

# Book of Mormon Study – Alma 5-12

Online zoom Sunday School, 14 Jun 2020

Singing with a Changed Heart

*Alma 5:26*

How well does the convert remain converted? Does the believer follow up their belief with progression in their understanding, behavior and intelligence? Or, instead, does faith atrophy and die?

*"The popular scripture from Alma 5:26 stood out to me:*

*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?*

*Most of us have experienced some form of conversion experience, even if we are not converts to the gospel. At times when we feel distant from God, reflecting on the precious experiences when we felt God's hand in our lives can have the effect of turning us back to Him. But it's not just about turning back to a place where we were when we were converted. We are expected to grow in the gospel.*

*I'm reminded of when Lincoln reflected upon the ground of Gettysburg after that great battle and observed: "we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or to detract." (Abraham Lincoln. Gettysburg Address; November 9, 1863.) When men gave their lives as a willing sacrifice for the cause in which they believed, they sanctified the cause far above words. Lincoln recognized that. He dignified himself by confessing in few words how men's sacrifices had been the true consecration for the battleground.*

*Christ hallowed the Gospel by His sacrifice. It does not end there, however. He asks for His followers to take up their crosses and live consecrated lives of sacrifice as they follow His path. It is not enough to find Him, convert to His ways, and find the joy of connecting with God. He requires enduring obedience. Singing the song of redeeming love once may make you feel born again. However, your faith can die in infancy if you do not nourish it through obedience and following Him. He gave the test for loving Him: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15.) Without an effort to walk in His ways, there is no love for Him." (from an email to Marcus Reed, 10 Jul 2019.)*

"No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator." (DHC 6:58)

You can lose the song of redeeming love while actively involved in religion. It is not just faithlessness which tempts us away. For some it is caused by an excessive preoccupation with religion itself.

Every conversion has at its core a transcendental experience. The convert has heard from God. As a result of that experience, they decide to come onboard with the new faith, the new way of looking at things, the movement which delivered to them this experience. Religious movements begin with an individual soul gaining enlightenment. Some person profoundly connects with God and changes the course of history. "Religion" follows in the wake of personal or individual enlightenment as others are taught by the enlightened visionary. It is not easy to transfer a connection to God from one person to another, and religion is the unavoidable result of enlightenment as the transfer is attempted.

It is impossible to institutionalize enlightenment. Although that is the object of every religious movement at the start, none of them are able to reach that goal. What is institutionalized is an echo of the enlightenment experience. It is always left to the individual participant to find the experience for themselves.

The religion established through a prophet of God became the superstructure used to kill the Lord who first revealed it to Moses. As these devoted followers of Moses' law were killing Christ, they were satisfied their judgment was more than justified by their religion. Religion and the religious were the ones who opposed the Lord. The sinners and irreligious were His followers.

In Alma's day, the tendency to drift from enlightenment to religion was again the challenge. Alma's words are intended to remind the audience of what they once experienced. He is calling them to return to the former state of enlightenment.

If you have been redeemed, are you still? Do you still feel the joy which accompanied your original discovery of God in your life? If not, then you need to seek Him again.

#### *Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 7:10*

Not in the "City of Yerushalayim" but the "land of Yerushalayim" (see footnote to 2 Nephi 1:1). The Mashiach was to be born in Beit Lechem (Bethlehem), a small town just outside of the City of Yerushalayim and within the land of Yerushalayim. As we read in the Targum: "And you, O Bethlehem Ephrath, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah, from you shall come forth before Me the Messiah, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned from before, from the days of creation" (Targum Jonathan; Micah 5:1).

#### *Stick of Joseph footnote 2 Nephi 1:1*

This phrase "land of Yerushalayim" (land of Jerusalem) does not appear in the Tanakh. However, it has turned up in the Amarna Letters, dated to the early 14th Century. These letters were written in Akkadian on 350 clay tablets discovered in 1887 and in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q385b), which mentions "Jeremiah the Prophet" as one of those who "were taken captive from the land of Jerusalem."

#### *Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 7:11*

Isa. 53:3–4. When The Stick of Joseph actually quotes these verses, the standard terms "sorrows" and "grief" are used for Hebrew makov מַכּוֹב (Strong's 4341) and Hebrew khali חָלִי (Strong's 2483); but when only alluding to the verses, The Stick of Joseph uses the more literal translation "pains, sicknesses, and afflictions." "Pains" and "afflictions" are used for makov and "sicknesses" for khali, pointing to a Hebrew original behind the English.

## Christ's Atonement

### *Alma 7:12*

*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.*

We often think of our future triumph over death as Christ's greatest accomplishment on our behalf. Maybe in one respect it is. However it is His present succor, His present intervention with our human sufferings which is most important at present. Our future condition in the resurrection depends upon how much of this succor we are willing accept at present.

D&C 19:15-20 Christ describes in painful detail the suffering endured in the Garden of Gethsemane. He tells us this suffering was not the end, however. It was only the beginning. He calls it only His "preparations" for us: "Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men." (D&C 19:19.) Why does He tell us His suffering was only "preparation" and not the completion? After all, He cried out on the cross: "It is finished!" (John 19:30) with a loud voice (Mark 15:37). How can it be the "preparation" and still be "finished?"

Joseph Smith, DHC: 3: 389-390; "Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it. No man is a minister of Jesus Christ without being a Prophet. No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy. Whenever salvation has been administered, it has been by testimony. Men of the present time testify of heaven and hell, and have never seen either; and I will say that no man knows these things without this."

Do you have a testimony of Christ? If so, you should be having revelation. As we have seen, the two are linked together. It is through revelation He will succor you. He will allow you to clearly understand the challenges you face. He will guide you past the trials and comfort you in what can only be suffered and not overcome. Just like Him, some of our trials cannot be overcome, but can be endured. He will strengthen your weaknesses to allow you to endure. But, He is able to do so only if you come to Him.

Our testimony of Christ is tied to revelation. Revelation is tied to obedience. Both are tied to the light we obtain here. And all of these are the Atonement of Christ at work in your life.

Whether or not you receive the full Atonement for your sins depends on whether you will permit Him to succor you. It is not a future work. He is not going to magically remove errors from you after you die. Rather, He is working to remove them from you now, in the life you are living now. He will guide you past the errors in your life, if you will receive His succor. His succor includes His commandments, and His revelations. If you will not obey Him, you cannot receive the Atonement He offers. If you will not ask for, receive and follow His revelations to you, then you will not receive an Atonement which He offers.

### *Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 8:22*

The giving of thanks after meals is a Jewish practice prescribed by the Talmud (b. Berakhot 47b–49a) that is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls in the hymn "Invitation to Grace after Meals" The practice is derived from Deut. 8:10.

## From The Dead Sea Scriptures (with notes and introduction)

*By Theodor H. Gaster (version online)*

### II Invitation To Grace After Meals

1 [Loudly acclaim  
the majesty of God;  
where many are foregathered  
Let His majesty resound!

2 Amid the throng (1) of the upright  
proclaim how majestic He is, (2)  
and along with the faithful  
tell stories of His greatness! (3)

3 [Join company] (4) with the good and the blameless  
in confessing the majesty transcendent; (5)

4 unite (6) in making known  
His saving power,  
nor be laggard in showing to the mindless  
His might and majesty!

5 For it is that the glory of the LORD (\*) may be made  
known that wisdom has been given,

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(\*) Written in archaic script.

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6 and that the richness (7) of His works may be told  
has it been imparted to man,

7 to the end that the witless may have knowledge of  
His power,  
and the mindless a sense of His greatness—

8 men who keep far from her doors,  
remote from all access to her.

9 Although the Most High, forsooth,  
is Jacob's special Lord, (8)  
yet does His majesty reach out  
over all that He has made,

{10} and a mortal who avows it (9)  
is no less pleasing to Him  
than one who brings offerings of grain,

{11} or presents to Him he-goats and bullocks,  
or fills the altar with ashes  
of burnt-offerings never so many (10)—  
yea, than fragrant incense  
proffered by righteous men.

{12} Wisdom's voice rings out  
from behind the doors of the righteous;  
wherever the godly foregather  
(is heard) her song.

{13} Whenso they eat and are filled, (11)  
the word is of her;  
when they drink in fellowship together,

{14} their talk is of the lore (†) of the Most High;  
the aim of their discourse is to further  
the knowledge of His power.

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[†] Heb. Torah'.

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{15} (But oh, how far from the wicked  
is any word of her;  
how far from all the proud  
any wish to have knowledge of her!)

{16} Behold, the eye (12) of the LORD  
looks with compassion on the good,

{17} and great is His tenderness to them  
that avow His majesty;  
He will save them from the time of trouble. (13)

{18} [Bless ye] the LORD,  
Who redeems the humble  
from the grasp of the proud,  
[and delivers [the blameless]  
[from the hand of the wicked;]

{19} [Who will yet raise Ja]cob [to honor], (14)  
and [from Israel] govern [the world]; (15)

{20} [Who will spread His tent in Zion  
and be present in Jerusalem for ever!] (16)

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Footnotes to Invitation To Grace After Meals:

1. Literally, 'multitude'.
2. Literally, 'confess the majesty of His name'. The 'name' in Hebrew signifies also the outward manifestation.
3. Verses 1-2, missing in the Qumran manuscript, are here supplied from the Syriac version.
4. Literally, 'unite your (individual) selves'.
5. Literally, 'of the Most High'. The meaning is that there is a supernal power which works salvation.
6. The Hebrew means simply, 'join in fellowship together', the expression being modelled (as again in v.13) on Ps. 122.3. To render, 'form a community', and to draw therefrom a reference to the Qumran Brotherhood, strains the syntax.
7. Literally, 'multitude'.
8. The word, 'Lord' (Heb. 'Adon), has special point: the meaning is that although the Most High is the particular Lord of Israel, His sovereignty is universal.
9. Literally, 'avow the majesty of the Most High'.
10. For the Hebrew expression (though in a slightly different sense), cp. Num. 4.3; Ps. 20.4.
11. Cp. Deut. 8.10.
12. The manuscript has 'eyes', but the verb is in the singular. Hence the text must be corrected in accordance with the Syriac version.
13. For this expression cp. Isa. 32.2; Jer. 14.8; 15.11; 30.7; Ps. 37.39. In the Qumran texts it has a quasi-eschatological meaning, as in Dan. 12.1.
14. Literally, 'establish/upraise the horn'—a common Biblical expression for 'triumph'. It is not clear whether this refers to the triumph of Israel in general (as in Ezek. 29.21; Ps. 148.14) or, more specifically, to the raising up of a future Messianic King (as in Ps. 132.17). I think the former is more probable; see next note.
15. Literally 'and from Israel a judge of peoples'. It is not clear whether this means that God will raise up from Israel one who will be judge of all peoples, or that He Himself is such a judge. In light of Ps. 67.4, whence the expression is taken and where it refers to God, I think the latter more probable, the strict translation then being, '(Bless the Lord) ... Who judges (all) peoples from Israel'. Nor do I think that 'judges' here refers to the Final Judgment; the Hebrew word means simply 'governs'. The sentiment is that of Isa. 2.3.
16. This expression echoes Exod. 33.7. The verse, missing from the manuscript, is here supplied from the Syriac version.

This prayer of Invitation To Grace After Meals is filled with imagery of the holy Mother.

*Alma 9:21*

Gift of Holy Ghost is listed along with other gifts of the spirit.

*Alma 9:25-29*

*We can read this as Alma himself is an angel delivering a message.*

*I've been reading in Alma (following in line with the church's Book of Mormon Sunday School curriculum). In chapter 9:25, as I read Alma teaching:*

*"And now for this cause, that ye may not be destroyed, **the Lord has sent his angel** to visit many of his people, declaring unto them that they must go forth and cry mightily unto this people, saying: Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is nigh at hand;"*

*It occurred to me that we could just as easily read this as Alma himself being an angel to these people as the angel that taught Alma. Sure enough, two verses later Alma is proclaiming:*

*"Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand..."*

*Then Alma concludes this statement with:*

*"Now behold, this is the voice of the angel, crying unto the people." (v 29)*

*Then, as if to add further validation, this article you shared from Jeffery Bradshaw has this quote from Margaret Barker that I really liked:*

*"The high priests and kings of ancient Jerusalem entered the holy of holies and then emerged as messengers, angels of the Lord. They had been raised up, that is, resurrected; they were sons of God, that is, angels; and they were anointed ones, that is, messiahs. . . .*

***Human beings could become angels, and then continue to live in the material world.** This transformation did not just happen after physical death; it marked the passage from the life in the material world to the life of eternity."*

*(email to Katie Fultz, 2 Jun 2020)*

(see also D&C 130:4-5 "...there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.")

*Alma 10:6*

Angel to Amulek Sun 2 Jun 83 BC am. 8 Flower on Sacred Round. 6 Sivan on Hebrew. Firstfruits (Pentecost)

Based on John Pratt's "Nephite Calendar", the day the angel visited Amulek "was a holy day on at least three of the sacred calendars. First it was Firstfruits (Pentecost) on the Hebrew calendar, 6 Sivan. In fact, even though the Hebrew sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees often celebrated Firstfruits on different days, in this year they would have both celebrated on that day. That is because one celebrated on 6

Sivan (as do modern Jews) and the other celebrated on the eighth Sunday after Passover, which was Sun 2 Jun that year.

Moreover, the day was also Firstfruits on the Enoch Calendar. The Enoch calendar Firstfruits only coincides with the Pharisee celebration about once every fifteen years. And if the angel appeared before noon, then the day was a triple major holy day, also being the day 1 Malchijah on the Priest cycle, one of the six principal holy days on that 168-day cycle." (The Nephite Calendar, 14 Jan 2004, <https://johnpratt.com/items/docs/lds/meridian/2004/nephite.html#4.1>)

#### *Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 10:7*

When we compare Alma's account of these events (Alma 6:5–7 [8:14-27]) with Amulek's account of the same (Alma 8:1–3 [10:1-11]), an interesting picture develops that points to a Passover setting. Amulek tells us the events begin on the fourth day of the seventh month (Alma 8:1 [10:6]). Counting from Rosh Hashanah as the new year, this is just ten days before Passover. Amulek was traveling to visit a near kinsman, perhaps with whom to observe the Seder (Alma 8:2 [10:7]). An angel appears to him and directs him to return to his own home and prepare an additional place for a prophet who has been blessed. He and his house will be blessed if he does this. One cannot help but recall the tradition of setting an extra place for Elijah at the Seder.

#### *Alma 10:24*

Amulek stretched forth his hand.

#### *Alma 11:4-19*

Reasons for the listing or description of the monetary system of Nephites in Alma. This was based on the law established by King Mosiah. It was not based on system patterned after Jews. It is tied to the size or weight of bushels of barley. If it is based on a fixed value of barley, This would mean it is not subject to inflation.

#### *Alma 12:9-11*

Compare 1 Enoch 58:5

*To "scrutinize (or discover) the mysteries of righteousness" is "the gift (or destiny) of faith". (See also Ps 25:14, Mark 4:11, Eph 1:9)*

#### *Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 12:11*

Alma is alluding to the concept in Judaism of the four levels of understanding known as Pardes פֶּרְדֵּס. Pardes is the Hebrew word for "paradise." PaRDeS is also an acronym for the four levels of understanding of the Scriptures: Pashat (literal); Remez (implied, hinted); Drash (allegorical, homiletical); and Sod (hidden, secret). Alma is telling us that a person who has hardened his heart may be limited to the lower, "lesser" levels of understanding.



*Stick of Joseph* footnote Alma 12:12-15

This verse is framed around the Sefirot of the Tree of Life: "... stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame, that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believes on his name...."

*Alma 12:36*

what is first provocation?