

Book of Mormon Study – Alma 32-35

Online zoom Sunday School, 19 Jul 2020

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

Show us a sign

Alma 32:17-18

Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it.

Alma is confronting pride. If you think you know a thing (because you have been given a "sign"), then this is not faith.

"It ain't what you don't know that gets you in trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." (Mark Twain)

Alma is addressing an audience who thinks they know something - i.e., they think that it's the worship in the way the Zoramites have taught them to worship that will connect them to God. Alma needs to help them "unlearn" this incorrect teaching so they can make room for the truth.

A "sign" is not always in the way we picture with Korihor, where he demanded a sign from Alma before he would believe. Often for us it is simply looking for proof or evidence before we will believe. But if we have proof, then is faith needed?

"There's a recent book by the most eminent American mathematician of our time, Morris Kline, called Mathematics and the Search for Knowledge. It has just been published recently by Oxford. I'm just going to read a couple of passages. (Show us a miracle; show us a sign.) He is citing Hume here: "The existence of an external world with fixed properties is really an unwarranted inference. There is no evidence that anything exists beyond the impressions and ideas that belong to nothing and represent nothing." Then he says, experience cannot prove reality; experience is personal. You may have your experience, and I may have mine. We don't know how they match up at all. He quotes Einstein a lot: "The belief in an external world independent of the percipient subject is the foundation of all science [we have to assume that such a world is, but it is only assumption]. But since our sense-perceptions inform us only indirectly of this world or Physical Reality it is only by speculation that it can become comprehensible to us." We can only know it by speculation.

There are a lot of interesting passages here. "The abandonment of physical mechanism in favor of mathematical description shocked even the great scientists. Contrary to popular belief no one has ever explained the physical reality of the force of gravitation. What science has done is to sacrifice physical intelligibility for the sake

of mathematical description and mathematical prediction.” It’s just mathematics we have; we do not have physical intelligibility. You can’t describe it to me or experience it. “One cannot [no one can] visualize a four-dimensional non-Euclidian world with which they work so much today. Almost since the beginning of the work with numbers, mathematicians have carried on algebraic reasoning that is independent of any sense experience whatever.” You can’t visualize them when they talk about these things, and they can’t visualize them either. “Our models of atomic structure are not physical; they are entirely mathematical.” They are not physical, so we don’t argue on this basis. “Newton provided a theory of gravitation whose physical nature neither he nor his successors for three hundred years have explained. Sense perception in this case has proved useless. [You might say, ‘Well, anybody sees there’s gravitation.’] Modern science is gradually removing the intuitive and physical content, both of which appeal to the senses. It is eliminating matter.” This is taking us down more and more on faith all the time, isn’t it? It is utilizing concepts which we all know are mathematical laws and nothing else. Science remains only a small, though vital, contact with sense perceptions after long chains of mathematical deductions. It’s like the god that lies at the end of a chain of syllogisms is not a very convincing god; it gets very thin by that time. Well, it’s the same thing with the reality of science—the sense perceptions after long chains of mathematical deduction. “Science is rationalized fiction, rationalized by mathematics.” He defines science as “rationalized fiction,” just as I would define faith here as “intellectual honesty,” which it is.

“Today the laws of physics concern our knowledge rather than what may be true in the physical world.” That’s what your faith is. It isn’t knowledge yet. “Mathematics no longer describes the behavior of the elementary particles, but our knowledge of this behavior. The real world is not what our unchallenged senses tell us, or our unlimited perceptions, but rather what man’s major mathematical theories tell us.” It’s mathematical theories that tell us what reality is, not the sign that I give you. “A mathematical theory of the physical world is not a description of the phenomenon as we perceive it, but a bold symbolic construction.” Einstein said he will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism, and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison. So if you try to imagine what heaven is like, or what something else is like, you have your own construction. He’s talking about the cosmos, just as local as our solar system, when he says he would never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism. He can’t even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison. It’s just strictly his own.” (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2, pg 353-354)

Alma 32:19

...more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth

Truth taught by signs would only serve to condemn or curse. This would be destructive to the principal of faith, which is required to know God, therefore, these humble people must begin with a belief. It is from this backdrop that we now get Alma's definition of faith:

Alma 32:21

And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

Note that this is not the same "hope" we discussed two weeks ago, where a "hope in Christ" is essentially the Holy Spirit of Promise (see Alma 28:11-12, Jacob 4:6, Ether 12:32). The kind of "hope" that Alma is talking about here is a hope that is preliminary to developing a stronger faith.

The illustration of Mirror Lake. I haven't been there, but based on your description of how beautiful it is there, I have formed an image in my mind about it, and based on your testimony I'm planning on doing an experiment on your words and I'm on going to visit it myself. My hope is that it is as wonderful for me as you say it is.

Joseph Smith tells us:

If men were duly to consider themselves, and turn their thoughts and reflections to the operations of their own minds, they would readily discover that it is faith, and faith only, which is the moving cause of all action in them; that without it, both mind and body would be in a state of inactivity and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental.

Were this class to go back and reflect upon the history of their lives, from the period of their first recollection, and ask themselves what principle excited them to action, or what gave them energy and activity in all their lawful avocations, callings, and pursuits, what would be the answer? Would it not be that it was the assurance which we had of the existence of things which we had not seen, as yet? Was it not the hope which you had, in consequence of your belief in the existence of unseen things, which stimulated you to action and exertion in order to obtain them? Are you not dependent on your faith, or belief, for the acquisition of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence? Would you exert yourselves to obtain wisdom and intelligence unless you did believe that you could obtain them? Would you have ever sown if you had not believed that you would reap? Would you have ever planted if you had not believed that you would gather? Would you have ever asked unless you had believed that you would receive? Would you have ever sought unless you had believed that you would have found? Or would you have ever knocked unless you had believed that it would have been opened unto you? In a word, is there anything that you would have done, either physical or mental, if you had not previously believed? Are not all your exertions, of every kind, dependent on your faith? Or may we not ask, what have you, or what do you possess, which you have not obtained by reason of your faith? Your food, your raiment, your lodgings, are they not all by reason of your faith? Reflect and ask yourselves if these things are not so. Turn your thoughts on your own minds

and see if faith is not the moving cause of all action in yourselves; and if the moving cause in you, is it not in all other intelligent beings? (Lectures on Faith, 1:10-11)

Other Definitions of Faith:

Now faith is the substance (assurance) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Heb 11:1)

But faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in Heaven, or on earth. (LoF 1:13)

Faith is the 'external elixir' that gives life, power, and action, to the impulse of thought. (Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich)

Alma 32:22

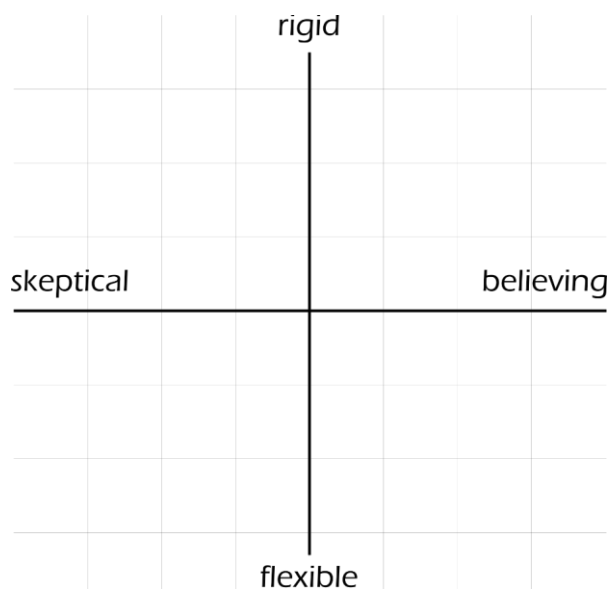
And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word.

God desires that you approach things believingly, as opposed to skeptically.

Some will argue that "you're only believing that because you want to believe it". To which I would say "of course I do".

A proposition that begins with a conclusion, then seeks evidence to support it, is impervious to reason. Steve Cuno

What's wrong with that quote is, to explore outside your box and expand your knowledge, you've got to begin with a conclusion. This is what faith is. Faith is saying I believe this could be true, enough to go out and experiment on it. Of course, the trick is being flexible enough to recognize when it's not a good seed.



Alma 32:23

Notice also that it is the role of angels to lead men and women to Christ. Christ's role is to lead you to the Father. These degrees reflect a progression from Telesstial to Terrestrial to Celestial. This tells us that the kind of faith being discussed here applies to the level where angels interact with man. The beginning stages in the process.

Alma 32:27

...awake an arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

This now places us on not just the believing ("accepting") side of my grid, but also in the "flexible" quadrant as well.

The problem we face when we open up to some new information is the fear of being deceived. The reason people approach things skeptically, is because there are so many charlatans out there peddling snake oil, and we don't want to get taken. Alma wants to tell these people "you can trust me, I'm telling you the truth". But isn't that what the last guy told them? And he turned out being wrong. How to avoid getting sucked into being taken advantage of? Next they'll be asking me to drink some kool-aid.

Did you notice how this kind of thinking places you on the skeptical end of the quadrant? When you approach things with fear and skepticism, then you are opposite of where Alma tells us you need to be to allow the seed to grow.

If I come down and say, "I just saw a polar bear in Rock Canyon," what are you supposed to say? "If you say you saw a polar bear in Rock Canyon, Brother Nibley, I believe you." Well, that's terrible. I don't want to hear that. That takes all the wind out of my sails. I want you to go up and see for yourself. Or you might say, "Of course, there's no polar bear. You didn't see anything of the sort. No polar bears are found below a certain latitude. Polar bears just aren't found in these regions, so you didn't see any polar bear." Well, I might have; there might have been one that escaped from the zoo. But you don't know. The thing for you to do is not just take it because I say so, or not to reject it because you are being scientific and you don't think it can be possible. Find out for yourself. (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2, pg 351-352)

Continuing in the verse:

...it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

Joseph once explained that truth could be "tasted" when it is taught. As he put it:

"This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things which

were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more" (TPJS p. 355)

Alma 32:34

And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant;

If you don't have faith anymore once your knowledge is perfect, and we know that God is omniscient (all knowing), then how is it that "God framed the worlds by faith" (LoF 1:17)?

The question boils down to the word "dormant". How can faith, based on what we learn in LoF 1, ever be dormant?

We "exercise" faith, but can we "exercise" knowledge? Is there a difference between the kind of faith that is a principal of action and power on one hand, and the kind of faith that begins as a little seed on the other?

Here's my own reflections on this question (Your reflections may give additional insight):

When God created the world, he set things in motion, then allowed them to incubate*. There was an incubation period where things were given to respond. In other words, God planted a seed and allowed it to grow. But along the way he cultivated it, as in the words of Alma here. At some point, it grew, or manifested itself into maturity, into the tree that would bear fruit. At that point, the faith was dormant, because it had turned into "knowledge". Alma begins this discussion telling them that "it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn *wisdom*; for it is necessary that ye should learn *wisdom*" (verse 12). In verse 23 Alma specifically mentions "women". One of the rare instances where we see reference to "men and women" (usually "men" is given to be understood as "mankind").

In a talk I attended in 2015, the speaker put it this way:

[T]he role of the man is to become knowledge, so as to be able to fulfill a role that is eternal. The role of the woman is to become wisdom, because creation will only move forward if guided by wise counsel and prudent adaptations. Only together do they become complete and therefore "one." Alone they are sterile, but joined they are infinite, because they continue. Knowledge alone may provide the spark of creation, but it is potentially dangerous when merely energetic. Creation must be wisely assisted to avoid peril. Wisdom alone is not an agent of action. Knowledge can initiate action, but wisdom is necessary to guide and counsel. The physical is a mirror of the spiritual. The seed of man provides the spark of life, but it is the womb of woman in which life is developed to become viable. Likewise, the role of the woman in nurturing new life here is akin to the role of wisdom in eternity. Together these become whole, capable of both producing and then guiding creation. The woman sacrifices her blood to bring new life here. This physical world reflects the spiritual. (TDS Vol 2, pg 190-191)

It's the cycle of yearning, stretching, growing, until you arrive at the destination and find "rest" (knowledge). Then the process begins again as you reach upwards toward yet even more light and truth.

Alma 32:35

O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good;

The Holy Ghost is informational. Its purpose is to enlighten the mind and to inform you. It is a revelator. Our reaction to the information can be very emotional. How we react is up to us. I've had very strong emotional reactions to some of the things revealed by the Holy Ghost to me. Those aren't always those positive, warm feelings. It has been sometimes dread. It has been sometimes fear. It has been sometimes anxiety. And being troubled in mind, body, and spirit.

Imagine that you were sitting in this room. Imagine that this room is absolutely pitch black, so much so that you can't even see your hand in front of your face if you put your hand there. It is just black. And you want to go about determining what is in this room. You begin by feeling. ... All because someone turned on the light. Nothing more than someone turned on a light.

The Holy Ghost illuminates. Your reaction is your reaction. The purpose is to enliven and enlighten and to reveal. That's what it does, but how we respond to that is up to us.

Alma 32:42-43

And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

...and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. (D&C 121:46)

In my mind I like to add the last verses from D&C 121 to the end of Alma 32. Once you pass a certain threshold with your faith, things can achieve a critical mass, so to speak, where the blessings that flow are indescribable. When you ask in faith, you set in motion things that, though your prayers are not answered immediately, by and by (and this could be years or even decades), you will experience the "rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you." Now you may ask for something you are unprepared to hear an answer for, because there is some preparation yet left. But if you ask, then you set in motion, on the other side, permission to fix what's wrong with you.

Looking at chapter 32 from *Book of EST* perspective:

All belief is the least reliable form of knowing. Belief represents *uncertainty*. People believe in God because they have no real certainty about Her. Where there is a natural knowing of God, there is no need for belief. The highest form of certainty is something you know so thoroughly and so naturally that it's impossible to put into words. (Book of EST, Luke Rhinehart, pg 38)

What is Reality?

First, it's physical. Physicalness manifests itself in time, distance, and form.

Secondly, the substance of physicalness is measurability.

Thirdly, the substance of measurability is agreement. Everything in the universe is in agreement: its beginnings absolutely depend on the ends of other things and extend into their middles. Everything in the universe flows into everything else - it's all one - beginnings, middles, and ends - all in agreement. (see est, pg 124-125)

Reasonableness is used to determine if what presents itself to us is real (in the interim before we can actually verify it)

Agreement is basic to both physicalness, our primary estimate of what is real, and to reasonableness, our secondary or interim test of what is real. (see est, pg 127)

Unreality is Experience. Cause and effect. If reality is effect, effect, effect, then unreality must be cause, cause, cause, the very source of all things. And of course our experience is the source. What we call reality is really agreed upon illusion. Experience is the true reality. (ibid, pg 131-133)

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|------|--|--------------------------|---------|
| | sourcing | natural knowing | |
| | participating or sharing | certainty of not knowing | |
| | witnessing or observing | realization | |
| | accept | observing | |
| zero | ↑ Experienced Experience ↑ ↓ Non Experience ↓ | | nothing |
| | helping | feel about | |
| | hoping | do about | |
| | deciding | think about | |
| | reasonableness | belief about | |

Alma 33:2

And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them.

How were the people to search the scriptures? In Christ's day, didn't you need access to the synagogue where the scrolls and scriptures were kept in order to read them?

Reference to Portable Versions of Scriptures/Records in Book of Mormon:

- People search scriptures after Sherum is exposed as anti-Christ and they no longer hearken to the words of this wicked man (Jacob 7:23)
- King Benjamin's words were written and distributed (Mosiah 2:8)
- Abinadi "reads" unto the court of King Noah the commandments (Mosiah 13:11)
- Mosiah reads the records of Zenif to the people (Mosiah 25:5)
- Sons of Mosiah explain scripture to all who desired to hear them (Mosiah 27:35)
- On his mission in Ammonihah Alma unfolds the scriptures (Alma 12:1), "Behold, the scriptures are before you" (Alma 13:20)
- After Alma made an end of speaking many searched the scriptures (Alma 14:1)
- People of city of Ammonihah burn records (Alma 14:8,14)
- Ammon expounds and lays before king Lamoni the records of the holy scriptures (Alma 18:36). Did Lamanites have records, or would Ammon have had to have brought them down with him?
- Aaron opens scriptures unto Amlicites (Alma 21:9)
- Aaron "reads" scriptures to the king (Alma 22:12-13)
- Scriptures are laid before Korihor and all things denote there is a God (Alma 30:44)
- After being cast out of their synagogues, Alma tells poor Zoramites they ought to search the scriptures (Alma 33:2). Where do the poor have access to scripture if not in the synagogues?
- Alma asks poor Zoramites if they have read scriptures (specifically words of Zenos & Zenoch, Alma 33:12-14)

Alma 33:4-7

For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me. Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me. And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer. And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

Zenos on praying in your fields, houses, closets. Rob Adolfo's presentation on clean and unclean animals

Alma 33:15

In original manuscript Zenock is spelled Zenoch. In the original manuscript we see places where Oliver had written a name phonetically, then we see it has been crossed out and the name re-written, spelled as Joseph would have dictated.

Alma 33:19-21

Moses. There's some views that may give question to the credibility of Moses being real or at least not playing as significant a role (atheist view, Margaret Barker and Deuteronomists). Here the Book of Mormon confirms he was real and the event with the pole is real.

Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 33:19

Num. 21:6 – 9. The Hebrew word for “serpent” is nachash נחש , which has a gematria of 358, the same gematria as Mashiach משיח . See also John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32.

Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 34:13

"great and last": The underlying Hebrew may have been acharon אחרון (Strong's 314), which can mean “last” but can also mean “latter, following, or to come.”

"a stop to the shedding of blood": The underlying Hebrew for “stop” may have been יותר תהיה שלא , which literally means “should be no more” but could also be translated as “shall be no greater.” The Hebrew word yoter יותר can mean “more” or “greater.” Yosef ben Yosef said: “These sacrifices, as well as every ordinance belonging to the priesthood, will, when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi be purified, be fully restored and attended to in all their powers, ramifications, and blessings ...” Cook, L.W. & Ehat, A.F. (Eds.) (1980) *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, p. 43 [quote edited for grammar and punctuation]; See 3 Nepi 4:7.

Alma 34:16

And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice

Amulek's message in this chapter is very sobering. Not to be taken lightly. Compare with D&C 19:15-19:

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink— Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

Stick of Joseph footnonte Alma 34:17-18

Referring to the Jewish custom of three times of daily prayer: Shaharit (morning prayer), Minhah (mid day afternoon prayer), and Maarive (evening prayer).

Alma 34:34

That spirit which doth have power to possess your body when you die has power to possess your body in the spirit world.. Again emphasises how this life is a test that we should take seriously. God is not trifling with us.

Alma 35:5

Now their rulers and their priests and their teachers did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people.

What similarities are there between what we see happening with Zoramites and what we saw with those in the city of Ammonihah? Liken to how does the government or powers that be ascertain our actions in our day?

*..."darkness reigned upon the face of the deep." But things were already being prepared for what was to follow, for the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters." Dictionaries define brooding as "to sit or incubate (eggs) for the purpose of hatching." As Milton puts it "dovelike sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss and mad'st it pregnant." Also, "to dwell continuously on a subject." Brooding is just the right word—a quite long quiet period of preparation in which apparently nothing was happening. Something was to come out of the water, incubating, waiting a long, long time. (Hugh Nibley, Before Adam, address given to the BYU community on April 1, 1980 <https://www.deilataylor.com/free-hugh-nibley-sources/hugh-nibley-books-online/before-adam-hugh-nibley/>)