

June 10–16: Alma 5–7, “Have Ye Experienced this Mighty Change in Your Hearts”

Overview

At the end of chapter 4, Alma was both the Chief Judge and High Priest. Alma resigned as Chief Judge so he could focus on the office of High Priest and strengthen the church

These three chapters contain the teaching of Alma to members of the church in Zarahemla and in Gideon

The members in Zarahemla had fallen by the wayside. So Alma's intent is to get them back on the straight and narrow path
The members in Gideon are still on the path. So Alma's intent is to help them progress along the way

Always Remember the Goodness of God

His message to the struggling members of the Church in Zarahemla:

- Always remember the goodness of God
- You must be born again
- How to progress along the path

Alma addresses members of the church in Zarahemla. He reminds them of the miraculous delivery of the previous generation (his father's) from the Lamanites in the land of Neph and Helam

Alma 5:4-5

[4] And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God.

[5] And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

Remember what the Lord told the people of Alma in Helam

Mosiah 24:13-14

And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying... this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions.

Remember what the angel said to Alma the younger:

Mosiah 27:16

Now I say unto thee: Go, and remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them; for they were in bondage, and he has delivered them.

Between the teachings of king Benjamin and Abinidi it sounds like most of the older generation had been born again. But not so much the younger generation

Alma 5:6-7

[6] And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

[7] Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

What can we do to that will help us always remember the power of God that we have witnessed in our life?

(Have you remembered the captivity of your fathers?
His mercy towards them?
That he has delivered their souls from hell?)

The Lord had forgiven the older generation, changed their hearts, and delivered them from destruction.

What can cause us to forget or explain away these experiences and drift away from the path?

Neal A. Maxwell

If we fail to stir remembrance of blessings received, the human tendency is to say, in effect, whether to one's God or to one's fellows, 'What have you done for me lately?' Indeed, prophets of the Lord have asked directly whether their people had 'sufficiently retained in remembrance' His deliverances and blessings.... Wherever the gospel is, there too is the call to remembrance." (A Wonderful Flood of Light, pg. 51)

When Oliver Cowdery ask for a witness from God he was told to remember the time he received the witness

D&C 6:22-24

22] Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

23] Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can have than from God?

24] And now, behold, you have received a witness; for if I have told you things which no man knoweth have you not received a witness?

Born Again

Alma explains to the people in Zerahemla why and how their fathers had been born again

Alma 5:10-13

[10] And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

[11] Behold, I can tell you -- did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

[12] And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

[13] And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved

What had happened that had brought about the mighty change in the hearts of their parents?

(according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts)

What had this mighty change of heart prompted them to do?

(humbled themselves and put their trust in God)
(they were faithful until the end)

Alma asks if they had followed the examples and teaching of their fathers and also had experienced this mighty change of heart

Alma 5:14-16

[14] And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

[15] Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

[16] I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

What can you look for in your life to know that you have been born again?

(Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?
Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality
can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying...
your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?)

What do you think Alma meant when he asked, “have ye received his image in your countenances”?

Andrew Skinner

"An 'image' is a person or thing very much like another. Countenance comes from an old French term originally denoting 'behavior,' 'demeanor,' or 'conduct.'...

"Therefore to receive Christ's image in one's countenance means to acquire the Savior's likeness in behavior, to be a copy or reflection of the Master's life. This is not possible without a mighty change in one's pattern of living. It requires, too, a change in feelings, attitudes, desires, and spiritual commitment. This involves the heart." (Studies In Scripture, 7:301)

Alma asked if they have lived their lives in such a way that their hearts are set on the spiritual and not on the carnal

Alma 5:26-31

[26] And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

[27] Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

[28] Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

[29] Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

[30] And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

[31] Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!

If you have been born again is it possible for your heart to go back to it's original carnal nature?

What are some questions Alma asks that can help us know if we've fallen back into the ways of the world?

(are ye stripped of pride?... stripped of envy?
make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions)

Ezra Taft Benson

“The antidote for pride is humility meekness, submissiveness.... Let us choose to be humble. We can choose to humble ourselves by conquering enmity toward our brothers and sisters, esteeming them as ourselves, and lifting them as high or higher than we are.... We can choose to humble ourselves by receiving counsel and chastisement.... We can choose to humble ourselves by forgiving those who have offended us.... We can choose to humble ourselves by rendering selfless service.... We can choose to humble ourselves by confessing and forsaking our sins and being born of God.... We can choose to humble ourselves by loving God, submitting our will to His, and putting Him first in our lives.” (CR, April 1989)

Alma tells us that if we want to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd we need to separate ourselves for the things of the world

Alma 5:57-59

[57] And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous, that the word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

[58] For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.

[59] For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

What does Alma tell them they must do if they want to “be numbered among the... the righteous”?

(follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things)

This is similar to what Paul said to the Corinthians who, like the members in Zarahemla, were struggling in the gospel

2 Corinthians 6:17

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

Charles W. Penrose

“This work will go on to this end and purpose. Zion will be built up, Jerusalem will be redeemed, and the time will come when Jesus, our Redeemer, shall descend in power and great glory to reign upon the earth.... He requires our whole heart.... Let us put away our follies and our errors. Let us not drink into the spirit of the world. Let us not pattern after the wickedness that is creeping into our midst. Come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing! Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. It is only by the practice of righteousness and personal purity, that we will be made fit to dwell in the presence of the Lord.” (JD, 21:80)

What will be the result if we do not come out from among the wicked and be separate from them?

(that the wolves enter not and devour his flock)

Heber C. Kimball

“We think we are secure here in the chambers of the everlasting hills..., but I want to say to you,... the time is coming when we will be mixed up in these now peaceful valleys to that extent that it will be difficult to tell the face of a Saint from the face of an enemy to the people of God. Then, brethren, look out for the great sieve, for there will be a great sifting time, and many will fall; for I say unto you there is a test, a TEST, a TEST coming, and who will be able to stand?” (Life of Heber C. Kimball by Orson F. Whitney, pg. 446)

Progress Along the Path

Alma was successful in getting the members in the church in Zarahemla back on the path. Alma next goes to teach the members of the church in Gidion. His message to them is different because they hadn't left the path but, rather, they were trying to press forward

Alma 7:9,19

[9] But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying -- Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.

[19] For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

Alma is commanded to call the people to repentance, “prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight. But -

What does Alma perceive about the church members in Gidion that helps direct his message?

(I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness)

So instead Alma was able to talk about more peaceable things - Impart deeper insight and understanding. He testified to them of the coming of Christ

Alma 7:11-13

[11] And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

[12] And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

[13] Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.

What reasons are given that Christ “[suffered] pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind”?

(he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people
he may loose the bands of death
he will take upon him their infirmities
know... how to succor his people
he might blot out their transgressions)

We often focus on Christ has taken upon him the pain of our sins, but he suffered pain of every kind

Howard W. Hunter

"We are indebted to the prophet Alma for our knowledge of the full measure of His suffering...

"Think of it! When his body was taken from the cross and hastily placed in a borrowed tomb, he, the sinless Son of God, had already taken upon him not only the sins and temptations of every human soul who will repent, but all

of our sickness and grief and pain of every kind. He suffered these afflictions as we suffer them, according to the flesh. He suffered them all. He did this to perfect his mercy and his ability to lift us above every earthly trial." (CR, April 1988)

Dallin H. Oaks

"Our Savior has revealed that He 'descended below all things'... We might even say that having descended beneath it all, He is perfectly positioned to lift us and give us the strength we need to endure our afflictions. We have only to ask." (CR, Oct. 2015)

Because they were already on the straight and narrow path, he admonishes them to press forward and gives them instructions on how they can do so

Alma 7:22-24

[22] And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received.

[23] And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

[24] And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

What does Alma list as some of the attributes we should strive to be blessed with in order to progress along the path?

Neal A. Maxwell

"The submissive soul will be led aright, enduring some things well while being anxiously engaged in setting other things right—all the time discerning the difference.

"Required, in particular, is meekness of mind which recognizes God's perfect love of us and His omniscience. By acknowledging these reassuring realities and accepting that God desires our full development and true happiness, we are readied even as the learning experiences come. Such meekness requires genuine intellectual honesty, owning up to the learning experiences of the past and listening to the Holy Ghost as he preaches to us from the pulpit of memory." (CR, April 1970)

Alma 7:25-26

[25] And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as

their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.
[26] And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word.