

Book of Mormon Study – Alma 17-22

Online zoom Sunday School, 28 Jun 2020

(<https://jayball.name/book-of-mormon-study-lessons>)

Missionary Work – How to Follow the Example of Ammon and How NOT to

Not long ago I listened to a speaker at a fireside who spoke on the topic of how to do missionary work among the Native Americans on our local reservations. He began by relating how Jell-O was a common thing at many church functions. He noted that "If you've ever made Jell-O or eaten Jell-O you know it takes the shape of whatever you use as a mold. You might have stars or American flags on the Fourth of July, or an entire bunt pan for large institutional functions." Due to the many expectations we find in the church, we may often feel like we are being asked to fit into some mold. He continued:

"There's an old rabbi who explains what Nimrod was up to when he was building the Tower of Babel. So Nimrod, as we know, was the mighty hunter in the land. Or according to some sources, the mighty hunter of the Lord's people. Nimrod is the archetypal tyrant who founded Babylon. And in many traditions was the builder of the tower. He it was, after the flood, who found that it was easier to control people by crowding them into cities and making them think, act, talk, and dress the same. To read from Genesis:

"And they said one to another, come, go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and they had tar for mortar. And they said, come, go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top will be nigh near unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down beholding the city and the tower, which the children of men were building. And the Lord said, Behold, the people are the same, and they all have the same language; and this tower they begin to build." [Gen 11:3-6]

The rabbi explains that the bricks are a metaphor for the people. Bricks, as you know, were made by taking clay and forcing or pressing it into a mold. Clay being pliable and moldable. Then burning them thoroughly, to dry them. So with pressure and heat the bricks all come out looking and feeling the same.

Now the ending of the kingdom of Babylon, there was a king who had a dream about an image made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with miry clay. The stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, which struck the feet, broke it in pieces, and ground it to powder. The King, Nebuchadnezzar, apparently inspired by this dream, set up a giant image in the plains of Dura for all the people to worship. Which if they didn't, they were cast like a brick into the fiery furnace. So this, among other things, was one of the hallmarks of what the image represents. The influence of Babylon. Conform or die. This influence, as we've learned, has dominated in political, social, cultural, and religious spheres ever since. The past 500 years missionaries have

been preaching to the natives of this land. Prior to that time the influence of Babylon hadn't touched them. First they were pressed into a Catholic mold, under the auspices of the Inquisition. The Spanish built missions, churches, and told the people they couldn't speak their language, sing their songs, do their dances, or pray to their God. In fact, they were told the only access they could have to God was through a middle man wearing a brown frock who would speak to God for them. Then came Protestants and Mormons with their own molds to press the people into. Now I'm not here to recount all the details that people encountered, except to show that in the name of God the people have been moved off their land, stripped of their way of life, separated from their parents, punished for speaking their language, beaten, driven, and killed. This is all well-known and I don't want to focus on that. But we should bear it in mind. These are the things that come about through colonialism.

So we need to approach this differently than has been done before. I believe the Lord intends to break the mold. To grind that influence to dust. And so if we have the true message that God intends to bring to the inhabitants of this land, surely how we approach it must be different than what has gone before. What is needed, I think, and what they haven't really encountered, is people who live the teachings of Jesus, who live the Sermon on the Mount. Not only to say, but to do [D&C 84:57]. Consider the different results of the preaching of Aaron and Omner and Himni and Muleki, and that of Ammon. There was a big difference. What made the difference? They were all sons of Mosiah (well, except Muleki. He just got an honorable mention). They gave, all of them, they gave up a kingly lifestyle, put everything on the altar and suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Yet the majority of the group failed to make converts, except one only, it's interesting the record points out. At least initially. But their approach was different than Ammon's. Ammon's approach was to show, rather than tell. To serve, rather than preach. He wasn't there to tell them what they ought to do, what they ought to learn. I've heard just recently and told of some projects on reservations to go and replace a roof, to replace a tile floor in homes of widows. Also to build greenhouses to help people regain self-sufficiency and food independence. I think that's the kind of thing that would be good for us to do. Let's do that. Let's feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, take abuse if it's offered, turn the other cheek. Give to those that ask of you, be easily entreated. And I think when they are satisfied that you are who you claim to be, they may ask about your religion. Ammon waited until he was asked. This all takes patience and relationships. Real genuine relationships. And I don't think there is a shortcut for that. We need to preach by example." (Sam Vaughn, Hurricane UT, Mar 21, 2020)

Alma 17:20. Compare with 21:4-5.

Among the Amalekites (Amlicites – see Alma 21:2 below), as a Nephite Aaron would not appear that different as did Ammon among the people of Lamoni. Ammon was immediately bound when coming into the land because he was a Nephite. Also note how King Lamoni's father asked Lamoni, what are you doing with this Nephite? (Alma 20:10) But Aaron and his companions walked freely into the land of the

Amalekites and the people of Amulon, and taught in the streets and in their synagogues. It seems to be what they said (and perhaps their accent?) that identified them more than their appearance.

Falling to the Earth as if Dead

Alma 18:40-19:30

Joseph Smith used “taste,” and Nephi used “feel” to describe the very intangible way we detect truth as it is presented to us. Nephi, when talking to his older brothers about how to know a matter is true, used these words:

“Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words” (1 Nephi 17:45).

This is delicate, refined, and subtle. It is intended to stretch us, to quiet us down, and calm our minds. We are supposed to receive our own anecdotal evidence which is personal to us, adapted to our own capacities, and something sufficient to convince us it comes from God. It is ALWAYS the case that these experiences are going to be anecdotal. Only the prepared are going to experience them. Others are excluded. One of the best examples of how this works is found in Daniel:

And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. (Daniel 10:4-9)

Daniel’s experience was real. But it was not open to the view of the unworthy. The physically demanding nature of this kind of experience is often referred to in scripture. Joseph Smith went through it when he collapsed, exhausted, and returning home after the night spent with Moroni (see JS-H 1:48). In these verses, King Lamoni, his wife, and all within his house have a similar reaction to this great revelation. Every such experience is real. They are physical and exhausting. But they are also necessarily personal and cannot be shared. Those lacking faith to have such access are free to disbelieve in them. It is true that this kind of “oil” cannot be shared (see Matthew 25:8-9). Taste and feel are two ways to communicate the highly personal nature of such experiences.

Stick of Joseph footnotes Alma 18:13

107 Compare with the Aramaic title רבונא. Defined in the Soncino Talmud (Pesachim 115b n. 6) as follows: “‘Rabbana’ is a Babylonian title, probably the equivalent of the Palestinian ‘Rabban’ lit., ‘our teacher,’ which is a peculiar title of honour, higher than ‘Rabbi.’”

108 The Hebrew word for “great” here was likely *rav* רב, from the same root as “Rabbanah.”

Alma 18:22

Ammon was harmless.

Alma 18:36

...he laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people.

Aaron later also “reads” the scriptures to the father of King Lamoni (Alma 22:12). Abinadai also “read” unto King Noah’s court the words of scripture (Mosiah 13:11).

Alma 18:38

Ammon relates the rebellions of Laman, Lemuel and sons of Ishmael to King Lamoni. What kind of humility does it take to be able to accept that the history you have been raised with is twisted or incorrect?

Alma 21:2

Amalekites and the people of Amulon were of religion of Nehor. How/when did they learn of this religion?

Amalekites - In Royal Skousen’s work, he renders this as *Amlicites*, as it appeared in the original manuscript (see *The Book of Mormon, The Earliest Text*, pg 356). This makes more sense, as the Amlicites were of the religion of Nehor who joined forces with the Lamanites in the war against the Nephites in Alma 2.

Alma 21:5

Hast thou seen an angel? Why do not angels appear unto us? Behold are not this people as good as thy people? Here we see pride on display.

“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 has gone, pride has gone.” (Mere Christianity, New York: Macmillan, 1952, pp. 109–10.)

Alma 21:6

We do believe that God will save all men.

(compare 2 Ne 28:8,22)

Alma 21:11

And they contended with many about the word.

The way that Aaron (and Muloki and Ammah) were teaching appears to be a different approach than what Ammon did.

Alma 21:20

King Lamoni "caused that there should be synagogues built in the land of Ishmael; and he caused that his people, or the people who were under his reign, should assemble themselves together."

Where the early church met in homes, and in Joseph Smith's day the only church building built was a temple, here there are synagogues built for the purpose of assembling together.

Alma 22:3

Aaron's approach to father of King Lamoni:

"And now, O king, if thou wilt spare our lives, we will be thy servants."

This is similar to Ammon's approach, but different than Aaron's initial approach. But since comparing notes with Ammon we see Aaron changes his approach.

Alma 22:7

Father of King Lamoni has different answer to the question "Do you believe there is a God". Where with King Lamoni it was about a great spirit, with Lamoni's father he says, the Amlicites believe there is a God. Notice that Aaron does not say, "Yeah, but the God they worship is all wrong, don't believe them". He simply takes what is understood and builds upon that.

Compare Aaron's teaching to father of king Lamoni to Ammons teaching to king Lamoni

Ammon's teachings to king Lamoni	Aaron's teachings to father of king Lamoni
<p><i>Alma 18:36-39</i></p> <p><i>Now when Ammon had said these words, he began at the creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam, and told him all the things concerning the fall of man, and rehearsed and laid before him the records and the holy scriptures of the people, which had been spoken by the prophets, even down to the time that their father, Lehi, left Jerusalem. And he also rehearsed unto them (for it was unto the king and to his servants) all the journeyings of their fathers in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth. And he also rehearsed unto them concerning the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, yea, all their rebellions did he relate unto them; and he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem down to the present time. But this is not all; for he expounded unto them the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.</i></p>	<p><i>Alma 22:12-14</i></p> <p><i>And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen. And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name. And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron did expound all these things unto the king.</i></p>
<p>creation of the world, and also the creation of Adam</p>	<p>creation of Adam</p>

the fall of man	laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state
journeyings of their fathers [Lehi's family] in the wilderness, and all their sufferings with hunger and thirst, and their travail, and so forth... rebellions of Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael	
he expounded unto them all the records and scriptures	reading the scriptures unto the king... did expound unto him the scriptures
plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world; and he also made known unto them concerning the coming of Christ, and all the works of the Lord did he make known unto them.	plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name. And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory;

The Attitude of the King's Prayer

Alma 22:17-18

I want to draw a connection between the Brother of Jared in Ether 3 and what we see in this example with Lamoni's father.

"And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying...."

It was not the words of the prayer that provoked the attention of heaven, although his prayer was in fact needed, relevant, and exactly what the Lord answered. It was what came before.

This was the King. The King who could have people killed if he chose to do so. This was the one who, like God among his people, exercised the power of life and death. This was the one who could exact taxes from them. This was the one who had absolutely no reason to do what he did here. Look what he did. He prostrated himself on the ground and he "cried out mightily." He didn't pray. He mirrored exactly what the brother of Jared did when he approached God. In the depths of humility and in the sincerity of his heart, he showed absolutely an appreciation for the difference between himself, on the one hand, and God, on the other.

Don't mistake me, I do not think it is necessary to physically engage in this kind of display. But when the display is an extension of what is in the heart, it is absolutely fine. When what is in the heart is right, it doesn't matter how it's displayed, because God looketh on the inner man. This King was so overtaken by what he had heard, that he was not ashamed to prostrate himself in front of the foreign missionaries. He was not ashamed to cry out in the depths of humility. He didn't care who saw it. He didn't do this to

be seen. He didn't care that he was being seen. He did this because at that moment, that was what he was. He was seeking grace from the throne of grace.

Then we read his prayer:

"O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God..."

Do you see this? This is someone who isn't at all certain. This is someone who was convicted of his own inadequacy. It may not be that in your case you don't know enough, it may actually be that you know too much that is wrong. It may be that what you lack comes from your own false beliefs. It will all be erased and started over anyway, if you happen to gaze into heaven for five minutes, you realize that people who have been writing about this stuff since the beginning of time, who have not gazed into heaven, don't know what they're talking about. The suppositions and the connections and the ideas that get floated around are not only false, many of them are offensive to God. They're not right. The board is going to be erased. God's going to re-order it when He ministers to you. You are going to see things in a completely different light when it happens.

It is not that you are brilliant and a shining light of knowledge that qualifies you to know God. Instead it is what is in your heart. How has your heart been prepared? If your heart is open to receive because it is broken and your spirit contrite, then you are ready.

Returning to the king's prayer:

"I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead."

Look what happens next. When he recovers, because as he was struck as if he were dead, he was converted. The Lord ministered to him!

And in verse 23:

"And the king stood forth, and began to minister unto them. And he did minister unto them, insomuch that his whole household were converted unto the Lord."

This is what happens when you are converted to the Lord. You can't stand to look about you and see other people left in the darkness. You want to invite them, rather like Nathaniel was invited to, "Come and see for yourself." (John 1:46) You come to the Lord, you come and see for yourself. This little bit of skeptical praying, whether there is a God, and "if thou art God, will you make yourself known to me?" That worked! But not because this is a magic incantation, instead because the king cried out with a broken heart and contrite spirit.

Don't think you lack the faith! If this King, with this prayer, can go to God and ask and receive an answer, your faith is enough. That is not the impediment. The impediment is the pride of your heart, the hardness of your heart, the self-reliance you think you have, the traditions that bind you down, the arrogance of your heart, the unwillingness to cry out mightily to God, and then to be open to receiving an answer. This was enough, and you too, can do enough.

Division of Lands Between Lamanites and Nephites

Alma 22:27-34

This Land: Nephite America

By Book of Mormon Evidence -October 30, 2019

<https://bookofmormonevidence.org/this-land-nephite-america/>

Another point of view:

True Book of Mormon Geography Lands - Western New York Model

Errors of Rodney Meldrum

<https://bookofmormongeography.org/basics/models-reviewed/errors-rodney-meldrum/>