enchantment; witchcraft; spells; charms. Soothsayers are Those who make predictions by using means other than true prophecy. Modern application of soothsaying may exist in business, government, economics, weather — especially long-term weather — politics, etc. It is foretelling for gain, profit, popularity, or influence without God's commission and direction.

idolatry or idleness: Idol is anything that separates mankind from Christ. Interesting how this relates to being idle.

babblings: lashon hara, talebearing, derogatory or damaging speech about a person

envyings: a feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages, success, possessions, etc.

strife: heated, often violent conflict or disagreement. contention

wearing costly apparel: we've mentioned already, with additional mention below

lifted up in the pride of their own eyes: “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone.” — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (President Benson gave an entire talk on this one subject)

persecuting: cruel and unfair treatment of a person or group, especially because of their religious or political beliefs, or their race.

lying

thieving: to steal

robbing: to take something from (someone) by unlawful force or threat of violence

committing whoredoms

murdering

all manner of wickedness

These things all go together. You don't have whoredoms without lyings etc. Our modern day entertainment is incomplete without this list. Lists like this occur all through the Book of Mormon. (Compare with 2 Ne 28:11-15 or 3 Ne 30:2, for example.)

[Come back to Alma 1:5-9](#)

Nehor is a perfect example of one who follows the path of sins listed in verse 32. They began to give him money, he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and he began to wear costly apparel. Then after this, he debates with Gideon, gets angry, takes the sword, and kills him. Murder. Note the progression of sins.

Can you identify items in this list that are applied in prophecy to us in our day?

*Yea, it shall come in a day when there shall be churches built up that shall say: Come unto me, and **for your money you shall be forgiven of your sins**. O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye **built up churches unto yourselves to get gain**? Why have ye **transfigured the holy word of God**, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled. Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing. And I know that **ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts. For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.** (Mormon 8:32-37)*

Amlici

Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 2:1

It is likely no coincidence that his name seems built upon the Hebrew root mlk (מלך), meaning “to rule” or, in the noun form, “king.”

Alma 2:3-4

We see those today with evil intentions, who seek to destroy the assembly of God, who will find or create loopholes in the framework of our government to gain power etc.

Alma 2:37-38

Reminds me of battle of King David with his son Absalom who had seized part of the kingdom from his father. The battle took place in "the wood of Ephraim" and "the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured". (2 Sam 18:6-8)

Curse of dark skin

Alma 3:7-8

See last week's notes on the taboo of mixing of seed.

Alma 3:9-10

See also 2 Ne 5:21-23

"...wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them."

As much as Mormonism takes flack on this subject, the teaching of black skin as a curse did not originate with Joseph Smith.

"[S]ome concluded that black people had descended from the Canaanites, the lineage cursed 'as pertaining to the Priesthood.' (Abr 1:21,26)

In coming to this conclusion, later Mormons borrowed from the common nineteenth-century belief that Africans descended from Ham and bore a curse. In the Bible, Noah's son Ham mocked his father's drunkenness and nakedness, and in revenge Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan. 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.'" (Richard Bushman, Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling, pg 288)

Stick of Joseph footnote for 2 Ne 5:22

Similarly, we read of Ham in the Talmud: “Our Rabbis taught: Three copulated in the ark, and they were all punished; the dog, the raven, and Ham. The dog was doomed to be tied, the raven expectorates [his seed into his mate’s mouth] and Ham was smitten in his skin” (b.Sanhedrin 108b). A similar account appears in the Midrash Rabbah but says “Ham came forth black-skinned” (Gen. Rabbah XXXVI:7).

In the *Book of Jubilees* (accepted as Jewish scripture by some, and is part of the Ethiopic cannon), the possibility of salvation for Ham's descendants was denied;

Be careful, my son, Jacob, that you do not take a wife from any of the seed of the daughters of Canaan, because all of his seed is (destined) for uprooting from the earth; because through the sin of Ham, Canaan sinned, and all of his seed will be blotted out from the earth, and all his remnant, and there is none of his who will be saved. (Jubilees 22:20-21)

Contrary to other views, Joseph Smith thought the capacity of a Negro slave to be saved was possible beyond any question. In that respect, Joseph Smith was more broad in his view of the potential for redemption of the slaves than many others. (see TPJS, pg 269)

The curse (2 Ne 5:21) was designed by God to prevent intermarriage (“that they might not be enticing unto my people”). In the LDS scriptures the word “enticing” is footnoted to the Topical Guide subject “Marriage, Temporal.” (again, see notes from last week’s lesson)

The church has taken some flack recently on this subject because of differences in the printed manual on 2 Ne 5 (pg 24 in printed manual) and what later has been changed in the online version. To satisfy my own curiosity I found myself investigating the differences more deeply. From the Jan 18th article in the *Salt Lake Tribune*:

“Church spokeswoman Irene Caso explained the problem this week.

During the publication of the ‘Come, Follow Me’ manual for 2020, there was an error that resulted in the printing of material that doesn’t reflect the church’s current views on the topic,” she said in a statement. “To correct this, a decision was made to modify the content in the digital version of the lesson.” (Error in printed LDS Church manual could revive racial criticisms

<https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/01/18/error-printed-lds-church/>

Printed manual version:	Online version:
<p>The dark skin was placed upon the Lamanites so that they could be distinguished from the Nephites and to keep the two peoples from mixing [see 2 Nephi 5:21-23; Alma 3:6-10]. The dark skin was the sign of the curse. The curse was the withdrawal of the Spirit of the Lord. ... Dark skin ... is no longer to be considered a sign of the curse.</p>	<p>In Nephi’s day the curse of the Lamanites was that they were “cut off from [the Lord’s] presence ... because of their iniquity” (2 Nephi 5:20–21). This meant the Spirit of the Lord was withdrawn from their lives. When Lamanites later embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, “the curse of God did no more follow them” (Alma 23:18). The Book of Mormon also states that a mark of dark skin came upon the Lamanites after the Nephites separated from them. The nature and appearance of this mark are not fully understood. The mark initially distinguished the Lamanites from the Nephites. Later, as both the Nephites and Lamanites each went through periods of wickedness and righteousness, the mark became irrelevant as an indicator of the Lamanites’ standing before God.</p>

	<p>Prophets affirm in our day that dark skin is not a sign of divine disfavor or cursing. The Church embraces Nephi's teaching that the Lord "denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female" (2 Nephi 26:33). President Russell M. Nelson declared: "The Lord has stressed His essential doctrine of equal opportunity for His children. ... Differences in culture, language, gender, race, and nationality fade into insignificance as the faithful enter the covenant path and come unto our beloved Redeemer"</p>
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What are the differences between what was printed in the manual and what was later corrected in the digital version that do not reflect the church's current views?

Both versions assert that the curse was the withdrawal of the spirit of the Lord, and that dark skin was placed upon the Lamanites so that they could be distinguished from the Nephites. The online version adds additional explanation and commentary. If both versions assert that the curse is the withdrawal of the spirit, it can be assumed the online version intends to infer that dark skin itself is not the curse and the church still holds to Joseph Fielding Smith's "Answers to Gospel Questions" that dark skin was the sign of the curse.

This leaves the manual's statement (that "doesn't reflect the church's current views"):

The curse was given "...to keep the two peoples from mixing [see 2 Nephi 5:21-23; Alma 3:6-10]."

In other words, what doesn't reflect the church's current views are the teachings in the Book of Mormon from 2 Nephi chapter 5 and Alma chapter 3 about the mixing of seed.

Aside from trying to parse through the details of this topic, what is the Lord trying to tell us in these verses on the curse of a dark skin?

All things testify of Christ. All things are a type of higher things. Relate this to the idea of a mark or a curse of dark skin so you don't mix seed. We become the seed of Abraham and of Christ. God declares us his son, or his begotten. Beloved. This doesn't mix with the world. Must be apart, separate. These are the types of things the curse of a dark skin and forbidding to mix seed points to. (see Alma 5:57)

The other thing that comes to mind is that we are here to learn to love one another. This gives a perfect opportunity to overcome opposition of differences.

Alma 4:4

They were baptized by the hand of Alma, who was the high priest. Does this mean that the 3500 souls (verse 5) that were united to the church and baptized, all were baptized personally by Alma? Much like we read his father did with the people of Limhi in Mosiah 25:18. Was this sacred responsibility not delegated to those called as priests? When Christ came many years later, he gave only 12 authority to perform this ordinance (3 Ne 11:21-22).

Alma 4:18

Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the *office* of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah.

This suggests that the office of being high priest over the church is something that Alma could have conferred. The true High Priesthood (as was that of Melchizedek) is something only conferred by God himself (see *Stick of Joseph* footnote below). So this office must have therefore been an *office* within the organization of the assemblies or churches.

Offices in the organization of the church today include "high priest", "elder", "priest", "teacher", "deacon", and even "member".

Did you know that "member" is an office in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? That office is conferred upon you whether you are male or female. Every one of us has a responsibility to preach, teach, exhort, and expound. (see D&C 20:38,68-70, 88:122)

We tend to conflate "office" with "priesthood". Consider the idea that an office in the Church is not coincidental or coextensive with priesthood. There is no such thing as the priesthood of Deacon. There is no such thing as the priesthood of Teacher. There is an office in the Church called "Teacher." There is an office in the Church called "Deacon." And the occupant of that, out of tradition, is supposed to have Aaronic priesthood in order to discharge that office. However, within the Church, we also sustain as "teachers"—for example, Gospel Doctrine teachers—females who hold the office of "Gospel Doctrine teacher" within the Church. What is the difference between the office of Gospel Doctrine teacher, that we sustain by our common consent on the one hand, and Teacher in the Aaronic priesthood, Teacher held by someone with the Aaronic priesthood, on the other hand? We make a big deal out of the offices in the Church which are associated with Aaronic priesthood. However, they are offices in the Church. They were offices in the Church to begin with; they are offices in the Church yet today. And priesthood and offices in the Church are not necessarily coincident with one another.

Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 4:20

Ordained by Adonai ; see Alma 9:10. Malki-Tzedek (Melchizedek) is the prototypical example of such; see Alma 10:1-2 [Book of Mormon, Alma 13:10-20].