
ALMA 29-35

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INTRODUCTION

ALMA 29 OH THAT I WERE AN ANGEL

The first thing you have to ask when reading this fairly short chapter is, “Who wrote it?” The author is never identified by name, and until you get to verse 14, from which we can determine his identity, it could be any of several Book of Mormon prophets. That Mormon included Alma’s prayer here between the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah and the ministry efforts of Alma and those same men is intriguing; it offers a nice break from the historical and doctrinal flow with a simple, heartfelt conversation with God.

1 *O that I were an angel.* Alma knew something about angels. At least one angel appeared to him on two separate occasions (Mosiah 27:11-17; Alma 8:14-17). Others during this time were also witnesses to angelic ministrations (Alma 11:31; 13:24; 19:34). Alma understood the power of an angel’s testimony and desired to have as much impact himself.

2 *with the voice of thunder.* When the angel appeared to Alma and the sons of Mosiah as they were going about to destroy the Church, “he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood” (Mosiah 27:11). Alma desires that same power in his message to convince others of the truth.

3 *I ought to be content.* Though Alma’s desire for this blessing of being an angel was only for righteous purposes, yet he did “sin in [his] wish” because he recognized that he needed to be happy with his lot. How often do we weary the Lord, others, and ourselves with concerns about what should be or could be or should have been, when instead we could be content with what the Lord has allotted us?

4-5 *he granteth unto men according to their desire.* See Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s comment, *Student Manual*, 211-212.

6 *why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?* In the Church, most members receive calls to serve. Sometimes those calls are humble and simple and sometimes they tax our leadership or other skills. I learned recently that a certain bishop was trying to staff his nursery, but as he called people, they kept turning him down. Meanwhile, the sisters in the nursery ran short-handed for several weeks. This scripture reminds me of that situation. I don’t know why the people they were calling said no, but it seems safe to bet that they believed nursery was beneath

them or too _____ (fill in the blank with your favorite word—boring, lonely, challenging, etc.). But if they did not desire to serve beyond their call, they would accept the chance to serve in the nursery with the same enthusiasm and commitment they might have for a ‘favorite’ calling.

10 ***then do I remember what the Lord has done for me.*** Each time we share the gospel or see someone find joy in the principles of truth, it reminds us strongly of the mercy of the Lord toward us personally. Likewise, remembering, pondering on, and living the atonement of Christ motivates us to share that message of joy with others.

11-12 ***I also remember the captivity of my fathers.*** Alma could remember several captivities especially. In this case, he appears to be referring to the captivity in Egypt.

13 ***God did establish his church among them.*** I’m not sure we often think of what was taught in the Exodus story as God establishing his church (at least not in the way we think of it), but Alma did. To Alma, establishing the church was have the priesthood (“a holy calling”) and teaching about Christ.

14-15 ***the success of my brethren.*** These verses are the clue as to the person saying the prayer in this chapter. When Alma speaks of his “brethren” who “labored exceedingly” in “the land of Nephi” and who “brought forth much fruit,” we know he is speaking of those whose stories we just finished reading in the previous chapter.

16 ***the separation of it [my soul] from the body.*** This is how Alma must have described his experience after the angel appeared to him, wherein he “was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light” (Mosiah 27:29).

ALMA 30 KORIHOR

Alma 30-35 are one chapter in the 1830 Book of Mormon (chapter XVI). Most would not be surprised about 31-35, but including chapter 30 in the group might at first seem odd. However, the story of Korihor serves as an introduction to the other chapters. Not only does the story in chapter 30 bring us to the location and people of the following chapters, but the counter to Korihor’s false doctrines (which are very relevant in our day) is marvelously woven throughout Alma’s and Amulek’s remarks in the chapters that follow.

2 ***the sixteenth year.*** It has been 16 years since the sons of Mosiah left on their missions (returned now for two years), since the system of judges was implemented, since Mosiah and Alma¹ died, and since Alma became the first chief judge.

continual peace. The way the Nephites seem to use this phrase, it doesn’t mean a long period of time but rather ‘no wars the entire year.’ See verse 5 also.

6 ***there came a man into the land of Zarahemla.*** We do not know where this man came from, just that he came from somewhere other than Zarahemla.

he was Anti-Christ. Though there are others in the Book of Mormon that certainly could deserve the title “anti-Christ” (such as Sherem or Nehor), Korihor is the only one to actually be called that. The term appears in the Book of Mormon only in this chapter (verses 6 and 12). Otherwise in scripture, it is only used by John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). The term there (Greek,

antichristos) means either against/opposing Christ or a false Christ. See *Student Guide*, 213 for fuller definitions.

7 *bring men on to unequal grounds.* This odd-sounding phrase is explained in the following verses. Basically, Alma's argument is that no one could be punished for beliefs, just for actions. Therefore, the law could force no one to believe anything and everyone was punished for their crimes, "therefore all men were on equal grounds," meaning they all had the same freedoms and punishments.

8 *Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.* This is the only evidence that the book of Joshua was on the brass plates, but this clear quotation from Joshua 24:15 serves that purpose well. Alma's citation of it is part of his explanation that a person could not be punished for his beliefs.

10 *if he murdered he was punished.* The laws of the land included punishment for actions, not for beliefs or statements. These actions included murder, robbery, stealing, and adultery.

12 *this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor.* In this verse, we learn his name.

13-18 This summary of Korihor's teachings includes:

- The people were bound down with foolish hopes.
- No one can know the future.
- Prophecies are foolish traditions.
- You can only know what you can see.
- A belief in a future remission of sins comes from a deranged mind.
- There could be no atonement.
- Every one succeeds in life according to their intelligence.
- Death is the end.

19-20 ***went over to the land of Jershon.*** Korihor went next to Jershon, where the people of Ammon were located. Being "more wise" than the Nephites, they rejected Korihor.

20 *Ammon, who was a high priest.* When Ammon told king Lamoni that he desired to "dwell among this people...perhaps until the day I die" (Alma 17:23), he may not have had any idea that would literally happen. Rejoined with his family, no doubt, he now lived among the people called after his name, serving them as their high priest.

21 *the land of Gideon.* Failing to make any progress in Jershon, Korihor next went to Gideon, but here things were even worse for him, as the people bound him up and took him to the high priest and chief judge, who, after arguing briefly with him, had him taken to Alma.

30 *brought before Alma and the chief judge.* Some have been confused, thinking this said Alma was the chief judge, but it clearly says "and." Alma was the high priest, and the chief judge was Nephiah (Alma 4:17), who took over that role from Alma 8 years previous.

32 *we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people.* Alma made the point that the priesthood leaders were not dependent on the people for their living, and that Korihor knew that. That exposed Korihor as a liar.

41 ***I have all things as a testimony.*** When Korihor said he denied the existence of God, Alma's argument was that he had no evidence to support that position, but that Alma had "all things" to show that God was real.

43 ***If thou wilt show me a sign.*** Korihor said this as a challenge, not believing that Alma could actually do anything. It was one of the last things he would ever say.

51 ***put forth his hand and wrote.*** Not only was Korihor stuck dumb so that he couldn't talk, he couldn't hear either, as the chief judge had to write to communicate with him.

53 ***the devil hath deceived me.*** How quickly Korihor turned his story around! Suddenly he knows there is a God, and that Satan deceived him "in the form of an angel" (when Alma heard that, I wonder if he thought back to his wish in chapter 29?). He listened to those teachings because "they were pleasing unto the carnal mind." He knew they were not true at first, but after repeating them often enough, began to believe them.

59 ***a people who had separated themselves...Zoramites.*** Led by a man named Zoram, the Zoramites had followed the pattern of the Amlicites and separated themselves from the main body of the Nephites, physically, politically, and spiritually.

he was run upon and trodden down. Korihor's end seem poetically appropriate. He was literally stepped on and killed by apostate Nephites, with whom he likely had a strong affinity before his sign. But this society, as we will learn, was entirely focused on wealth and status. Seeing the beggar he had become, they had no tolerance for Korihor, and ran him over.

ALMA 31 A TALE OF TWO PRAYERS

I call this chapter "A tale of two prayers" because it powerfully contrasts two different prayers, one by the Zoramites and one by Alma.

1 ***bow down to dumb idols.*** Not only were the Zoramites teaching false doctrines, but they were being led by Zoram, their leader, to worship idols.

3 ***a land which they called Antionum.*** The home of the Zoramites was east of Zarahemla, near the seashore, south of Jershon (where the people of Ammon had gone), and just north of the wilderness separating the Nephites and Lamanites. It is mentioned first here then again in Alma 43 at the beginning of the 'war chapters.'

5 ***the preaching of the word.*** See *Student Manual*, 219-220, especially President Spencer W. Kimball's remarks on "The Power of the Word."

6-7 The group on this trip were an amazing collection of Book of Mormon missionaries: Alma, Ammon, Aaron, Omner, Amulek, Zeezrom, Melek, and Alma's two sons, Shiblon and Corianton.

15-18 The Zoramite prayer is in these verses. The focus of the prayer is praising God for saving them because they are so righteous and smart and chosen and...better than the poor. See the *Student Manual*, p. 220 on "Avoiding the Causes of Apostasy."

21 **Rameumptom**. This word, which the text says means “holy stand,” starts with a Hebrew word *ram* which means ‘high’ or ‘high place’ (Largey, 672).

26-35 Alma’s prayer is longer and more heartfelt than the silly Zoramite prayer. He cried out in anguish at first, saddened by the sins he sees among these people. Then he asked for strength to deal with the pain he felt for their sins. He prayed for comfort from sufferings and afflictions. Finally, he asked for success among them, for himself and his companions, that they might bring many to Christ.

ALMA 32 HUMILITY AND THE WORD AS A SEED

When asked the message of Alma 32, many will respond, “Faith.” True enough, the chapter does talk about faith. But Alma focuses on two ingredients that build faith—humility and taking the word of God into our lives. He is laying the groundwork for his real point—we have to believe in Christ.

1 **preach the word of God**. Alma and his group had split up to canvas the city and land of Antionum (31:27). This verse lets us know that it took great patience on their part, that they didn’t just walk into the city and immediately convert many people. They were teaching over a period of time in synagogues, houses, and in the streets. In fact, Mormon says it required “much labor” (v. 2).

2 **began to have success among the poor**. As is often the case, those in more humble circumstances in life can often be the most receptive to the message.

4 **upon the hill Onidah, there came a great multitude**. Alma was apparently preaching (with his good friend, Amulek) to a crowd on top of a hill. It’s almost as if this great multitude of poor people snuck up behind him and he didn’t see them at first.

5 **they have cast us out**. The richer, self-righteous Zoramites have cast the poor people out of the very synagogues that the poorer people had built “with their own hands.” For them, this created a situation where they felt deprived of the ability to worship God, so they ask Alma, “What shall we do?”

6 **he turned him about**. As if he just discovered this huge crowd of the poor, Alma turns around smiling “with great joy,” for he knew they were ready to hear the word. At that point, he ignored the other group he had already been preaching to and focused his attention on this crowd.

10-11 **do ye suppose**. Alma first had to debunk two false beliefs, which were at the root of their problem: they thought they could only worship God in a building and only once a week. In chapter 33, Alma will expand on this, and in chapter 34, Amulek will pick up this theme and develop it even further.

12-16 **ye are necessarily brought to be humble**. See President Ezra Taft Benson’s comments on *Student Manual*, 223, about being humble.

17 **show unto us a sign from heaven**. This is Alma’s first reference back to his experience with Korihor.

18 **is this faith?** Alma’s argument is that seeking a sign is not faith, because if the sign is received, it is then knowledge.

21 ***faith is not to have a perfect knowledge.*** This well-known scripture is the ‘punchline’ to his reference to Korihor—faith is not knowledge, but it is hope or belief in something you do not see, but which is nevertheless true. Having faith in something that is *not* true is a false faith. So how do you tell the difference? That is exactly what Alma explains next. See President Boyd K. Packer’s comments in “Faith and Hope,” *Student Manual*, 224.

23 ***he imparteth his word by angels unto men.*** Alma, Amulek, and many others had experienced this. It was because they had received the word of God from angels and had been authorized by the priesthood that they could preach to the people with authority and confidence.

27 ***an experiment upon my words.*** Alma introduces his great metaphor by an invitation to experiment, to test and try what he is saying for themselves. The message of the restored gospel is always one of personal invitation—don’t take my word for it, find out for yourself.

28 ***compare the word unto a seed.*** The seed is not faith, but the seed is the word of God, received through angels and conveyed by inspired and authorized prophets of God. Planting and nurturing it will build faith, because if the seed is good, we will see the results (v. 30).

it will begin to swell within your breasts. The word of God can be tested. It requires patience and a “desire to believe” (v. 27), but if it is true, it will begin to grow within your heart in a way that is hard to describe but unmistakable when it happens, causing you to exclaim, “it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginning to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.”

35 ***whatsoever is light, is good.*** Alma’s ultimate criteria by which you test truth is, does it bring “light”? Does it increase your understanding?

42 ***because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word.*** See President Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s great comments on “Being a Disciple of Christ,” *Student Manual*, 227-228.

the fruit...precious...sweet...white...pure. Alma’s words used to describe the fruit that results from nurturing the seed of the word of God echo back to Lehi’s and Nephi’s tree of life dream/vision in 1 Nephi.

ALMA 33 FAITH IN THE SON

With the task established of building faith by nurturing the word of God in our lives, Alma next turned to the focus of our faith—the life and atonement of Jesus Christ.

1 ***they sent forth unto him.*** The text implies that this was at another time or at least there was some break between 32 and 33. In other words, the poor people of Antionum were pondering his teachings about the word of God and had some questions, which “they sent forth” to Alma in some way. Chapter 33 is Alma’s response to their questions.

2 ***search the scriptures.*** Alma uses the scriptures not only to support his point but to direct them to a place where they can find their own answers. It is fascinating that the scriptures were apparently so readily available in their culture that he could say even to poor people living in a land of apostates, “Search the scriptures.”

3 *ye remember to have read what Zenos.* Alma is going to cite three prophets from the plates of brass to answer their questions. First is Zenos, in verses 4-11.

prayer or worship. Prayer is worship, but especially to these people whose entire religion was based on a weekly prayer offered on a Rameumptum. He wanted to be sure they applied what he was about to say to them. But using this equivalency, it's a good reminder that prayer is worship, and we go to the temple to worship, therefore the temple is a house of prayer.

4-11 Zenos' quote here is about praying anywhere and all the time, and God will hear us.

13 *turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.* Alma next moved directly to his main point—it is because of the Son of God that we can have any hope of receiving blessings from God. Without Christ, judgment would fall surely and swiftly upon us. Because of Christ, God can turn away his judgments and instead bless us abundantly.

15 *Zenock also spake of these things.* The second prophet Alma quoted was Zenock, who is often paired with Zenos in the Book of Mormon (perhaps they were like Alma and Amulek—friends and missionary companions?). His quotation here is just one verse, 16, and it has to do with God extending mercy to his children because of his Son.

17 *they stoned him to death.* We learn this sad fact about Zenock from this reference in Alma.

19 *he was spoken of by Moses.* Our Old Testament doesn't have Moses speaking of the Son of God directly, but the story Alma uses here (from Numbers 21:6-9) was quite clearly to him a perfect metaphor of the power of Christ in our lives.

22 *believe in the Son of God.* Here Alma offered a summary of the message about Jesus, the good news or gospel—he redeems his people by suffering and dying and atoning for their sins. He rises again in three days, which allows all to be resurrected. And all are judged by him.

ALMA 34 ATONEMENT, REPENTANCE, PRAYER, AND CHARITY

As a second witness, Alma's good friend Amulek next stood up and elaborated on some points Alma had made. But Amulek also went further, taking the poor Antionumites to the steps that come after they have begun to build their faith.

2 *these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension.* This verse makes clear that these people were taught the gospel of Christ before they separated themselves from the main body of the Nephites and became Zoramites. It is very likely that they were even members of the Church.

5 *whether the word be in the Son of God.* Amulek gets to the point—the people here were questioning whether the teachings about Christ are true.

6-7 Amulek summarized Alma's last remarks, proving that "the word is in Christ unto salvation" by quoting Zenos, Zenock, and Moses.

8 *I will testify unto you.* Amulek powerfully added his own testimony to those prophets' and to Alma's.

9 ***there must be an atonement made.*** Because of the fall and because of our own personal sins, without an atonement to pay the price and allow God to bless us, we would all be instantly and eternally lost. Understanding our fallen and perilous state is the first step toward accepting and appreciating Jesus.

10 ***an infinite and eternal sacrifice.*** See *Student Manual*, 228-229, where Elder Bruce R. McConkie and Elder Russell M. Nelson explain the nature of the atonement.

14 ***the whole meaning of the law.*** The law of Moses was given for one purpose only—to point people to the Son of God. All the ordinances, practices, sacrifices, and commandments were designed to help people think of, remember, and rely on him.

17 ***exercise your faith unto repentance.*** The next step after beginning to gain faith is to recognize the gap between your behavior and God’s expectations, and repent—which means to turn around and go a different way.

17-27 ***call upon his holy name.*** Amulek’s great statements about prayer being something we should do anywhere and everywhere, at all times, and over all aspects of our lives. Prayer flows naturally from our desire to repent.

28 ***impart of your substance.*** After we gain faith, repent, and build our relationship with God through prayer, we next turn to helping others in need. How fascinating that even when speaking to the poorest people here, he makes a point about charity and sharing what we have with others.

31-33 ***now is the time.*** Amulek’s call to action is stirring—today is decision day, this life is when we are to prepare to meet God, and we cannot procrastinate that work.

34 ***that same spirit will have power to possess your body.*** In other words, in the resurrection, we will be physically changed but unless we repent, prayer, have charity, and turn to God now, we will be no different in that day.

38 ***live in thanksgiving daily.*** Again, how interesting that he told this poor and persecuted people that they should always give thanks, that they should count “the many mercies and blessings” of God that they had received. How much more powerful is his counsel to us who enjoy many such blessings?

41 ***one day rest from all your afflictions.*** The hope and promise of the gospel is that rest is coming, that pain and suffering are temporary, and that through the atonement of Christ, joy is our eternal expectation.

ALMA 35 PREPARATION FOR WAR

1 ***into the land of Jershon.*** The faithful people of Ammon in nearby Jershon happily received the Church leaders. What is curious is that they apparently left the people there in Antionum without resolving their situation. Perhaps they encountered some serious persecution of their own that forced them out?

3 ***it did destroy their craft.*** The richer people relied heavily on the poor people for their living, apparently. Somehow, the missionaries' preaching had destroyed that, perhaps causing the poor to quit supplying the cheap labor on which the upper class relied?

6 ***cast out of the land.*** Those who were inclined to believe Alma and his brethren were discovered by a poll that was seemingly innocent but turned out to be a means of getting rid of converts. The result is that they all left Antionum and followed Alma and the others to Jershon. This made the Zoramites very angry (puzzling because they kicked them out—what did they expect would happen?) and was the trigger that led to years of terrible warfare.

9 ***did nourish them, and did clothe them, and did give unto them lands.*** The generous people of Ammon took in the refugees from Antionum, cared for their short term needs, and set them up permanently among them.

13 ***into the land of Melek.*** Because of the growing tensions between the Nephites and the Zoramites, not allied with the Lamanites (v. 10), the people of Ammon, who would not take up arms, were moved out of the area to a more safe location. The people of Antionum were left behind to help in the defense of the territory.

an account shall be given of their wars hereafter. The next several chapters are Alma's teachings to his sons. We pick up with this account of the wars in Alma 43:3.

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