

Book of Mormon Study – Alma 13-16

Online zoom Sunday School, 21 Jun 2020

Review of verses from last week

Alma 12:30

God made His plan of redemption known to man, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world. And this he made known unto them according to their faith, and repentance, and their holy works.

First commandments, provocation, and death

Second commandments, provocation, and death

"Provocation" in Heb 3:8-11

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.

Some observations of the art.

The art shows Alma and Amulek wearing something. The artist needs to do this for modesty reasons, but remember they were naked. Same is true for art depicting Christ on the cross.

There is a picture illustrating Alma eating with Amulek. We see it beautiful outside. If John Pratt's calculations are correct, the time of year would have been in June. We also see what looks like could be Amulek's wife and daughter (with a white board?). I have wondered of Amulek's wife and family as I read this account. If his wife was a believer, would she have been included among those who were burned? Would she have been among the family who disowned him? How much did Amulek sacrifice to become converted and come unto Christ? Was it all worth it?

Cite your minds Forward

Alma 13:1

As we begin looking at chapter 13 I want to approach this as if you have never read this book before. Try to strip away anything you think you already know and approach this with completely new eyes.

Why "cite your minds forward?" Especially since it was talking in the past tense? Why is this idiom in the verse? How would Joseph Smith know about this kind of word usage?

Why "the Lord God ordained priests?" Were they ordained by God indeed? Was there another man involved in conferring that authority? Did it necessarily come from God alone? What priesthood is it that is referred to?

What is “after his holy order?” Is this Aaronic? Is this Melchizedek? Or is this something different?

We are familiar with two priesthoods that we read about in D&C 84. Melchizedek and Aaronic.

Elsewhere Joseph Smith taught, “All priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion that brought Moses to speak with God face-to-face was taken away, but that which brought the ministry of angels remained. All prophets have the Melchizedek priesthood and were ordained by God himself.” (TPJS, pg 180)

Later, beginning on page 322 of TPJS, he begins teaching about “three grand orders of priesthood”. He goes on to discuss Patriarchal, Melchizedek and Levitical (or Aaronic) priesthoods.

What form of priesthood is “after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son?” Are all three? Or is there one that is distinguished by being uniquely after the order of His Son?

Alma 13:2

To be “ordained after the order of his Son” it must be done “in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.”

Think about these words carefully.

The “manner” must be in a way which will let people know or understand how to “look forward to His Son for redemption.”

Let's clear away some conditioned thinking that may interfere with grasping what may be being taught here by Alma:

Christ WAS NOT ordained by being sustained by a congregation.

Christ WAS NOT ordained by having hands laid upon Him by another man.

Christ DID NOT carry a credential with Him or a certificate of priestly authority.

Christ WAS NOT part of the established priestly hierarchy.

We have no record of His ordination at all. We only have established, priestly class officials asking Christ about where He got His authority from. And we have Christ simply refusing to answer their question.

Christ showed that He in fact held priestly authority by His demonstration of power. More importantly, He taught profound truths with such passing simplicity and convincing prose that His message necessarily came from a higher source. In word and deed He put on display His power and authority.

But what is the verse in Alma speaking about? How does one become “ordained” in such a manner that people learning of it will then know how to look forward (or back) to the Savior and understand His redeeming power?

Do they put on display, by the words and precepts they speak, the profound simplicity and convincing prose of the angels themselves? Are they able to show their ordination by speaking words of eternal life, as He did?

How does this “ordination” acquire or show redeeming power?

How can obtaining authority by ordination to this priesthood be something which will let people know their Lord better?

What is really going on for those who hold actual priestly authority, being ordained in the required manner? Do they acquire more than administrative authority from an institution? Do they receive power from on high? Can you get it anywhere other than from on high? Is this why the power of the priesthood is inseparably connected with the powers of heaven? What have we Saints been doing? Practicing? Holding ourselves forth to possess?

Where can we get this ordination after the order of the Son of God?

Alma 13:3

Called and prepared FIRST. From the foundation of the world.

So here priesthood has its beginning before this world even was organized. There is a necessary link between those hallowed days and power here. No person has authority here unless it was first obtained there.

How was it obtained first – before the foundation of the world?

It was because of the foreknowledge of God. And what was God's foreknowledge based upon? Their "exceeding faith and good works!"

How can a person have "faith" when they stand in the presence of God? Do they now have knowledge? This was before the mortal estate, right? If so, then how can there be faith? What good works were involved?

Then, too, the "faith" and the "good works" were done as a result of the person having been "left to choose between good and evil." Now this is surprising! You mean that before Adam partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (i.e., before the foundation of the world) that some people had already obtained a knowledge of good and evil, been tempted, exhibited good works and acquired faith? How so? When and where did they do that? What does that tell us about them? Is this why Joseph said there were "sons of God who exalted themselves to be gods before the world was made?" (TPJS p. 375.) When and where and how did they do this? And was this required for any person to be able to claim they now have priestly authority here? Or is it only those who have the "holy order after the Son of God?" Is there something about these men's "holy calling" that distinguishes them from others here? If so, what is it? Who are these men? Are they always going to be from unlikely sources and places, so that people can know how to recognize the Lord?

Then, too, we have them in a class of people who had been through a "preparatory redemption" already. What does that mean? What does it imply? How did they qualify? How long have these souls been working on the process of redemption and thereby qualify through their faith and good works to hold authority in this estate? Who are they?

Alma 13:4

The result of what went on before is the reason for the ordination or calling. That is, "thus they have been called." Meaning that all of what went into the earlier experiences i.e., being left to choose between good and evil, and having chosen good, having "faith" and good works, is the reason for their ordination. These souls are not novices. They are not getting authority here for the first time. They come

with power from beyond this earth, bringing it with them to this earth. They qualified before and elsewhere.

All of this is “on account of their faith.” All things are obtained through faith (see Sixth Lecture on Faith). Faith is a principle of power. It is capable of making things happen. There must be a connection between faith and power; between faith and priesthood.

Others reject the Spirit of God and, therefore, do not have this power. These others may claim to have authority, but they do not really receive power from the Spirit of God. They are animated by a different source.

Alma 13:5-6

So there wasn't some great advantage for these people who hold actual priestly authority. We learn that “in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren.” Where was that “first place?” Is it also “from the foundation of the world” referred to earlier?

What does it mean that they were “on the same standing with their brethren” while in that first place?

What was it about these who receive authority that qualified them to receive the “holy calling” from the foundation of the world? What does it mean that they “would not harden their hearts” in the first place? If they didn't do it then, will they do it now?

Is foreknowledge about these individual's qualifications based on prior performance? Can you determine that since they did not harden their hearts in the first place, they will not begin to harden their hearts now?

What about the “atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared” made them qualified? Did they accept Him there? Did they soften their hearts there toward Him? Are they capable of having redeeming faith in Him here because they first acquired it there?

Is all this necessary to have preceded ordination here? If it was not acquired there, can an ordination here have any effect?

What, then, do those who qualify do? What does it mean “to teach his commandments unto the children of men?”

Is there something different between teaching commandments on the one hand, and “that they [who are taught] also might enter into his rest” on the other hand? Are the two linked together? Is it necessary to both “teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest” to show such priestly authority? That is, can anyone, regardless of their true ordination to authority teach commandments? But does it take something more, some higher ordination in order to bring those taught “to enter into His rest?” If so, what is the difference? How can you recognize such teachings if they are ever put on display?

Did Joseph Smith exhibit such powerful teachings?

Did Enoch?

Did Melchizedek? Abraham? Elijah? Elisha? Nephi? The Brother of Jared? Enos? Others?

Do we see that today? If so, where? Does anyone have the audacity to presume they can bring another soul back to the Lord's rest? Maybe Joseph Smith's comment on this point is appropriate: "'The things of God are of deep import and time and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind O man if thou wilt lead a soul into salvation must search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity, thou must commune with God.'" (DHC Vol. 3, p. 295.)

Alma 13:7

Now we encounter comments that everyone seems to use about this priesthood. It is "without beginning of days or end of years." It is "from the foundation of the world."

It is "prepared from eternity to eternity."

When did eternity end and mortality begin?

When does mortality end and eternity begin again?

What does the phrase "from eternity to eternity" really refer to?

Do we pass "from eternity" then back "to eternity" as part of this mortal experience?

What went on before, back in the first "eternity?" We read elsewhere of this peaceful existence during "millennial" conditions, which end with rebellion, disputes and a war. Was Satan loosed in an earlier eternity after some season of peace to stir the hearts of men to anger one with another? (See Rev. 20: 7-9.) Was he cast out to hell, or the Telesstial Kingdom, where we presently reside? What went on? How often would the Lord have gathered us as a hen gathers her chicks, but we would not be gathered? (I suppose His asking and the lack of an answer implies a great number.)

What is it about what went on before, in the earlier "eternity," that allows God to possess His perfect "foreknowledge of all things" now?

What is this strange doctrine and the implications which flow from them? Was Joseph Smith trying to tell us this in the later Nauvoo talks? (Maybe we should read them again...)

How is one to take it all in? How is the priesthood tied to this prior eternity? Why do we get side-tracked into the subject of "from eternity to eternity" when we learn about this endless priesthood which is without beginning of days or end of years?

Alma 13:8

The manner of such person's ordination is described but-

What does it mean to be "called with a holy calling?" Is there something about the nature of this "calling" that is different from an interview and being "found worthy of advancement in the priesthood" as we commonly see? What is a "holy calling" anyway? Why does this kind of priestly calling get described exclusively as "holy" by its nature? Is there some contact with God required (who is the source of all holiness) as part of this "holy calling?"

Then we have the description of their ordination. What does it mean to be "ordained with a holy ordinance?" Does our practice of laying on hands, conferring the Aaronic Priesthood and ordaining to

the office of Priest answer to this description? What is the “holy ordinance” that is done to confer this priesthood?

Can we automatically rule out the entirety of Aaronic and most of the Melchizedek priesthood offices when we see the words: “taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order?” Is there some office we are aware of which is appropriately described as “taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order?” Think about that for a moment.

If this is a “holy calling” and it results in the person receiving it “taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order” isn’t this something perhaps quite different from what we do to disseminate the priesthood? And if all the Aaronic Priesthood and most of the Melchizedek Priesthood offices are not what we would appropriately call “the high priesthood of the holy order” then are we talking about either of these two commonly held priesthoods anyway?

Then we have the interesting addition that the “calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end” for those involved. That is, without reference to mortality. It was held before coming here, it will endure after leaving here. It is “endless” in the sense it comes “from eternity to eternity” as set out in the preceding verse.

This is potentially quite different from the manner in which we practice priestly ordinations in the church today. I suppose that some will want to confine all this description to our practices. They are free to see it in that way if they choose. I’m just asking if it is more likely that the words have a different meaning than we have associated with them before. If that is possible, then perhaps we ought to be asking the Lord to inform us more about the matter, rather than presuming we already possess what is being described here.

It may just be that our hopes for some great, eternal reward hinge upon getting to the bottom of this matter. It may just be that God’s control over and involvement with the “holy calling” and “holy ordinance” of having the “high priesthood after the Son of God” is immediate and direct. It may be that this “holy ordinance” will only come from that God who employs no servant at the gate, but is Himself the gatekeeper. (2 Ne. 9: 41.) Wouldn’t that be wonderful. Think about it – no flawed process. No fooled bishop or stake president letting someone obtain an office for which they are completely unsuited. It sort of makes sense.

Alma 13:9

Several things about this formulation are interesting. Most interesting is the closing declaration, “And thus it is. Amen.” It is iconic. It is as if the statement were an authorized, serious message, intended to be accompanied by the requisite formalities to let the reader know that this is serious stuff. This is “most holy.” This is not just a passing description. It holds terrible, eternal significance. So the material that preceded it holds important keys to understanding. Important warnings and knowledge. Perhaps, as a result of the concluding punctuation, we should be very, very careful about the words that preceded it.

Now look at the beginning-

“Thus they become...” These individuals have become something. The “high priests” about whom this material has been written have been in the process of becoming something holy from before the foundation of the world. This is pre-earth or pre-mortal existence stuff. The history, or background

leading up to finding a holy high priest in mortality is eons in the making. It goes back to before this world had been reorganized.

“..high priests forever...” This priestly authority and holy order is not mortal. It is without beginning in this mortal phase of existence.

Now comes the formula of the authority: “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.” Look at it in pieces.

-After the order of the Son

-After the order of the Only Begotten of the Father

-After the order of Him who is without beginning of days or end of years

-After the order of Him who is full of grace

-After the order of Him who is full of equity

-After the order of Him who is full of truth.

What does it mean to be “begotten” of the Father? (Psalms 2: 7.)

What does it mean to be a “son” of the Father? (1 John 3: 1-3.)

What does it mean to be full of “grace?” (D&C 93: 11-20.)

What does it mean to be full of “equity?” (Proverbs 2: 9.)

What does it mean to be full of “truth?” (D&C 93: 24.)

This is interesting. What are we to make of such “holy” men who are “high priests after the order of the Son of God?”

Do you think we make a man such a thing by sustaining him in Ward, Stake and General Conferences?
Can we make one of them at all?

If we never realize who they are, does that mean they don’t exist? Does it mean they weren’t ordained before the foundation of the world?

This is quite different than what I’ve been told in Gospel Doctrine class. It is beginning to look and feel a lot like what Joseph Smith was saying right at the end in the Nauvoo period. I wonder why we neglect this today?

Alma 13:10

Immediately following the formula, the explanation continues that “many” were able to become ordained as such “high priests of God.” But the way they did this was through several specific actions.

They had “exceeding faith.” What do you suppose “exceeding faith” means? Why not “faith?” What is the difference between “faith” and “exceeding faith?”

They went through “repentance.” So we know they made the same kinds of mortal mistakes as we do. They experience the bitter and then are able to prefer the sweet. They knew what it was like to feel the bitterness of hell, because they felt the sting of sin. So they repented. These great souls are NOT perfect, after all! They “repented” because they didn’t do it right the first time. What a refreshing idea. They weren’t fake. They didn’t feign virtue. They had failing. They were filled with life, made errors, and needed to repent. They were not immune to the circumstances of this fallen world.

More importantly, do the terms “exceeding faith” and “repentance” go together? That is, do you necessarily have to possess “exceeding faith” in order to become one who fully “repents?” If so, why? How is it done? This may be an important clue to the process of “keeping the second estate” and “proving” that you are ready to move on. Perhaps it is in this manner that some will then have “glory added upon their heads forever,” (Abr. 3: 26) and in another cycle of existence and eternal progression then also join in the ranks of those belonging to the “holy order after the Son of God.”

These called persons are, despite everything, “righteous before God.” God measures differently than do we. Being “righteous before God” may not mean the same thing we think “righteous” means. We want outward signs, symbols, dress, grooming and conformity. God looks at the intent of the heart.

Interestingly, they “choose to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish.” What do you suppose that means? First, they “repent,” then they “work righteousness.” Because of this, they do not “perish.” So do these things all go together? Can a person “repent” but then not “work righteousness?” Does a person have to “repent” and “work righteousness” in order to not “perish?”

There is so much more. But I stop the verse by verse commentary here. I will not have time in this lesson to get even this far.

We are often taught that it is unlawful to preach mysteries, yet here Alma is preaching the deepest doctrines to the non-converted. If we preach the truth, it will attract those whose lives are empty. Why would they join us if what we offer is as trite and superficial as the false religions they already believe?

[Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 13:16](#)

A document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, known as “The Melchizedek Document” (11Q13), speaks of a Messianic figure called “Melchizedek” who will release the people “from the debt of all their sins.” The first century Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria identifies Melchizedek with the Logos (Word) and says he will “bring forward wine instead of water and shall give your souls to drink, and shall cheer them with unmixed wine in order that they may be wholly occupied with divine intoxication, more sober than sobriety itself” (Philo, Allegorical Interpretation iii, 82).

[Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 13:18](#)

The first century Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria writes, “God made Melchizedek...his own high priest” (Philo, Allegorical Interpretation iii, 79).

According to the Talmud, Melchizedek was a title for Shem; his father was Noach (b.Nedarim 32b).

[Alma 13:21](#)

Stretched Forth His Hand - we touched on this back in Mosiah:

[Mosiah 16:1](#)

And now it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words, he stretched forth his hands and said, The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord, when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just (Mosiah 16:1). Mosiah 12:24 helps one to understand what he stretched forth his hand(s) means: The

Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations. Abinadi is demonstrating the Lord's action, thereby affirming he is His messenger. He had been given the sign to testify and used it to declare he was a true messenger. Later in the Nephite history, the prophet Alma concluded his testimony of Melchizedek by using the same sign to evidence his authority: And now it came to pass that when Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying, Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh! (Alma 13:21). He used this sign because he was authorized to do so, and he understood what the declaration meant. Although those who were there may not have understood, it was a sign that he was a true messenger. Man cannot be saved in ignorance. Once the key of knowledge is lost, mankind is lost and cannot be saved until that key is returned. Prophets sent with messages who testify to an ignorant people use signs that the Lord recognizes and authorizes, but they may not be noticed or understood by those who hear the message. Nevertheless, the testimony becomes binding when the Lord's seal is put upon it. This often involves a required sign to be given, or in other words, for hands to be stretched forth. (See also Alma 14:10-11 below)

Alma 13:28

A list:

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;

Alma 13:29

Another list:

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.

Alma 13:30

Alma concludes praying that the Lord grant they many not suffer the *second death*.

Alma 14:10-11

I was thinking about the poor store owner(s) in recent news at CHAZ who was told to pay protection money. At first I thought, no, if it were me I wouldn't pay them. Then I realized the predicament the store owner is under. No other place to turn. And if he refuses he will be labeled "racist", and that kind of label in these circumstances could certainly result in his store being burned to the ground and possible threat to his life and that of his family. Go ahead and pay. Not because you trust the people to actually protect you, but because if you don't the very people offering protection would likely be the ones to turn around and become the perpetrators. Then it occurred to me. If I had the faith, could I trust in God to protect me and my store?

Power. Amulek asks Alma, should we stretch forth our hands. Alma tells him now is not the time. Similar thing in next week's lesson with Ammon. Those who were coming to attack Ammon did not know anything about God or His power or the promise that had been made to Ammon.

Alma 14:23

"...twelfth day of tenth month". This is just over 3 months since Angel visited Amulek (Alma 10:6). We must also take into account this is "after many days" being in prison. In this short time Amulek, being taught by a true High Priest of God, is able to transform his life and become a powerful teacher, with power and authority himself from God. (As we see he is witnessing and teaching profound truths and even stretching forth his hand and suggesting to Alma they have power to stop the martyrdom).

Alma 14:26

Alma prays, "How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength..." In the Stick of Joseph it uses the words "O Adon", where in other places for "Lord" it is often translated "YHWH". Hebrew gives us many more names for God and Lord than we see in English.

"And they broke the cords with which they were bound;" (note in verse 28 it says they were "loosed from their bands"). Power in the priesthood includes power to break bands. We see in the example of Nephi that he broke the bands when his brothers bound him in the wilderness, but when he was bound on the ship he endured the suffering.

Alma 15:3-12

Compare Zeezrom's conversion with the conversion of Alma, Paul, King Lamoni, and King Lamoni's father. What are the similarities? Have you experienced anything similar?

Alma 15:16,18

Amulek's sacrifices. Was his wife and children among those of his kindred who remained in Ammonihah? (see Alma 10:11)

Alma 16:1

On the fifth day of the second month (82 BC). This would be just less than 4 months from when Alma and Amulek came out of the prison.

The last war/battle with the Lamanites (that the record tells us about) had been in 86 BC (Alma 3:22-24). After this one there was 3 more years of peace.

Definition:

Wrath

There are two levels of wrath. One is temporal — here and now. The wicked are often punished here by letting them pursue their own evil course until it destroys them. Repentance, in that sense, relieves them of the physical, emotional, social, military, economic, and interpersonal disasters they bring upon themselves by their ruinous pursuit of destructive behavior. The other is eternal — meaning coming after this life. That second wrath is a result of leaving this life with accountability for what happened here and the lack of preparation for the moment when “judgment” is rendered. That “judgment” consists of the unrepentant finally facing reality. “When you are in His presence you can accurately measure the difference between what you are and what He wanted you to become — i.e., like Him. The gulf is so great that you would rather be in hell than in the presence of a just and holy being when you are stained with the blood and sins of your generation (Mormon 4:6).” God withdrawing is how His wrath manifests itself. “If He withdraws from you, that should be felt keenly as an absence and rejection.”

God’s wrath is “poured out” and takes a specific form: wars and rumors of wars among all the nations and kindreds (1 Nephi 3:29). People go to war. The wicked shall slay the wicked (T&C 50:8; Proverbs 2:37; Mormon 2:1). The wicked get to destroy one another, but they do not get to destroy the righteous (see 1 Nephi 7:4). The angel makes a point of stating what Nephi is beholding in 1 Nephi 3:29: Behold, the wrath of God is upon the mother of harlots. How is this God’s wrath? The answer is that when God is angry, He withdraws His spirit (see Helaman 2:34; 5:3). And when He withdraws His spirit from one, He generally pours it out on another (see Helaman 2:34). When His spirit withdraws, men are left to their natural, carnal state, filled with envy, jealousy, covetousness, ambition, and greed. When the Heavens become silent, the judgments of God follow (see Revelation 2:17; T&C 86:20).