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Introduction



The image of a small portion of Michelangelo's fresco, "Creation," found above serves as metaphor for this page's means and ends.

- ? How would you characterize God's arm in the fresco?
- ? How would you characterize Adam's arm?
- ? What is the message in Adam's limp wrist? In the fact that his arm rests on his knee?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we engage in scripture study and seek to understand scripture, scripture's divine author and our relationship to Him?
- ? How does Adam, as painted in Michelangelo's fresco, represent all of us as we seek God's enlivening, strengthening, and saving influence and presence in our daily lives?

Michelangelo reminds us of our desperate need for God's presence in our lives if we are to follow Him and be all that He hopes us to be. In relation to this page and its purposes, we are in need of God's help as we seek to understand and apply scripture.

The questions we posed and our brief commentary concerning the fresco represent an example of our approach to each scripture reading.

Scripture readings are accompanied by general and passage-specific questions to ponder along with brief comments. In addition to the passage-specific questions associated with each reading, the reader can apply the following **general questions** to most readings. These questions come from the purposes of scripture as identified in the introduction to our site, ponderthescriptures.com, found on the site's home page

- What does this reading reveal about the character of God?
- How and what does this reading testify of Christ?
- What wisdom and knowledge does this reading provide?
- How does this reading direct the way you think and act?
- Of what dangers does this reading warn? How does it help you avoid these dangers?
- How does this reading gladden your heart, encourage you, and give you hope?
- How does this reading expand your vision and increase your expectations of the possible?
- What does this reading discern or "read" about you?
- How will you apply this reading to your life, to how you relate with others, and to how you relate to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

It is not intended that the reader ponder every question. We introduce numerous and varied questions in hopes that readers will find a question or two that catches their imagination and interest, seems pertinent to their lives, and provides an opportunity for meaningful pondering and further spiritual insight. In addition, if the reader wishes, the many and varied ponder questions allow the reader to spend additional time to consider passages from various perspectives.

Finally, we suggest that during and after your reading and pondering experience you consider how you can incorporate your thoughts and feelings from the scripture reading into your personal prayer life. As you pray, share with Heavenly Father what you thought and felt as you studied and pondered. In your prayer, seek further insight from a God who is anxious to reveal himself, his will, and his interest in our lives. Incorporating your reading and pondering into your prayers can, we think, enliven a prayer life that can all too easily become mundane, mechanical, and rote.

Alma 1.³— just scripture

“And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

Questionary

- ? What does it look like when individuals and societies are “liberal” in their assistance to vulnerable people?
- ? What are the signs and evidences that one has “set their hearts upon [their] riches”?
- ? How does one show “respect to persons as to those who [stand] in need”?

Alma 4.⁶⁻⁹— just scripture

⁶And it came to pass in the eighth year of the reign of the judges, that the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel. ⁷Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, yea, and to many of the people whom Alma had consecrated to be teachers, and priests, and elders over the church; yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people. ⁸For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure. ⁹And thus, in this eighth year of the reign of the judges, there began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride, even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.

Questionary

1. In verse six, the inspired writer informs us that members of the church of God began to sin in much the same ways that the world around them sinned.
 - ? What is the nature of that sin?
 - ? If you answered, “pride,” what was the cause and nature of the pride?
 - ? What is it about material wealth that it seems to inevitably cause “pride”?
We read that members of the church were “lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel.”
 - ? What does the conjunction, “for” tell you about pride and “costly apparel”?
 - ?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you read that “costly apparel” is a sign of inner sinfulness?
2. We learn that many of the church’s priests “were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people.”
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel about the pride that accompanies materialism being called “wickedness”?
 - ? What do you think and how do you feel when you consider that church leaders were “grieved” over the wickedness surrounding materialism?
 - ? One can justify wealth, as often happens, by saying that it is the attitude toward materialistic wealth rather than the wealth itself that is the problem. But, realistically, and historically speaking, how often does materialism not result in pride and wickedness?
 - ? If an individual or two is able, here and there, to avoid the wickedness of pride that flows from materialistic wealth, how often do entire societies resist the it?
 - ? What sorts of direction has God given societies to assist them avoid the wickedness and pride of materialism?
 - ? How well is our society doing?
 - ? How well are Christians doing?
3. As a result of the pride that flowed from materialistic wealth, church members “began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure.” We often think of this “scorn” and “persecution” in terms of doctrinal contention. However...
 - ? This scorn and persecution flowed from the materialist wealth. Do poorer people not contend over doctrine?

- ? Since they most certainly do, what does this suggest about the nature of scorn and persecution that increases with the materialism?
 - ? How might those who are using their materialistic wealth for purposes of self-gratification view and treat those who do not?
 - ? How might those who are using their materialistic wealth for purposes of self-gratification view and treat those who dare criticize their inappropriate use of materialistic resources?
 - ? In this context, then, what might the “persecution” look and sound like?
 - ? How are less advantaged populations of society “persecuted” as a result of their lack of resources?
4. The writer laments that the pride found in the church “exceed[ed] the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.”
- ? How do you feel about this observation?
 - ? What might have been the doctrines and attitudes of church members that contributed to such a surprising turn of events?
 - ? Again we ask, how is the church doing today in comparison to the greater societal population?
- ? What is it about “riches” that produces “pride” so often and consistently among humans?
 - ? What is the real purpose of fashion or “very costly apparel”?
 - ? What active measures can you take to avoid the false pride of economic success, wealth, and fashion?

Alma 4.¹²⁻¹³— just scripture

Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted. Now this was a great cause for lamentations among the people, while others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ's sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy...

Questionary

- ? If we consider things on the macro-historical level, how common is it for societal inequality NOT to result in the despising of and turning of the back upon the “needy,” “naked,” “hungry,” “thirsty,” and “afflicted”?
- ? How useful and even wise is it to consider the private exceptions to the rule when considering one’s own wealth?

Alma 4.¹⁸⁻¹⁹

Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah. And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.

Questionary

-
- ? How has “the word of God” and “pure testimony” served to “pull down... pride and craftiness and.. contention in your life?
 - ? How have they served to “reclaim” you?

Alma 5.⁷⁻¹⁴— Atonement

⁷Behold, 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.

⁸And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not. ⁹And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

¹⁰And 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? ¹¹Behold, 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? ¹²And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true. ¹³And 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.

¹⁴And 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?

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” *

1. Alma uses several phrases to describe the spiritual state of his “fathers” before their spiritual rebirth.
? What phrases do you identify as descriptive of these un-regenerated individuals?
2. Alma speaks of his “fathers” as being “in a deep sleep,” “in the midst of darkness,” encircled about by the bands of death,” and “encircled about by the chains of hell.” Finally he teaches that an “everlasting destruction did await them.”
? How do you feel about Alma’s description of the human spiritual state before spiritual rebirth?
? How broadly true is this of each individual?
3. Alma teaches that his “fathers” escaped all of this by being born again. Again, he uses several phrases to describe their regenerated state.
? What phrases does he use?
? What do you think and feel when you consider the following phrases and the contrast that they represent with the life that existed before?
“He changed their hearts”
“He awakened them”
“Their souls were illuminated”
“Theirs souls did expand”
“They did sing redeeming love”
“They are saved”
“They were faithful until the end”
They “received his image in [their] countenance”
4. After describing the spiritual state of his “fathers” both before and after spiritual rebirth, Alma asks his audience to consider several questions concerning their own spiritual state.

- ? What questions does he ask?
 - ? Ask and answer each of the following questions for yourself.
 - Have I spiritually been born of God?
 - Have I received his image in my countenance?
 - Have I experienced this mighty change in my heart?
 - Have I experienced an illumination or expansion of my soul?
5. Alma speaks of his “fathers” as “singing redeeming love” after their spiritual rebirth.
 - ? What does that look like?
 - ? What does it feel like?
 - ? Do you find yourself doing so regularly?
 - ? What are the words to your own song of redeeming love?
 6. Verse 11 provides a key to having one’s heart changed, or being born of God. As you consider the “how is it done?” question, cross reference the following passages: 2 Ne. 26.⁸; Jac. 6.⁸; Mos. 15.¹¹; D.C. 20.²⁶.
 - ? Is the emphasis on believing the prophets one of general belief in prophets, or a more focused belief in a specific message that dominates their call?
 - ? How do those who minister to you testify of Christ and his regenerating power?
 7. Consider rereading Alma 36, Mosiah 4, and/or Enos 1 where other’s experience of being born of God is recorded.
 - ? Do you find the same feelings and experiences there that Alma describes in today’s passage?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 5.²⁹

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.

Questionary

- ? What do you understand “envy” to be?
- ? What is it about “envy” that one possessing it is “not prepared” for a judgment or for life in the next sphere of existence?

Alma 5.^{33-35, 38}— atonement

³³Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: “Repent, and I will receive you.” ³⁴Yea, he saith:

“Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life;
yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;
³⁵yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness,
and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire...”

³⁸Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ...

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.” *

1. In the course of our atonement readings we have heard Jesus extend many hopeful invitations. We will also encounter many examples of repentance. We sometimes weigh the principle of repentance down with so many lists that the idea of repenting becomes overwhelming and discouraging. It can even be thought of negatively.

At its very core, the idea of repentance is really quite simple, hopeful, and even, ultimately joyful. Note, for example, that, here, it is an “invitation” to repent. Think about invitations. Have you gotten an “invitation” lately to attend some event or other? Chances are, the invitation was given by someone who thought the invitation would please and gladden you. Most likely the invitation was for some happy event.

- ? What does this suggest to you when you consider the Savior’s invitation to repent?
- ? What do you think of when you think of “invitations”?
- ? The Savior “invites” repentance, he does not “challenge” or “warn.” How would the Savior’s “invitation” be different if it was a warning or challenge?
- ? What is the significance of this observation that the Savior extends an invitation to repent rather than a challenge or warning?

2. Consider, next, the simplicity of repentance. Very few passages get to the heart of repentance better than Alma 34.¹⁷.

“Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, *that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you.*”

- ? How does this passage shape your understanding of what it means to repent?
- ? How often do you find yourself calling upon God for mercy?

Repentance, then, at its most basic, is the act of calling upon God, acknowledging our present need, pleading for His merciful forgiveness for past and present sins, seeking His merciful acceptance, asking for His merciful help in the future to resist and overcome sin, and expressing a desire to follow His counsel so as to show appreciation for His merciful forgiveness, acceptance, and help.

While the *desire to obey* is part of the repentance process and is prerequisite to our being forgiven, the actual *carrying out of our desire* is not. The carrying out of our desire to obey is something we work on and develop one step at a time over our life time. Until we are perfected, we must continually repent; that is, we must constantly cry out to God for mercy, help, and the revelation of His acceptance.

- ? If you close your eyes and imagine the Savior's "arms of mercy extended towards you," what do you see? How do you feel?
- ? The Savior's "invitation" takes the form of "Repent, and I will receive you." What form would a "command" to repent take?
- ? What is the difference between "invitation" and "command"?
- ? How do you experience the Savior? Does he tend more toward one of the other in your life—"invitation" or "commandment"?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - "Fall: Our Need of Atonement"
 - "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"
 - "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"
 - "Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"
 - "Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"
 - "Justification: How We Repent and Change"
 - "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"
 - "Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement"
 - "Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"
 - "Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Alma 7.⁷

For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

Questionary

This reading is the 3rd in a series of Advent readings and post-Advent readings that will continue through the end of December.

1. Consider all the events that have transpired in human history since Alma's day.
 - ? Make a list of 10 events that you consider most important in the world's history in the past 2000 years and consider the ways that their importance falls short of Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of God.
 - ? If someone were to follow you 24/7 over a long course of time, what evidence would they see in your life that nothing "is of more importance" to you than the Redeemer of mankind?
 - ? What can you do during the Christmas Season to further evidence this priority?

Alma 7.⁹⁻¹³— Atonement

⁹But 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. ¹⁰And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God. ¹¹And 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. ¹²And 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. ¹³Now 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.

Q

uestionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.” *

1. In today’s reading, we read repeatedly that Jesus “will take upon him...”
? What does this language of “taking upon himself” suggest to your mind?

Consider the things that Jesus “takes upon him:”

- “The pains and sicknesses of his people”
- “Death”
- Our “infirmities”
- “The sins of his people”

- ? What impact has Jesus’ having “taken upon him” all these things had on you personally?
- ? How is the troubling reality that we are beset and yield to sin “easily” affected by knowing that Jesus “takes upon him” all of these things?
- ? How has Jesus “taken upon him” these things in your behalf?

2. We learn from today’s reading that

- Jesus looses “the bands of death which bind”
- Jesus’ “bowels” are “filled with mercy”
- Jesus knows “how to succor his people according to their infirmities”
- Jesus “blots out their transgressions.”

Being released from those things that Jesus “takes upon him” and experiencing the truths of those things listed just above is part of the experience that the scriptures call “being born again.” Being born again is the outcome of repentance.

- ? Have you repented? Have you, then, been born again?

3. In inviting us to come unto Christ and repent, Alma encourages us to “come and fear not.”
? What is the nature of the fear from which Alma encourages us to free ourselves?
? What role does Jesus play in eliminating such fear?

4. Alma teaches that Jesus will “take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy.”

- ? What does this mean to you?
- ? What comes to your mind when you read of the “*bowels*” being filled with mercy?

- ? How does Jesus' experience of the same trials that we encounter increase the extent of his already huge amount of mercy and give him the knowledge "how to succor his people"?
- ? Have you had the experience of growing in mercy towards others by finding yourselves in their shoes?
- ? How do you feel about Jesus' willingness to suffer as others suffer?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

"Fall: Our Need of Atonement"

"Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"

"At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"

"Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"

"Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"

"Justification: How We Repent and Change"

"Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"

"Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus' life of Atonement"

"Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"

"The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Alma 7.¹⁴⁻¹⁵— Atonement

¹⁴Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. ¹⁵Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” *

1. Alma teaches that we must “be born again” or we “cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.”
 - ? What does it mean to you to “be born again”?
 - ? Have you been born again? How would you know?

In association with being “born again,” Alma mentions baptism, repentance, and faith. These three represent three of the four “First Four Principles of the Gospel.

? How do the first four principles relate to being “born again”?

2. Alma admonishes us to “lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you.” Compare this with Nephi’s confession found in 2 Nephi 4.¹⁸.

“I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.”

- ? How do you feel about this idea that temptation and sin “easily besets” us?
- ? Is this consistent with your own experience?

- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

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“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 12.¹⁰

And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

Questionary

-
- ? Here, “the mysteries of God” seem to be something positive, something God is interested in bestowing, and something to which believers can and should aspire. What, do you think, is meant by “the mysteries of God”?
 - ? To what degree do you “know” them?

Alma 15.¹⁰

And then Alma cried unto the Lord, saying: “O Lord our God, have mercy on this man, and heal him according to his faith which is in Christ.”

Questionary

-
- ? Have you had need of the Lord’s healing power?
 - ? How did he respond in your need?

Alma 22.¹³⁻¹⁴— atonement

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.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Fall: Our Need of Atonement.” *

1. In looking at today’s passage, the first thing we note is the similarity between Aaron’s teaching here and Ammon’s teachings found in Alma 18. Both begin with the existence of God (18.²⁴ and 22.⁷), and then move on to the creation (18.³⁶ and 22.¹⁰), the creation of man in God’s image (18.³⁶ and 22.¹²), the fall (18.³⁶ and 22.¹³), and the redemption through Christ (18.³⁹ and 22.¹⁴).

The reader may want to turn to DC 20.¹⁷⁻²⁸, where we have a kind of “creedal statement” very similar to the teachings found in Alma 18 and 22.

- “There is a God in Heaven” (DC 20.¹⁷)
- “God, the framer of heaven and earth” (DC 20.¹⁷)
- “He created man... after his own image” (DC 20.¹⁸)
- “Man became sensual and devilish, and became fallen man” (DC 20.²⁰)
- “The Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son...” (20.²¹)

It is interesting to compare the “We know” statements of DC 20 with the document known as “The Apostles’ Creed,” one of the oldest Christian documents.

“I believe in *God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, *was crucified, died, and was buried.*
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again.
He *ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.”

The two Nephite brothers, Ammon and Aaron, the 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Apostles’ Creed all remind us of the most fundamental principles upon which our religion is based.

? Take some time to consider these fundamentals; how you feel about them, and how they impact your daily life.

2. Aaron taught that “since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins.” This is yet another statement of why we

need the Savior and his Atonement.

- ? What does it mean to “merit” something?
- ? Think about the relationship between “merit” and “demerit.” What is a “demerit”? Ponder these concepts and their relationship to the Atonement.

If we could not “merit” anything without the Atonement, it means that the opposite would hold. Without the Atonement we would only have “demerits.”

- ? What does this mean to you and how do you feel about it?
- ? Why could we, whatever our character might be, “not merit anything” without Christ and his atonement?

Read and consider these other Book of Mormon passages that speak of “merit” or “merits.”

2 Nephi 2.⁸

“There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits... of the Holy Messiah.”

2 Nephi 31.¹⁹

“After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path... ye have not come thus far save it were by... relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.”
(Note that word “wholly”)

Alma 24.¹⁰

“...that we might repent... he hath forgiven us... and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.”

Helaman 14.¹³

“Ye may have a remission of them [your sins] through his [Christ’s] merits.”

Moroni 6.⁴

“Relying alone upon the merits of Christ.”

- ? How do these passages and their statements concerning “merit” relate to and enhance your understanding of today’s reading?
- ? How do they add to your appreciation for the need of atonement and for the Savior?

In all of these passages in which “merit” is a part, there is a good deal of “absolutist” language. We are to rely “*wholly*,” and “*alone*” upon the merits of Christ. We cannot “merit *anything*” of ourselves.

- ? How do you feel about this absolutist language?
- ? Have you and do you find it applicable in your own experiences?

3. Among the many doctrines that Aaron “expounded” was the “carnal state” in which all humankind lives.
 - ? Avoiding any false notion that “carnality” has only to do with matters of sexuality, what does it mean to be carnal?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 22.¹⁵⁻¹⁸— atonement

¹⁵* After Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: “What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold,” said he, “I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.”

¹⁶But Aaron said unto him: “If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.”

¹⁷When 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:

¹⁸“O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and 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.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” *

1. Today’s reading is another in our series of atonement readings relating to *How we Repent and Change*.
 - ? What realizations brought the king to his desire to repent and experience the love of God in his life?
 - ? What was the king willing to give up that he might know the joy of feeling God’s love and forgiveness?
 - ? What have you given up or what are you willing to give up in order to experience the reality of God’s love and forgiveness?
2. The king speaks of “having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast.” Think about this idea of “rooting out.”
 - ? What do you picture in your mind when you contemplate “rooting out”?
If wickedness has taken “root,” it is deep and tenacious.
 - ? Is there a sin or weakness in your life that is more than superficial, that has a bit of a root?
Getting rid of such things can be difficult and painful. “Rooting out” a weed tends to tear the soil a bit.
 - ? Are you willing to experience this type of temporary pain in order to bring about a greater and longer-term benefit?

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“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 26.¹⁶— atonement

¹⁶Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever.

Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord?

Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men?

Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement.” *

1. I have reformatted today’s reading in order to call attention to the two questions that Ammon asks.
 - ? Take a few moments to answer these questions and to consider why you answer as you do?
 - ? On what are your answers based?
 - ? Are they based on “doctrinal” or “theological” understanding, your own personal experience, or both?
2. The two questions seem rhetorical, anticipating an obvious answer of “No one.”
 - ? What do you think and feel about the implied assertion?
 - ? Again, do you think and feel as you do because of a “doctrinal” or “theological” understanding, or because of your own experience with God?
3. Ammon confesses that he finds it impossible to say all that could and should be said about the Lord’s “power,” “mercy,” and “longsuffering”
 - ? Do you find yourself under the same difficulty?
 - ? Though you may not be able to say all that could or should be said about these divine attributes, what would you say if asked to speak and testify about each of them? Take a moment to write down your thoughts as if you had been asked to speak or testify of them.
 - ? How has God exercised these divine attributes in your life?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 26.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

Therefore, let us glory, yea, we will glory in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel.

Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

Questionary

- ? I have often said that if I could take only one verse with me to a deserted island, as hard as it is to choose, this is the one I would choose. What is it about this verse, do you think, that I find so inspiring?
- ? What passage would you take with you?

Alma 26.¹⁷⁻²¹— atonement

¹⁷Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?

¹⁸Behold, we went forth even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church.

¹⁹Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction?

Yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?

²⁰Oh, my soul, almost as it were, fleeth at the thought. Behold, he did not exercise his justice upon us, but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

²¹And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things?

I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement.” *

1. I have reformatted today’s reading in order to call attention to the series of six questions that Ammon asks.
 - ? Take a few moments to answer each of these questions and to consider why you answer as you do?
 - ? On what are your answers based?
 - ? Are they based on “doctrinal” or “theological” understanding, your own personal experience, or both?
2. The first two questions seem rhetorical, anticipating an obvious answer of “No one.” The third question, “Who could have supposed that our God would have been so merciful as to have snatched us from our awful, sinful, and polluted state?” also seems rhetorical—again, “No one.” But it also contains an implied assertion. It seems to assert that God’s mercy goes beyond that which the human mind and heart anticipates or would predict.
 - ? What do you think and feel about the implied assertion?
 - ? Again, do you think and feel as you do because of a “doctrinal” or “theological” understanding, or because of your own experience with God?
 - ? Has he been merciful toward you in ways that seem beyond a reasonable expectation?
 - ? What other scriptures come to mind that suggest that God is extravagant in his mercy?
3. Ammon’s fourth and fifth question seem to go beyond rhetorical. In fact, they almost seem beyond human capacity to answer. These two questions are:
 - Oh then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction?
 - Yea, why did he not let the sword of his justice fall upon us, and doom us to eternal despair?
 - ? As you continue to contemplate the generosity of God, do you answer the same as before? Has your answer expanded? If so, how?
 - ? How does an apparently correct response, “because he is merciful,” still leave one feeling confused, feeling as though one was witnessing something beyond one’s ability to “suppose”?
4. Ammon’s final question, “And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things?” seems almost rhetorical as well, with an anticipated answer “None.” At the same time, it invites the reader to introspection.
 - ? Do I know these things? Do I know that God’s mercy goes beyond all human expectation or supposition? Do I know and understand that in my limited human comprehension God

- cannot be manipulated or predicted?
- ? Or am I a “natural man” who remains ignorant of God’s boundless mercy because of my lack of experience with him?
5. In addition to the six questions, there are six statements or exclamations.
- ? As you examine these, do you find yourself in agreement with Ammon, both intellectually and emotionally?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
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 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 31.²⁴⁻²⁸ — just scripture

²⁴Now when Alma saw this his heart was grieved; for he saw that they were a wicked and a perverse people; yea, he saw that their hearts were set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods. ²⁵Yea, and he also saw that their hearts were lifted up unto great boasting, in their pride. ²⁶And he lifted up his voice to heaven, and cried, saying:

“O, how long, O Lord, wilt thou suffer that thy servants shall dwell here below in the flesh, to behold such gross wickedness among the children of men? ²⁷Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world. ²⁸Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.”

Questionary

1. Today’s reading comes immediately after the report concerning what Alma witnessed in the Zoramite synagogues.
 - ? Take a moment to review the sort of worship service that Alma witnessed there (Al. 31.¹²⁻²³). How would you characterize this worship?
2. Today’s reading contains a portion of a prayer that Alma offered after witnessing Zoramite society and worship practices. After witnessing the society and its worship, he concluded that “they were a wicked and a perverse people.”
 - ? What specific indicators does he offer in this portion of his prayer as evidence of Zoramite wickedness and perversity?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you hear Alma identify materialism as wicked and perverse?
3. Alma seems to find Zoramite materialism and their prayerful claim of election as incongruous and hypocritical.
 - ? What is incongruous about materialism and spiritual election?

It is very likely that the Zoramites explained the relationship between their wealth and election very differently, claiming, as “prosperity gospels usually do, that their wealth was in fact a sign of God’s approval of them rather than a sign of wickedness and perversion.

- ? Have you witnessed such claims made by purveyors of “prosperity gospels”? How do you feel about them?
- ? What other passages of scripture comes to mind when you consider the linkage that Alma makes between materialism/ wealth and wickedness/ perversion?
- ? What do you do to combat heretical “prosperity gospels” that link wealth and election?

Alma 31.²⁷⁻²⁹— just scripture

²⁷Behold, O God, they cry unto thee,
and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride.
Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths,
while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

²⁸Behold, O my God, their costly apparel,
and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold,
and all their precious things which they are ornamented with;
and behold, their hearts are set upon them,
and yet they cry unto thee and say—

We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee,
while others shall perish.

²⁹Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.

Q

uestionary

Today's Read, Ponder, Pray passage is a portion of the prayer that Alma offered upon witnessing the arrogant prayer and apostate behavior of the Zoramites (Alma 31.²⁶⁻³⁵).

- ? First, based upon previous readings and your familiarity with the Zoramites, how would you characterize the Zoramite apostasy?
- 1. Verses 26 and 30-35 constitute Alma's request that he and his fellow ministers be comforted, strengthened, and blessed with success as they minister among the Zoramites. It is in verses 27-29, then, that Alma addresses Zoramite apostasy and behavior.
 - ? After rereading and considering verses 27-29, would you alter or add in any way your past characterizations of the Zoramite apostasy? If so, how?
 - ? How do you feel about Zoramite materialism being so central to Alma's thoughts and prayers concerning the Zoramite apostasy?
 - ? What is the relationship between extravagant materialism and an inflated and false sense of one's worth, exceptionalism, and superiority?

Consider these passages, all from the Book of Mormon

"...because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they" (Jac. 2.¹³).

"And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel..." (Al. 1.⁶).

"For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes..." (Al. 1.³²).

"In the eighth year of the reign of the judges, the people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks, and their fine-twined linen, and because of their many flocks and herds, and their gold and their silver, and all manner of precious things, which they had obtained by their industry; and in all these things were they lifted up in the pride of their eyes, for they began to wear very costly apparel" (Al. 4.⁶).

"And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?" (Al. 5.⁵³).

“Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him” (Hel. 13.²⁸).

“And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world” (3 Ne. 1.²⁴).

“And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts” (Morm. 8.³⁶).

- ? What is it about the materialistic wearing of “costly apparel” that makes it such a good barometer in gauging individual pride, societal pride, and religious apostasy?
 - ? How would you characterize the wearing of “costly apparel” and its accompanying materialism today? Prevalent? Rare? Accepted? View skeptically?
2. After describing Zoramite hyper-materialism and false sense of exceptionalism, Alma continues with “Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ.”
- ? What is the import of Alma’s “Yea”?
 - ? Is it to be read something like, “in addition,” as if he was merely shifting gears and enumerating yet another part of Zoramite apostasy?

Or

- ? Should it be read something like, “yes,” as if the materialism and false sense of exceptionalism is part and parcel with the denial of Jesus Christ?
- ? How is hyper-materialism and a false sense of exceptionalism a denial of Christ?
- ? As you consider the earthly ministry of Jesus, what role did materialism and a sense of exceptionalism play in his life?
- ? How did Jesus exhibit a sense of unity rather than separateness and superiority with those with whom he came into contact?
- ? What, do you suppose, would Alma say about your society’s materialism and sense of exceptionalism if he were to visit today?
- ? What can you do to avoid the Zoramite errors?
- ? What can you do to influence your society so that it may recognize and avoid the Zoramite errors?

Alma 33.¹⁻³

¹Now after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith.

²And 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. ³Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?”

Questionary

There are few sermons found in the Book of Mormon that can top this one for its breadth and passionate intensity. We will examine this sermon in eight readings.

1. The Zoramite poor had been humiliated by being “cast out” and “not permitted to enter their synagogues.”
 - ? What do you think it meant to be “cast out” and how do you suppose it was accomplished?
 - ? Do you see it as the result of some physical coercion or violence or the result of a more subtle social pressure and stigma?
 - ? What was it about being poor and the doctrine of the Zoramites that allowed them to justify what was, essentially, excommunication of the poor?
 - ? What would you think and feel if we suggested that the Zoramites might have excommunicated the poor because their doctrine suggested that poverty was the result of personal flaws, mismanagement, and spiritual disfavor with God?
 - ? How is religious doctrine today similar in its attitudes toward poverty and the poor?
2. Humiliated, the Zoramite poor gave ear to Alma’s preaching (Alma 32). After his sermon, they had a number of questions.
 - ? What questions did they ask and how would you answer them?

One of their questions was “whether they should believe in one God.”

 - ? What do you make of this question?
 - ? How might it relate to the confession that they had formerly made in their ritualistic prayer: “thou [God] wast a a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever”?
3. Because they had been “cast out” of their synagogues, the poor questioned their ability to “worship” God. Alma teaches that one does not need a physical structure to worship God and suggest that this truth is clearly taught in scripture.
 - ? What scriptures come to your mind as supporting Alma’s teaching?
3. In speaking of worshiping God, Alma speaks of “prayer or worship” as if the two are synonymous.
 - ? How do you feel and what do you think about this observation?
 - ? What other scriptures point to the idea that true prayer not only possesses an element of worship but is dominated by worship?
 - ? What does a worshipful prayer entail?
 - ? How worshipful are your prayers? What could you do to improve this aspect of prayer in your own prayer life?

Alma 33.⁴⁻⁷

⁴“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.

⁵Yea, 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.

⁶And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.

⁷And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

Q

uestionary

There are few sermons found in the Book of Mormon that can top this one for its breadth and passionate intensity. We are examining this sermon in eight readings. This reading is the second. It is the beginning of a quotation concerning prayer, or worship from the prophet Zenos. The quotation runs through verse 11.

1. Zenos presents a progression as to the location of his prayers
 - ? What is that progression?
 - ? What does the progression from “wilderness,” to “field,” to “house,” to “closet” signify?
 - ? How is this pertinent to the Zoramite dilemma?
 - ? How is it pertinent to you and your prayer life?
2. In addition to teaching that God hears prayer no matter where you are, Zenos also teaches concerning the basis upon which God hears prayer.
 - ? What is that basis?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that God hears prayer because he is “merciful”?
 - ? How often are you cognoscente of this truth and how often do you acknowledge it in prayer?
 - ? How does this knowledge impact the way you pray?
 - ? How do you feel about the suggestion that an appeal to God’s mercy is central to any and every prayer?
 - ? How can you apply the lesson concerning God’s mercy and its importance for our prayers to your own prayer life?
 - ? Why is recognizing and acknowledging that God’s mercy is more crucial to the power of prayer than location so important?

Alma 33.⁸⁻¹⁰

⁸Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee,
to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

⁹Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me,
and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations.

¹⁰Yea, and thou hast also heard me
when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies;
yea, thou didst hear my cries,
and wast angry with mine enemies,
and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction.

Questionary

There are few sermons found in the Book of Mormon that can top this one for its breadth and passionate intensity. We will examine this sermon in eight readings. This reading is the third, and continues a quotation concerning prayer, or worship from the prophet Zenos. The quotation runs from verse 4 through verse 11.

In our previous reading (vs. 4-7), we learned that God hears prayers wherever they are offered and that His attendance to pray is the result of God being merciful rather than the location from which we pray.

1. In this reading, Zenos assures us that in his mercy God hears prayers not only without consideration of the location of our prayers, but also no matter the circumstances in which we may find ourselves during our prayers.
 - ? What are the circumstances Zenos mentions?
 - ? How does prayer offered in the comfortable surroundings of family and friends differ from that offered in uncomfortable settings and among unfriendly others?
2. Zenos thanks God for being “angry” with his, Zenos,’ enemies and for “visiting them in anger with speedy destruction.”
 - ? How would Zenos’ assertion that God would hear the prayer of those who struggled under the power of their enemies be particularly applicable to Alma’s audience in that moment?
 - ? How are those who have cast out Alma’s audience from their synagogues acting the part of “enemies” toward them?
 - ? How do you feel about God visiting Zenos’ enemies with “speedy destruction”?
 - ? How do you feel about Zenos’ thankfulness at his enemy’s “speedy destruction”?
 - ? How do you feel about the implication that Alma purposely left in his audience’s minds that they could legitimately pray for the “speedy destruction” of those who had cast them out of the synagogue?
 - ? What constitutes an “enemy,” and do you have any? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? What, if any, application do you make in your life to God visiting “enemies” with “speedy destruction”?

Alma 33.¹¹

¹¹“And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.”

Questionary

There are few sermons found in the Book of Mormon that can top this one for its breadth and passionate intensity. We will examine this sermon in eight readings. This reading is the fourth, and continues a quotation concerning prayer, or worship from the prophet Zenos. The quotation runs from verse 4 through verse 11.

In verses 4-7, we learned that God hears prayers wherever they are offered and that this attendance to pray is a result of God being merciful. In verses 8-10, we learned that God hears prayers in whatever situation we may be in—good or bad—that this too is a consequence of God’s mercy, and that God will go so far as to bring our enemies to destruction.

1. Zenos has spoken of God’s mercy several times. He speaks of it again in this verse. Take a moment to review verses 4-11.
 - ? How many times does he speak of God’s mercy?
 - ? What is the significance and impact of this repetition?
 - ? How does this repetition focus the mind of the one praying on considering, acknowledging, and making use of God’s mercy in their prayer life?
2. In addition to God’s own mercy, Zenos gives two other reasons for God’s having heard his prayers.
 - ? What are those three reasons?
 - ? Why is “affliction” a reason for God hearing prayer? What is it about Him that “affliction” draws God to the petitioner?
 - ? Why do we sometimes feel that our afflictions separate us from God rather than draw God to us?
 - ? What is it about “sincerity” that draws God to the petitioner?
 - ? What are the signs of sincerity in prayer?
 - ? How can your sincerity in prayer deepen?
 - ? What role would a sincere confession of the need for God’s mercy during prayer play?
3. After repeatedly acknowledged God’s mercy in his life, Zenos says that “it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me.”
 - ? What role does Jesus play in bringing God’s mercy into our lives?
4. Zenos also acknowledges that God “hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.”
 - ? What does he mean by “judgements”?
 - ? How does the following passage from Psalms relate to Zenos’ witness?

“The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.
He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him” (Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹¹).

- ? To what extent have you experienced this reality of God’s character? What were the circumstances?

Consider the following well-known passage.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1.⁵).

- ? How is a “lack of wisdom” reflected not only in what we understand or do not understand but also in how we act?
- ? How do you apply this well know passage concerning the reality of God’s mercy to your prayer life?

Alma 33.¹²⁻¹⁴

¹²And now Alma said unto them: “Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? ¹³Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: ‘Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.’

¹⁴Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

Questionary

There are few sermons found in the Book of Mormon that can top this one for its breadth and passionate intensity. We will examine this sermon in eight readings. This reading is the fifth.

In verses 4-7, we learned that God hears prayers wherever they are offered and that this attendance to pray is a result of God being merciful. In verses 8-10, we learned that God hears prayers in whatever situation we may be in—good or bad—that this too is a consequence of God’s mercy, and that God will go so far as to bring our enemies to destruction. In verse 11, we learned that God’s mercy is found/ exemplified in Christ, Jesus.

1. In today’s reading, Alma has ended his quotation from Zenos. However, he now repeats a portion of the quote.
 - ? If you were the speaker and were repeating a portion of a quote that you had just read, what would be the purpose of your re quoting?
 - ? What is Alma’s purpose in re quoting this portion of Zenos’ prayer?
 - ? What does the selection of this particular portion of Zenos’ prayer for re quoting suggest about the most fundamental and lasting message Alma wishes to deliver?
 - ? How does Alma’s re quoting of this portion of Zenos’ prayer suggest that it is the Zoramites’ lack of faith in Christ and his desire and ability to “turn away” the “judgements” of God that is the most serious problem and the one that needs most corrected—even more so than the misunderstanding about where and when one can pray?
 - ? Why is it so important to understand and act upon the reality that Jesus has “turned away” the “judgements” of God?
 - ? How does a full appreciation of this reality impact prayer; how often, and how hopefully we pray?
2. After quoting from Zenos’ prayer, Alma asks, “Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?”
 - ? How would you answer this question?
 - ? What evidence would one see in your life to confirm your answer?
 - ? Take a moment to write down your testimony of scripture. Include why you feel as you do, what you have learned from scripture, and how you feel when you read them?

Alma 33.¹²⁻¹⁶— atonement

¹²And now Alma said unto them: “Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old? ¹³Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said:

‘Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.’

¹⁴Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God? ¹⁵For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—¹⁶For behold, he said:

‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.’

Q

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- ? As you consider today’s reading, of what specific hope, joy, peace, and power are you invited to partake of?
- Alma specifically highlights two quotations: one from Zenos and one from Zenock.

? What are you invited to understand and respond to in these two quotations?
 - Reconsider the quotation from Zenock, which begins with “For behold, he said: ‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because...’” Stop there. We might finish the sentence with any number of things that the Lord might be saddened to find in our lives.

? Take a few minutes to make a list of a few of those things.
? If you had not read the rest of the verse already, would you have thought to include, “because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son”?
? Would you have thought of this as one of the things that saddens God?
? Why do you think this is true? Why is Heavenly Father saddened when we do not understand his mercy?
? What negative consequences can this lack of understanding bring into our lives?
? What is your own understanding concerning the mercy God bestow upon you because of his Son?
? Are there times and ways when you are guilty of misunderstanding” God’s mercy? When? Why?
 - Zenock speaks of “understanding” the mercies that Father has bestowed upon us because of his Son.

? What do you think is meant by “understand”?
? Is understanding about more than mental and intellectual comprehension? Could we read “understand” as “experience”?
? What does it mean to “experience” Father’s mercies which he has bestowed upon us because of thy Son.’
? Have you done so?
 - Alma highlights Zenos’ testimony that Father “hast turned away [His] judgments because of [His] Son.

? What does the “turning away of judgments” mean to you?
? Is it significant that it is “judgments,” plural, rather than “judgment,” singular?
? Is this something that you can experience in the here and now?
? Have you felt this “turning away of judgments” in your life?
? How does the following passage relate to God’s “turning away His judgments”?

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always chide:
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103.⁸⁻¹²).

- ? How do you feel about God “not rewarding us according to our iniquities”?
- ? Have you experienced this divine bestowal of mercy?
- ? What feelings does such a bestowal of mercy produce in you?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 33.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

¹⁵“For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—

¹⁶For behold, he said:

‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people,
because they will not understand thy mercies
which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.

¹⁷And now, my brethren, ye see that a second prophet of old has testified of the Son of God, and
because the people would not understand his words they stoned him to death.

Questionary

1. Consider the quotation from Zenock, which begins with “For behold, he said: ‘Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because...’” Stop there. We might finish the sentence with any number of things that the Lord might be saddened to find in our lives.
 - ? Take a few minutes to make a list of a few of those things.
 - ? If you had not read the rest of the verse already, would you have thought to include, “because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son”?
 - ? Would you have thought of this as one of the things that saddens God?
 - ? Why is Heavenly Father saddened when we do not understand his mercy?
2. Zenock speaks of “understanding” the mercies that Father has bestowed upon us because of his Son.
 - ? What do you think is meant by “understand”?
 - ? Is understanding about more than mental and intellectual comprehension? Could we read “understand” as “experience”?
 - ? What does it mean to “experience” Father’s mercies which he has bestowed upon us because of thy Son.’
 - ? Have you done so?
 - ? What is your own understanding and experience of God’s mercy bestowed upon you because of his Son?
 - ? Are there times and ways when you are guilty of misunderstanding” God’s mercy? When? Why? How?
 - ? What negative consequences can this lack of understanding bring into our lives?

Alma 33.¹⁸⁻²⁰

¹⁸But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God. ¹⁹Behold, he was spoken of by Moses; yea, and behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. ²⁰But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them.

Questionary

1. Before turning to the questions for today's reading, take a few minutes to review the story to which Alma refers in today's reading.

“And the people spake against God, and against Moses, ‘Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.’

And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.’

And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” (Num. 21.⁵⁻⁹).

- ? What lessons do you take from this story? What application do you make to your own life?
- ? What are the snakes and their poison symbolic of?
- ? Now, turning to today's reading, what additional information and insights do you have into the story as told in Numbers?

2. While the account in Numbers does not tell us so, Alma makes it known that “there were many who were so hardened that they would not look.”

- ? Why, according to Alma, did they refuse to look upon the serpent?

Nephi also used the story to motivate others, his brothers, to faith. He gave another reason for the people's refusal to look upon the serpent.

“He sent fiery flying serpents among them; and after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Ne. 17.⁴¹).

- ? When have you heard of people not doing something—temporal or spiritual—because it was too *easy*?
- ? If they wanted and looked for something harder than Moses' solution, what types of solutions might they have tried?

3. I don't know if the Numbers story is literal or really happened or not. It doesn't really matter to me. But I am very comfortable examining the story as reflecting human realities. Now, I have always wondered, if their eyes were not on the serpents, where were they? They had to be looking somewhere.

- ? Where, do you imagine, were they looking?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider that perhaps their eyes were on the ground, on the snakes writhing on the ground rather than on the snake on the pole?

- ? Doesn't it make sense to keep your eye on the snakes in order to avoid being bitten in the first place?
- ? Why and how is this attempt to avoid being bitten in the first place more difficult than looking for an antidote once bitten?
- ? Is it possible to avoid being bitten, or sinning? Why do you answer as you do?
- ? How do we sometimes focus on the sin that is in our lives and attempt to avoid it rather than looking to Christ to heal us of our inevitable sins?
- ? How do you feel when you consider that focusing on avoiding sin rather than looking to Christ for his antidote to our inevitable sins is an act of faithlessness, not faith and wisdom?

Alma 33.²¹⁻²³

²¹O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief, and be slothful, that ye would not cast about your eyes, that ye might perish? ²²If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works.

²³And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.

Questionary

1. Alma began his discourse by addressing the problem of where and when and under what circumstances those who had been excluded from worshipping in Zoramite synagogues could pray to God. We might have assumed that pray was Alma's central concern. However, in his concluding remarks, he makes no comment about prayer.
 - ? On what do his concluding remarks focus?
 - ? How has the direction of Alma's discourse demonstrated that his chief concern is to inspire faith in Christ and confidence in his mercy?
2. Alma expresses his hope that "ye shall plant this word in your hearts."
 - ? What is the nature of "this seed"?
 - ? What do you think and feel if we suggest that faith in Christ and the message of his mercy is the seed that is to be planted?
 - ? What are the consequences of planting and then nourishing the growth from the seed.
 - ? What is the relationship between this tree and the tree seen in Lehi's dream (See 1 Nephi 8:⁹⁻¹² and 11.²¹⁻²³)?
3. Alma promises that our "burdens may be light" "through the joy of his Son."
 - ? What is the significance of finding our burdens lightened, not "through Christ," but "through the *joy* of" Christ?
 - ? In what circumstances have "your burdens" been lightened "through the joy of his Son"?

Alma 34.¹⁻⁴

¹After Alma had spoken these words unto them he sat down upon the ground, and Amulek arose and began to teach them, saying:

²“My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God; yea, I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us. ³And as ye have desired of my beloved brother that he should make known unto you what ye should do, because of your afflictions; and he hath spoken somewhat unto you to prepare your minds; yea, and he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience—⁴Yea, even that ye would have so much faith as even to plant the word in your hearts, that ye may try the experiment of its goodness.”

Questionary

1. In today's reading, the first of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³). Amulek references Alma's well-known admonition that the Zoramites try an experiment and plant “the word” in their hearts as they would plant a seed in the ground.
In chapter 32, Alma described the nature of the experiment and in chapter 33 he defined the nature of “the word” with which they were to experiment.
 - ? Take a moment to briefly describe the nature of the experiment in your own words.“The word” is more than the general word of God, but one “word” or concept in particular.
 - ? What specific “word” are they to plant?
 - ? How does verse 2 help to answer the previous question?
 - ? How does Alma 33.²³, coming at the end of the doctrines taught in the rest of the 33rd chapter help to answer what specific word Alma encourages the Zoramites to plant?

“And now, my brethren, I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will. Amen.”
2. At the beginning of his New Testament Gospel, John refers to Jesus as “the word of God”

“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God” (John 1.¹).

 - ? In what ways is Jesus God's word or message to humankind?
 - ? What bearing does this have on how you understand “the word” that the Zoramites are to plant?
3. We often think of the experiment as one in which the Zoramites might come to know “the truth” of “the word.” But Amulek seems to understand it differently.
 - ? What does Amulek hope that the Zoramites will learn about “the word.”
 - ? What does Amulek mean when he speaks of their coming to a knowledge of “the word's” “goodness”?
 - ? What is the difference intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually between knowing that “the word” is “true,” and knowing that it is “good”?
 - ? What is the difference intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually between knowing that Jesus “lives,” and knowing that he is “good”?
 - ? How have you discovered both the “truth” of Jesus and the “goodness” of Jesus.

Alma 34.⁵⁻⁷

⁵“And we have beheld that the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ.

⁶And ye also beheld that my brother has proved unto you, in many instances, that the word is in Christ unto salvation. ⁷My brother has called upon the words of Zenos, that redemption cometh through the Son of God, and also upon the words of Zenock; and also he has appealed unto Moses, to prove that these things are true.

Questionary

In today’s reading, the second of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma’s discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. Amulek recognizes that his audience’s “great question” is “whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ.”
 - ? What would it mean that “the word” is “in the Son of God”?
 - ? What evidences do you find in the Zoramite culture that confirm their uncertainty and skepticism concerning Christ?
 - ? As you read through Alma 34, what evidences does Amulek offer of the reality of Jesus Christ and of his active interest in the lives of every individual?
2. Amulek reminds his audience of the witness born by Zenos, Zenock, and Moses that “the word is in the Son of God. Take a moment to review Alma 33
 - ? What do these three prophets say by way of testimony of Jesus Christ?

Reconsider Moses’ testimony.

“A type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” (Alma 33.¹⁹⁻²⁰).

- ? We ask the common question first: “Why did the Israelites not look to the serpent that Moses raised for the purpose of healing Israelites bitten by the poisonous snakes?”
- ? Now, for a less often asked question: “If they didn’t look to the serpent, where were their eyes likely focused?”
- ? How logical would it be to keep one’s eyes on the snakes in hopes of avoiding being bitten in the first place?
- ? What is the fallacy of obsessing on potential sin while ignoring Christ’s ability to heal one upon being bitten?
- ? How do we fall into that trap?

Alma 34.⁸⁻⁹— atonement

⁸And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it. ⁹For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

Questionary

In today's reading, the third of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³). This reading is also one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, "Fall: Our Need of Atonement." *

1. Consider this statement:

"There must be an atonement made, or else mankind perish."

? How do you feel about this assertion?

Consider this statement:

"There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind perish.

? How is the second statement different than the first?

? Is the second statement more or less true than the first?

Now, consider a third statement.

"There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must perish."

? How does it differ from the first two?

Now, consider Amulek's statement as he wrote it.

"There must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish."

? How is Amulek's statement different from the others?

? Would you agree that they all say essentially the same thing?

? Why, do you think, Amulek added the words "all," "must," "unavoidably," when the principle might have been taught without them, as in our first statement above?

Amulek doesn't say that without the atonement "mankind perish," even though "Mankind" might sound to us like everyone. To say that "mankind perish" seems pretty universal. But, somehow, for Amulek, "mankind perish" wasn't deemed strong enough for the profound truth that he wished to convey. So he wrote "*all* mankind perish." Now, surely, we have arrived at the ultimate statement.

But, no, Amulek wasn't satisfied yet. He felt stronger than this about the truth of mankind's final state without Atonement. "All mankind *must* perish." Here we have a double superlative. First, *everyone* perishes. Amulek leaves no one out. Second, they "*must*" perish. There is no other option. Again, sounds pretty absolute.

Yet, Amulek feels the need to up the ante one more time: "All mankind must *unavoidably* perish." I would have thought that "must" implies "unavoidable." But Amulek needs to be sure that we do not misunderstand our need.

? Why do you think Amulek was so intense in his language here?

? In your living, do you feel the same intensity concerning your personal need for the Savior and his Atonement?

- ? How do you feel about Amulek’s assertion?
- ? Do you agree with him?
- ? Would no one truly be able to return to Heavenly Father without the Atonement? There have been some pretty impressive people who have come to earth. Is everyone truly “hardened,” “fallen,” and “lost” without the Savior and his Atonement?
- ? How do you feel, knowing that this is everyone’s state and final destiny—however impressive they may be—without Atonement?
- ? Why do you think Amulek is so emphatic and intense in his language—He does not say “mankind perish;” not just ALL mankind perish,” or even “ALL mankind MUST perish,” but “ALL mankind MUST UNAVOIDABLY perish?
- ? What do you learn and feel about yourself from the intensity of Amulek’s language?
- ? What impetus does today’s reading provide for repentance?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”
 - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
 - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
 - “Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
 - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
 - “Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 34.¹⁰⁻¹²— Atonement

¹⁰For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. ¹¹Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay. ¹²But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us.” *

In today’s reading, the fourth of 12 taken from Alma 34 as well as an atonement reading, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma’s discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. In today’s reading, Amulek speaks of a sacrifice that is “infinite and eternal.” We might think of this in temporal terms, indicative of its length and scope. Certainly Jesus’ sacrifice is infinite and eternal in its duration and scope. But Amulek seems to have something else in mind.

? What, do you think, is this something else?

Amulek contrasts an “infinite and eternal sacrifice” with “a sacrifice of man.”

? What does this suggest to you?

Amulek teaches that an “Infinite and eternal” sacrifice is indicative of a sacrifice that is the sacrifice of a God. Sacrifices made by men and/or of men cannot save. It must be a sacrifice of a God. Amulek returns to these two words—infinite and eternal—in verse 14.

“And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

? Do you think that these two adjectives, “infinite and eternal,” modify “sacrifice,” “the Son of God,” or both?

2. In speaking of the Savior, we often, and appropriately, think of him as “the Son of God.” But the Book of Mormon, and specifically Amulek here, thinks of him simply as “God” Himself, infinite and eternal (See, for example, Mosiah 13.³⁴).

? Does it shape or alter in any way your understanding and appreciation of the Atonement to know that it came through a sacrifice of a God?

? What do you think when you contemplate the death of God, Himself?

* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:

“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

“Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”

“At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”

“Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”

“Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”

“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”

“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 34.¹⁵⁻¹⁸—Lent

¹⁵And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. ¹⁶And 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; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption. ¹⁷Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you... ¹⁸yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save.

Questionary

Today's reading is our 23rd reading for Lent 2024. In addition, it is the 6th or 12 readings focused on Alma 34. In this chapter, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. In verses 15 and 16, Amulek speaks of mercy or the "bowels of mercy," which accomplish four things.
 - ? What is meant by "bowels of mercy"?
 - ? Does any imagery come to mind when you contemplate "bowels of mercy"? If so, what?
 - ? What are the four things mentioned in these two verses that the "bowels of mercy" accomplish?
 - ? What do each of the following mean to you?
 - a. "The bowels of mercy... overpower justice"
 - b. "The bowels of mercy... bring about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance."
 - c. "The bowels of mercy... satisfy the demands of justice."
 - d. "The bowels of mercy... encircles... in the arms of safety."
2. We often quote Alma 42.²⁵ to emphasize that mercy cannot "rob" justice. In today's reading, Amulek speaks of mercy "overpowering" justice.
 - ? What is the difference between robbing and overpowering?
 - ? What do you think of when you think of something or someone who is overpowering?
3. Amulek teaches that the "bowels of mercy... bringeth about the means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance." Note that it is not faith unto *forgiveness*.
 - ? What is the difference between having faith "unto repentance" and having faith unto *forgiveness*?
 - ? We all understand that we cannot be forgiven without faith. But how do you feel about the fact that you can't even repent without faith—that even if you wanted to repent, you would be incapable of calling up faith sufficient to do so were it not for Jesus' atonement and its revelation of mercy and divine attachment and connectedness with you?
 - ? What does this tell you about the importance of understanding the merciful nature of God?
 - ? What would it mean to you if we read his admonition, "exercise... *trust* unto repentance?"
 - ? What role does trusting God play in the repentance process?
 - ? Do you believe that God really can be trusted with your sins? Why do you answer as you do?
4. Amulek teaches that the "bowels of mercy... satisfies the demands of justice."
 - ? What are the demands of justice?
 - ? How does mercy "satisfy" them?
5. Amulek teaches that the "bowels of mercy... encircles... in the arms of safety."
 - ? What imagery does this bring to your mind?
 - ? Safe from what?
 - ? Do you feel "arms of safety" encircling you spiritually? Why do you answer as you do?

Opposite to those who are encircled in “the arms of safety” are those who are “exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice.”

- ? What do you think and feel when you think of the general idea of being *exposed*?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you think of being exposed to “the *whole* law” and the “demands of justice”?
 - ? Do you feel safe from this exposer? Why or why not?
6. In repenting, Amulek twice admonishes his audience to make appeal to God’s mercy.
- ? What is the relationship between our willingness and attempt to repent and our belief that God is merciful?
 - ? Why is a trust in God being merciful necessary to our willingness and attempt to repent?
7. Amulek testifies that Jesus is “mighty to save.”
- ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that God is strong enough to save?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that God ability and willingness to save is “mighty,” huge, expansive?
 - ? Does one of these possible readings about the meaning of God’s might in saving speak more to you than the other? Why?

Alma 34.¹⁹⁻²⁷

¹⁹Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him.

²⁰Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, yea, over all your flocks.

²¹Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening.

²²Yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies.

²³Yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.

²⁴Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them.

²⁵Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.

²⁶But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. ²⁷Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Questionary

In today's reading, the seventh of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. In today's reading, we read of "praying," "crying out," "pouring out of the soul," and "hearts... drawn out in prayer."
? How is each of these reflected in your life?
2. All prayers are not created equal. Some are more intense than others.
? In what circumstances have you had more intense prayers that could be characterized as those in which you "poured out your soul"?
3. One can have a prayer "in the heart." But, "crying unto God" is clearly outward, verbal, and formal prayer which is to be offered "morning, mid-day, and evening."
? What do you do to be true to such admonitions?

Alma 34.²⁸⁻²⁹— just scripture

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. Therefore, if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth) and is trodden under foot of men.

Questionary

In today's reading, the eighth of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³). It is also a Just Scripture reading.

1. Amulek contends that even if we pray diligently and faithfully, our prayer is “vain” and “availeth” us “nothing” if we refuse to help the more vulnerable members of our society.
 - ? What is so important about caring for the vulnerable that, if left undone in one's life, even the most fervent prayer becomes a vanity that avails nothing?
 - ? How do you feel about this close relationship between prayer and assisting the vulnerable?
 - ? In light of this close relationship, how effective are your prayers likely to be?
2. Amulek goes further, contending that those who pray without assisting the vulnerable are “as hypocrites who do deny the faith” and that they are “as dross... of no worth” but to be “trodden under foot.”
 - ? How do you feel about this? Does it seem “reasonable” or “excessively harsh and exacting?”

Alma 34.³⁰⁻³²

³⁰And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance. ³¹Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you. ³²For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

Questionary

In today's reading, the ninth of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. Amulek speaks of a "fruit unto repentance."
 - ? When you read this, what comes to your mind?
 - ? In this analogy, repentance can be thought of as a "tree." "Fruit" can be thought of as the results of the tree or repentance. What sort of "fruit" does true repentance bear?
2. Amulek promises his audience that "now is the time and the day of your salvation." He further promises that "immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you." Consider the following passage, which represents an Advent 2020 reading, and how it relates to Amulek's promises that "redemption" and "salvation" can be experienced "immediately" today.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;
because the LORD hath anointed me
to preach good tidings unto the meek;
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all that mourn;
to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,
to give unto them beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
that they might be called trees of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD,
that he might be glorified" (Isaiah 61.¹⁻³).

- ? When you read of "the acceptable year of Yahweh," what do you understand it to mean?
- ? How would the following translation of this phrase change or amplify your understanding of "the acceptable year of Yahweh": "the time for Yahweh's acceptance"?

Alma 34.³³⁻³⁶

³³And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. ³⁴Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. ³⁵For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked. ³⁶And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell; yea, and he has also said that the righteous shall sit down in his kingdom, to go no more out; but their garments should be made white through the blood of the Lamb.

Questionary

In today's reading, the tenth of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.^{8-33.23}).

1. Amulek says that "Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God.

? Why can we not repent after our death?

? Is the cause for this impossibility dictated by some cosmic forces or is it dictated by internal forces?

Amulek offers the following for the impossibility of repentance after death: "for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world."

? How does this answer the previous question?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that if one is unwilling to repent in life, they will continue to be unwilling in death?

? What does this suggest to you about the development of character over a lifetime?

2. Amulek speaks of "the wicked" becoming "subjected to the spirit of the devil" so that he "hath all power over you."

? What does this mean to you?

? When you consider that in death one is either "subjected to the *spirit* of the devil" or the "*spirit* of the Lord" what do you think about the influence of these two spirits in the life of mortal beings?

Alma 34.³⁷⁻³⁸

³⁷And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye should remember these things, and that ye should work out your salvation with fear before God, and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ; ³⁸that ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and that ye live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you.

Questionary

In today's reading, the eleventh of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. Amulek issues several admonitions in today's reading.
 - ? Make a list of those admonitions.
 - ? Is there one that seems particularly significant to you and upon which you could improve?
2. Amulek admonishes, "work out your salvation with fear before God."
 - ? What does it mean to have "fear before God"?
3. Amulek also admonishes that "ye humble yourselves even to the dust."
 - ? How does his "even to the dust" impact your understanding of what it means to be "humble"?
 - ? What is the relationship between humility and humiliation?
 - ? What does it mean to be humble and what does it mean to be humiliated?
4. Amulek admonishes, "worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth."
 - ? What does it mean to you to "worship God... *in spirit and in truth*"?

Alma 34.³⁹⁻⁴⁰

³⁹Yea, and I also exhort you, my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing. ⁴⁰And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them; ⁴¹but that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions.

Questionary

In today's reading, the twelfth of 12 taken from Alma 34, Amulek addresses the poorer, humbler Zoramites after Alma's discourse delivered to the same audience (32.⁸-33.²³).

1. Amulek ends his discourse with a series of admonitions.
 - ? What admonitions do you find in today's reading?
 - ? Which of these admonitions feel most pertinent in your life today?
 - ? How will you apply the most meaningful admonition?
2. One of Amulek's exhortations is to "be watchful unto prayer continually"?
 - ? What does this mean to you?
 - ? What is "watchful" prayer?
 - ? What is the difference between being "watchful... continually," "being watchful unto prayer continually," and praying "continually"?
3. Amulek uses the following progression: "led away by the temptations of the devil," be "overpowered" by the devil," and "becoming his subjects."
 - ? What comes to mind when you consider this progression?
 - ? What does it mean to become a "subject" of the devil?
4. Amulek exhorts the poor that they "not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty."
 - ? What does it mean to "revile"?
 - ? How does the following further your understanding of the word and help you understand what the poor are not to do toward those who oppress them?

To revile means "to reproach angrily and abusively," and "implies a scurrilous, abusive attack prompted by anger or hatred."

5. Amulek further exhorts the poor that they "have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions."
 - ? Do these two exhortations to avoid reviling and to have patience preclude the poor's right to agitate for better conditions?
 - ? Why do you answer as you do?
 - ? Would you answer the same if we asked whether Jesus's admonition to turn the other cheek precluded one from defending themselves?
 - ? What role can and should those who may not be poor play in the defense of the oppressed poor?
- ? What role do you play? Do you defend? Could it be said that you are an oppressor? Why do you answer as you do?

Alma 36

Questionary 1— alma 36.^{1, 30}

¹My son, give ear to my words; for I swear unto you, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.

³⁰But behold, my son, this is not all; for ye ought to know as I do know, that inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land; and ye ought to know also, that inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence. Now this is according to his word.

Alma 36-42 represent Alma the Younger's final instruction to his three sons, Helaman (36-37), Shiblon (38), and Corianton (39-42). These are some of the most beloved chapters in the Book of Mormon. There is, perhaps, no chapter in all of scripture that has been more influential in my life than Alma 36. This reading is the first of several that explore these inspired and inspiring words of a loving father.

As others have pointed out, Alma 36 represents an extended chiasm. The chiasm can be constructed as follows.

- a (vs. 1) Keep the commandments and prosper
- b (vs. 2) Alma reviews fathers' delivered from captivity
- c (vs. 3) God supports those who trust him
- d (vs. 4-5) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- e (vs. 6-9) Alma's labors before the angel's visit
- f (vs. 10-13) Alma loses use of limbs and faculties as though dead
- g (vs. 14-15) Presence of God produces inexpressible horror
- h (vs. 16) Alma experiences pains of a damned soul
- i (vs. 17-19) **"O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me"**
- h' (vs. 20-21) Alma's pains of a damned soul forgotten,
- g' (vs. 22) Presence of God produces a longing to be there
- f' (vs. 23) Alma regains use of limbs and faculties through rebirth
- e' (vs. 24-25) Alma's labors after the angel's visit
- d' (vs. 26) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- c' (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b' (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers' deliverance from captivity
- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 1st of 8 readings exploring this chiasm. Because the chiasm ends as it begins, we examine verse 1 and 30 together.

1. Alma begins and ends his instruction to Helaman by essentially quoting the well-known and often misunderstood promise the Lord made to Nephi—a promise I often refer to as "the prosperity promise."

"Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith,
for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.
And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper,
and shall be led to a land of promise;
yea, even a land which I have prepared for you;
yea, a land which is choice above all other lands" (1 Ne. 2.¹⁹⁻²⁰).

- ? What is the nature of the promised "prosperity"?

? How would you characterize the “prosperity” that Alma mentions in verse 2 of this reading?

“I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions.

? How would you characterize the “prosperity” that the Lord mentions immediately after his promise to Nephi?

“And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren. For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also” (1 Ne. 2.²²⁻²³).

? What is their commonality?

? What is the nature of the “prosperity”?

? What do you think and feel when we suggest that “prosperity” in the Book of Mormon is almost always associated with “national security”—freedom from the tyranny and aggression of one’s national enemies and victory against them in times of war—rather than either individual or national “economic prosperity”? (For an in-depth look at this association, see my “Prosperity and the Just Society, Part 1: The ‘Prosperity Promise’ as Found in Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 2.¹⁹⁻²⁴ and Part 2: The Nature of Prosperity in the Hebrew Bible).

Questionary 2— alma 36.^{2-3, 27-29}

²I would that ye should do as I have done, in remembering the captivity of our fathers; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and he surely did deliver them in their afflictions. ³And now, O my son Helaman, behold, thou art in thy youth, and therefore, I beseech of thee that thou wilt hear my words and learn of me; for I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

²⁷And I have been supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions; yea, God has delivered me from prison, and from bonds, and from death; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me. ²⁸And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. ²⁹Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day; and I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.

Alma 36-42 represent Alma the Younger's final instruction to his three sons, Helaman (36-37), Shiblon (38), and Corianton (39-42). These are some of the most beloved chapters in the Book of Mormon. There is, perhaps, no chapter in all of scripture that has been more influential in my life than Alma 36. This reading is the second of several that explore these inspired and inspiring words of a loving father.

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- d (vs. 4-5) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
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- f' (vs. 23) Alma regains use of limbs and faculties through rebirth
- e' (vs. 24-25) Alma's labors after the angel's visit
- d' (vs. 26) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- c' (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b' (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers' deliverance from captivity
- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 2nd of 8 readings exploring this chiasm. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 2-3 and 27-29, which are parallel to each other.

1. Alma testifies that "none could deliver [our fathers] except it was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
 - ? What examples of divine deliverance come to your mind when you read this testimony?
 - ? What sort of deliverance do you need in your life?

- ? How much does Alma’s testimony resonate with you as you consider your need for spiritual deliverance from sin and death?
- ? How does the Psalmist following testimony relate to and expand upon Alma’s testimony?

“If YHWH does not wish to build a house,
it is to no avail for its builders to labor on it.

If YHWH does not intend to protect a city,
it is to no avail for guards to keep watch.

It is to no avail whether you arise early
or stay up late.

eating food produced through much labor.

Still, its God who grants repose to those He loves” (Ps. 127.¹⁻², author’s translation).

2. Alma assures his son that “whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.”

- ? How do you feel about the promise of “support in” rather than “deliverance from”?

- ? How do you feel about the implication that “deliverance from” trials, troubles, and afflictions only comes when we are “lifted up at the last day”?

The entire Book of Mormon began with this observation:

“I, Nephi... having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days...” (1 Ne. 1.¹).

- ? How often do you and others feel that you are not “favored of the Lord” because of afflictions?

- ? How do Alma’s and Nephi’s testimonies help you and others combat such erroneous feelings?

Speaking of Jesus, scripture says, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2.¹⁰). Also, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5.⁸).

- ? Of what use have your trials, troubles, and afflictions been in your life? What have you learned and how have you grown?

3. Alma testifies that “I have always retained in remembrance their captivity; yea, and ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity.”

- ? Why is it important to remember, not only God’s rescue from oppression and captivity, but also the very oppressions and captivities that individuals and groups have suffered and do suffer?

- ? How does such remembrance impact you in your attitudes and actions toward oppressed and captive individuals and groups?

Questionary 3— alma 36.^{4-5, 26}

⁴And I would not that ye think that I know of myself—not of the temporal but of the spiritual, not of the carnal mind but of God. ⁵Now, behold, I say unto you, if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things; but God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me, not of any worthiness of myself...

²⁶For because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God.

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- e (vs. 6-9) Alma's labors before the angel's visit
- f (vs. 10-13) Alma loses use of limbs and faculties as though dead
- g (vs. 14-15) Presence of God produces inexpressible horror
- h (vs. 16) Alma experiences pains of a damned soul
- i (vs. 17-19) **"O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me"**
- h' (vs. 20-21) Alma's pains of a damned soul forgotten,
- g' (vs. 22) Presence of God produces a longing to be there
- f' (vs. 23) Alma regains use of limbs and faculties through rebirth
- e' (vs. 24-25) Alma's labors after the angel's visit
- d' (vs. 26) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- c' (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b' (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers' deliverance from captivity
- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 3rd of 8 readings exploring this chiasm. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 4-5 and 26 which are parallel to each other.

1. Alma describes how he came to understand God and His truths.
 - ? How, according to these verses, did Alma come to understand God and His truths?
2. Alma tells his son that the spiritual knowledge and insight that he has into God and His truths is "not of the carnal mind but of God."
 - ? What does Alma mean by "the carnal mind"?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you consider that the "carnal mind" is not, here, an evil mind, but simply the human mind working on the basis of what can be observed through the senses?
 - ? Yet, the human mind must be engaged in the process of truth discovery. What is the human mind's role in perceiving, understanding, and appreciating truth and how does God work upon it in this process?
3. Alma expands on God's assistance in helping human understand Him and His truths by testifying, "if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things."

? What does it mean to be “born of God”?

We often speak of being “born of God” as if it is nearly some type of advanced and full development. But “birth” comes before any development, as can be seen in the real-life experience of temporal birth.

? What does natural and temporal birth as a metaphor for spiritual birth teach you about being “born of God”?

? As you continue to read Alma’s experience of being born of God, ask yourself, “What is the nature of his birth?” “What spiritual “development” was part of that “birth”?

4. Alma also speaks of his experience of being born of God as “seeing eye to eye.”

? What does this phrase, “see eye to eye” mean to you?

? What does it mean in terms of Alma’s spiritual birth?

5. Alma suggests that others can and have experienced what he experienced.

? Have you? If not, why not? If yes, how did it transpire?

? Alma felt obligated to share his experience with others in hopes that they too would experience being born of God. How have you shared your experience with the same intent of helping others?

Questionary 4— alma 36.^{6-9, 24-25}

⁶for I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way. ⁷And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us. ⁸But behold, the voice said unto me: “Arise.”

And I arose and stood up, and beheld the angel. ⁹And he said unto me: “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God.”

²⁴Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. ²⁵Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors...

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- d’ (vs. 26) Alma’s knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- c’ (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b’ (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers’ deliverance from captivity
- a’ (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 4th of 8 readings exploring this chiasm.

1. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 6-9 and 24-25 which are parallel to each other.
 - ? How are verses 6-9 and 24-25 related and parallel?
 - ? Both passages describe Alma’s relationship with and labor in regard to the church of his day. What is the nature of this labor in relation to the church before and after his experience with the angel?
 - ? Alma’s labors in and for the church brought him “great joy.” What did his labors against the church bring him?
 - ? How would you characterize your own labors in and for the Church?
 - ? What is the focus of your labors in and for the Church?
 - ? that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost?

Questionary 5— alma 36.^{10-13, 23}

¹⁰And* I fell to the earth; and it was for the space of three days and three nights that I could not open my mouth, neither had I the use of my limbs. ¹¹And the angel spake more things unto me, which were heard by my brethren, but I did not hear them; for when I heard the words—“If thou wilt be destroyed of thyself, seek no more to destroy the church of God”—I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more. ¹²But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. ¹³Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

²³But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

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- c’ (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b’ (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers’ deliverance from captivity
- a’ (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 5th of 8 readings exploring this chiasm.

1. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 10-13 and 23 which are parallel to each other.
 - ? How are verses 10-13 and 23 related and parallel?
 - ? What language does Alma use in verses 10-13 to describe his emotional state after encountering the angel?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read language like:
 - “I was *racked* with eternal torment”
 - “I was... *racked* with all my sins”
 - “I was... *harrowed up* to the greatest degree... with all my sins”
 - “I did remember all my sins and iniquities”
 - “I was *tormented* with the pains of hell”

- ? What do the verbs, “racked,” “harrowed up,” and “tormented” mean to you?
- ? What do you see in your mind when you consider each?

These feelings of being “racked,” “harrowed up,” “tormented,” and having a painful remembrance of sin are all parallel to and in opposition to Alma’s “I had been born of God.”

- ? What does this tell you about the meaning and significance of being “born of God”?

Questionary 6— alma 36.^{14-15, 22}

¹⁴Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. ¹⁵Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

²²Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

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- d' (vs. 26) Alma's knowledge comes from personal experience and revelation
- c' (vs. 27) God supports those who trust him
- b' (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers' deliverance from captivity
- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 6th of 8 readings exploring this chiasm.

1. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 14-15 and 22 which are parallel to each other.
 - ? What do they have in common or, better, how are they dichotomous?
2. In the previous reading, we saw some pretty intense language as Alma described his experience and feelings (racked, harrowed, tormented).
 - ? What additional intense vocabulary do you find in vss. 14-15?
 - ? What comes to your mind when you read of "inexpressible horror"?
3. As we get closer to the center of the chiasm, the dichotomy between verses leading to the center and verses leading away from the center become more stark.
 - ? What are the dichotomies that you find between vss. 14-15 and 22?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate that Alma went from being terrified of God to longing to be with him?
 - ? Which of Alma's feelings about God comes closest to matching your own? Why do you answer

as you do?

- ? What do you find in the verses between these parallel members of the chiasm (vss 16-23) that explains the drastic change, especially the change of feelings about being in God's presence?
4. Alma sees God "surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God." God is often seen and depicted in such a setting.

"And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever" (DC 76.²¹).

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.' And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever'" (Rev. 5.¹¹⁻¹³).

- ? What is the significance of God so often being depicted as sitting in the midst of multitudes that praise Him?
- ? What do you feel when you read that there are so many in universe who praise and honor God?

Questionary 7— alma 36.^{16, 20-21}

¹⁶And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

²⁰And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! ²¹Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

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- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our 7th of 8 readings exploring this chiasm.

1. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 16 and 20-21 which are parallel to each other.
 - ? What do they have in common or, better, how are they dichotomous?
2. In speaking of his suffering before his "conversion," Alma has used very intense, graphic, and evocative language. He has spoken of being "racked," "harrowed," and "tormented." He has spoken of "inexpressible horror." He has expressed the desire to be "banished and become extinct."
 - ? What new language and vocabulary does Alma use in verse 16 to communicate the intensity of his physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering?
 - ? What do you think, feel, and imagine when you contemplate damnation and the "damned soul"?
 - ? He speaks of damnation as "exquisite" and "bitter." What do these words suggest about the nature of damnation?
3. As opposed to his intense pain and suffering before conversion, Alma speaks thrice of the joy he experienced after his conversion as being "exquisite and sweet" above any other.
 - ? What do you think and feel when you contemplate such joy?
 - ? To what degree have you experienced such joy?
 - ? To what do you credit your having experienced such joy or not having experienced such joy?

Questionary 8— alma 36.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

¹⁷And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins,

behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. ¹⁸Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought,

I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

¹⁹And now, behold, when I thought this,

I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

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- b' (vs. 28-29) Alma reviews fathers' deliverance from captivity
- a' (vs. 30) Keep the commandments and prosper

This is our last of 8 readings exploring this chiasm. Because of the nature of chiasm, we examine verses 17-19, which represent the center of the chiasm and the principal message of it.

1. In verses leading up to verse 17, Alma has used very intense, graphic, and evocative language to describe his suffering. He has spoken of being "racked," "harrowed," and "tormented." He has spoken of "inexpressible horror" and of being damned. He has expressed the desire to be "banished and become extinct" rather than face God. This reading begins by continuing this theme: "I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins."
 - ? What was it that pained Alma so?
 - ? What is the significance of Alma suffering because of his memory of his many sins rather than simply because of his sins?

2. In vs. 19, Alma opposes verse 17a, b with “I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.”

? What takes place between these statements that explain the drastic change?

We hear on occasion that after repenting one does not remember their sins. But, clearly, Alma remembers his sins as he writes this account sometime later. One might even say that they no longer remember the *pain* of sin. But, again, since Alma can later recount the pain and describe it as “exquisite,” he clearly “remembers” the pain.

? What does Alma mean, then, when he says “I could remember my pains no more.”

? Alma follows this statement up with, “I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.” How does this shed light on what Alma might have meant by “remembered”?

? What do you think and feel when you consider that past sins can be “remembered,” or “recalled to mind,” but that those past sins no longer are accompanied by feelings of horror or fear of God?

? Have you experienced this “loss of memory”? Why do you answer as you do?

3. While Alma continued to be consumed with thoughts and memories of his sins, he also had another thought.

? What was the nature of that thought?

? What was Alma’s decision upon thinking of his father’s message about “Jesus Christ, a Son of God”?

4. At the very center of the chiasm is Alma’s prayer: “O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.”

? What is the significance of this being at the center of the chiasm?

? As you think back at all our previous readings in this chapter and all the dichotomies that existed before and after this prayer, how does this pray explain the transformation?

? How is the act of calling out to God for mercy, the central pillar upon which repentance and forgiveness rest?

? Would it be reasonable to say that Alma “repented” in this chapter? Why do you answer as you do?

We often load “repentance” with all sorts of things; things such as forsaking sin, for example, as a prerequisite for forgiveness. Yet, in this chapter, Alma experiences complete forgiveness and the peace that comes therefrom even though no time passes in which he could demonstrate the forsaking of sins.

? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you consider this observation?

? How do you respond to the observation that the forsaking of sin is a *consequence* of forgiveness and a life-long pursuit, not a prerequisite of forgiveness or being born again, as Alma was here?

- ? After examining the readings that explore Alma 36, what are some of the take-away messages that you have received?

- ? After examining the readings that explore Alma 36, what do you learn about being born of God, or born again?

Alma 36.¹²⁻¹⁷— atonement

¹²But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. ¹³Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. ¹⁴Yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. ¹⁵Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

¹⁶And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

¹⁷* As I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Questionary

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” * Today’s reading is one of two readings examining Alma’s experience of repentance and rebirth.

1. In this reading, Alma has, essentially, the same experience as Enos. In examining Enos’ repentance, leading to change and rebirth (Enos 1.²⁻⁹), we identified the following pattern or “morphology of rebirth.”
 - Individual and spiritual crisis.
 - Confessing of sin and prayer for relief from the crisis
 - A response on the part the Lord to the prayer offered in crisis.
 - A statement of the reason for the Lord’s response to the individual’s prayer in crisis

? Identify these elements of the pattern in today’s reading—some may appear in part 2 (verses 18-23).
 2. Alma uses very intense language in describing the crisis stage of his rebirth (verses 14-17).
 - ? What language stands out to you?
 - ? What images and circumstances come to your mind as you consider the following words that Alma uses to describe his crisis?
 - Horror
 - Damned
 - Racked
 - Tormented
 - Harrowed
 3. Alma tells us that “the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.”
 - ? How, do you suppose, does God feel about being the cause or object of “horror” in any human being?
 - ? If your sins have ever caused you to feel a similar “horror,” how did you overcome such feelings?
- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
 - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
 - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
 - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
 - “Glorification: The Savior’s Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement”

“Justification: How We Repent and Change”
“Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
“Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement”
“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
“Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 36.¹⁸⁻²³ — atonement

¹⁸Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart:

“O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me,
who am in the gall of bitterness,
and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.”

¹⁹And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. ²⁰And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! ²¹Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. ²²Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there. ²³But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God.

Questionary

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? Identify these elements of the pattern in today’s reading. Some will be found in part 1 (vs. 14-17).
2. Many have pointed out that Alma 36 is, in its entirety a chiasm. Without going into detail on the nature of chiasm, we will only say that often a chiasm is used to focus the reader’s attention on the center element. In Alma 36, the following is the center of the chiasm.

“O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me.”

Before this prayer, Alma’s experience is all “crisis.” After this prayer, it was all redemption.

? What is it about this prayer that was so effective in obtaining a positive and redemptive response from God?

? Have you offered such a prayer? How did God respond?

? If you yet need to offer such a sincere prayer, what is stopping you?
3. In verses 19-23, Alma describes the feelings and experiences that came into his life due to God’s response to his prayer of crisis.

? What language does Alma use to express his feelings and experiences of redemption?

? What does the following language bring to your mind?

Joy
Marvelous
Light
Exquisite
Sweet

4. Take a moment to compare and contrast the list words from part 1, words that described Alma's crisis, and the list of words from today's reading—words that describe his experience of being redeemed.

Horror		Joy
Damned		Marvelous
Racked	Light	
Tormented		Exquisite
Harrowed		Sweet

- ? What comes to mind when you compare and contrast this two lists?
- ? How do you feel about the fact that it was Alma's prayer that created such a drastic change?
- ? Do you need a change such as this in your life?
- ? If so, what is keeping you from experiencing such a change?

- ? What, if any, application does today's passage have in your life?
- ? How "lively" are the "memories of your own sins"?
- ? What could you do to duplicate Alma's experiences of "deadening" the memories of your sins?

- * The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
 - "Fall: Our Need of Atonement"
 - "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"
 - "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"
 - "Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"
 - "Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"
 - "Justification: How We Repent and Change"
 - "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"
 - "Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement"
 - "Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"
 - "Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Alma 37.⁹

Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

Questionary

Today's is the 7th reading for Lent 2024. With this reading, we revisit the topic of repentance, one of the principal themes and purposes of Lent.

1. Alma asserts that it was scripture and their words that brought the audiences of the sons of Mosiah to repentance.
 - ? As you call to mind the missions of these sons of Mosiah, how did they use scripture to bring Lamanites "unto repentance."
 - ? How does scripture shed light on "incorrect traditions" found in one's culture?
 - ? What example/s can you point to in your own life when scripture has revealed an "incorrect tradition" that you had inherited?
 - ? How has scripture inspired you to want to repent and improve?
2. After affirming a second time that scripture had "brought [the Lamanities] unto repentance," he followed it up with "that is,"
 - ? When someone makes a statement and follows it up with "that is," what does that "that is" signify?
 - ? What does, "that is," do in the following examples?
 - I went to the store, that is, I went shopping.
 - He yelled at the cashier, that is he treated the cashier rudely.

Used in this way, "that is" is meant to emphasis or clarify a previous statement.

- ? If you were going to add a "that is" statement to help clarify or enhance what you mean by repentance, what would it be?

A common "that is" statement to further explain repentance might be, "We must repent, that is, we must forsake our sins." This is not unreasonable or wrong. However, this was not Alma's "that is" statement to further explain what repentance meant to him.
- ? What is Alma's "that is" statement?
- ? What do you think and feel about repentance after reading Alma's "that is" statement

"They brought them unto repentance...
that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer."
- ? How are repentance, coming to a "knowledge of the Lord," and "rejoicing in Jesus Christ the Redeemer" so intimately connected that they become essentially synonyms of each other in Alma's mind?
- ? Given that coming to a "knowledge of the Lord" and "rejoic[ing] in Jesus Christ" are such an essential aspect of repentance, how would you judge the experience and depth of your repentance?
- ? What can you do, especially during Lent, to deepen your "knowledge of the Lord" and your "rejoic[ing] in the Lord;" *that is*, your repentance?

Alma 37.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵

For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land. And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.

Questionary

- ? How do you feel about Alma's depiction of mortality as a "vale of sorrow"?
- ? How would you characterize one who felt this way about mortal existence?

Alma 39.⁸⁻⁹

⁸But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day. ⁹Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

Questionary

Today's reading is the 1st for lent 2024

1. One of Lent's objectives is to encourage the mortification of the flesh and a deeper self-denial.
? How does today's reading relate to and encourage the spirit of self-denial?
2. Alma warns his son, Corianton, concerning the dangers of going "after the lusts of your eyes." In the case of Corianton, the lust for women seems at the forefront of Alma's mind. However, there is no end to the number of people and things toward which we can direct our "lusts."
? What sorts of things do you find yourself drawn to that might cross over into "lust"?

It can seem that "lust" is a driving force in our materialistic culture. Advertisers seem to work to drive and exploit our "lusts."

- ? What do you do to control such lust that our society seems to approve of and even encourage?
- ? How does the following warning of the New Testament writer, James, relate to today's reading with its warning concerning lust?

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jam. 1.¹⁴).

3. Alma encourages his son to "cross yourself" in relation to his lusts.
? What, do you think, is Alma envisioning when he speaks of crossing oneself?

Consider the following dictionary definitions of "cross" as a verb.

To run counter to: OPPOSE

To deny the validity of: CONTRADICT

To confront in a troublesome manner: OBSTRUCT, DISRUPT

To turn against: BETRAY

- ? How do these definitions of the verb impact your thinking on what Alma meant by "cross yourself"?

It is a near certainty that Alma did not have the Christian making of the sign of the cross, or some such act of obeisance, in mind when he instructed his son to "cross yourself." Nevertheless, Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross can and should act as an example to us of self-sacrifice and the rejection of self-indulgent lusts.

- ? How does Jesus' willingness to suffer the cruelty of the cross impact your own desire to control your self-indulgent lusts?
- ? How often do you think of Jesus suffering on the cross? What is the impact of such thoughts?

Alma 42.⁶⁻¹²—Atonement

⁶But behold, it was appointed unto man to die—therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth—and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man. ⁷And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

⁸Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness. ⁹Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.

¹⁰Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

¹¹And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. ¹²And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience...

Q

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Today's reading is the twelfth and final reading in our series of atonement readings entitled, "Fall: Our Need of Atonement." As we close up this series of atonement readings with this 12th series, we note that nine of the twelve readings under this title have come from the Book of Mormon. This is not because the other standard works have nothing to say about the fall.

The Old Testament, for example, contains a treasure trove of truth about the fall and its impact on our daily lives, indeed, about the very nature of this world from the beginning. The Old Testament does this through the stories it tells rather than through theological statements. It also does it through the collected writings of the prophets with their criticisms of Israelite and Judean society. There are more stories and more prophetic criticisms about the nature of fallen man than can be counted. And they are powerful. These, however, are often long, and make for long and difficult readings. In addition, because they say nothing about "the fall," they are easily missed as statements of the fall and the nature of fallen man. So, as we have said there is much to learn about the fall from the Old Testament. If the reader wishes to see what it has to say about the fall, we suggest that they have a look at our "Just Scripture" series of readings. These really are about the fall, about fallen man, and about the nature of his/her life and the societies they create. With a picture being worth a thousand words, if one knows what they are looking at as they read the Old Testament, the stores contained in the oldest of scriptures are in many ways the most extraordinary witnesses of the fall and the nature of fallen man.

The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, has all these wonderful discourses in which inspired preachers and writers shared their theological thoughts on the fall and fallen man. They are simple and usually short. Sometimes even pithy. For this reason, we have largely limited our readings on the fall to the Book of Mormon. But, as we have said, we didn't want the reader to get the wrong idea and assume that when it comes to the fall and the nature of fallen man it says the most or it says it the best. It is simply the most assessable.

1. There is much to learn about the fall and the nature of fall people from this passage. Consider, for example the following words that describe the nature of fall man.

“Lost forever”

“Cut off”

“Spiritual death”

“Carnal, sensual, and devilish”

- ? What comes to mind when you read each of these phrases?

- ? Think, for example, of being “lost.” How does the child who is lost feel? How does the parent who has lost a child feel? What additional insights do you have from thinking on these questions?
 - ? What do you think and feel when you read that mortal beings are “carnal, sensual, and devilish, *by nature*?”
 - ? To what evidence would you point for the Book of Mormon’s assertion that everyone is “devilish *by nature*”?
2. Here, humankind’s carnality, sensuality and devilishness is not blamed on others—Adam and Eve, in particular—but on individuals themselves: “Which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience.” Compare this with what we suggested in a previous reading was Paul’s statement of the fall.

“There is none righteous,
no, not one:
There is none that understandeth,
there is none that seeketh after God.
They are all gone out of the way,
they are together become unprofitable;
there is none that doeth good,
no, not one...

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3.^{10-12, 23}).3.

- ? How closely do Paul’s and Alma’s sentiments and conclusions match up when it comes to the nature of fallen man?
3. Alma says that fallen man become “subjects to follow after their own will.”
- ? How well, would you say, have humans done in being “subject” to “their own will”?
 - ? How have they used their will?
4. Alma calls this life a “probationary state.”
- ? What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear or read the word “probation”?
 - ? You probably thought of someone who is on probation because of some misdeed or violation of the law. How is this form of probation appropriate to our mortal state?
 - ? You might have thought of someone who is inexperienced as something, say the demands of a new job, and so is given a short period of time to prove that they are up to the job. How is this form of probation appropriate to our mortal state?
 - ? Given Alma’s description of the nature of fallen man in this passage, which of the two do you think Alma had in mind?
5. Alma says of fallen man, “as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.”
- ? What do you think and feel when you think of being “miserable”?
 - ? What is the cause of misery in this instance?
 - ? If individuals are miserable being “cut off from the presence of the Lord,” how do you imagine God feels?
 - ? What are your thoughts about Gods who can suffer hurt and pain?
 - ? How does this impact your approach to a common LDS doctrine that has it that we can become Gods? Is maybe being a God not all that it is cracked up to be?
6. This reading concludes with Alma’s observation that “there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state...” Meaning, of course, that man had no means within him or herself to be reclaimed—while God did.
- ? How do you feel about such helplessness and the vanity of “self-reliance” in such a situation?
 - ? What does it cause you to feel about God and His Son... knowing that they have the means to save people who do not have the means within themselves?

? How does this statement relate to and amplify on the following passages, at which we have previously looked?

“And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them” (Moro. 7.²⁴).

“And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins...” (Al. 22.¹⁴).

? After examining all twelve readings under the heading “Fall: Our Need of Atonement,” what have you learned and felt, and what would you want another to know and feel about the fall?

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“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Alma 42.¹⁰

Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state.

Questionary

- ? Alma speaks, as he did earlier in the chapter (verse 4), of life as a kind of “probation.” The reason he gives is that we have become “carnal, sensual, and devilish, BY NATURE.” What is meant, do you think, by this “by nature”?
- ? How do you feel about his estimation of humanity?

Alma 42.¹⁵

And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

Questionary

- ? In this chapter, Alma speaks of a “plan of salvation,” a “plan of redemption” (twice) a “plan of happiness” (twice) and a “plan of mercy” (three times). What do you learn about God’s plan from these various names?

Alma 43.7-8

Now this he did that he might preserve their hatred towards the Nephites, that he might bring them into subjection to the accomplishment of his designs. For behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power over them, and also that he might gain power over the Nephites by bringing them into bondage.

Questionary

- ? What is the feeling you get when you consider the Mormon's observation that Zerahemnah used divisive rhetoric and actions against one group in order to unify his supporters against another, "usurp power," and create an environment of bondage?
- ? Sound like anyone you know.... Say America's Caligula?
- ? What is the moral way to create unity?

Alma 45.⁷⁻¹⁰— just scripture

And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous. . . . Thus we see how quick the children of men do forget the Lord their God, yea, how quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one. Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men. Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek . . . to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.

Questionary

- ? How vulnerable to the “flattering words” and “cunning devices” of “one very wicked man,” the American Caligula, has the American Church shown itself to be?
- ? How are our “liberties” under assault and in danger—take the upcoming 2020 elections as but one example—at the evil cunning of this “one very wicked man”?
- ? What evils do his followers fall into through his flattery and cunning?

Alma 45.²³— just scripture

But they grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great a riches; therefore they grew rich in their own eyes....

Questionary

1. This text reports that wealthy individuals were “lifted up in their hearts”?
 - ? What does this lifting up in the heart mean to you?
 - ? What behaviors follow this inflated and exaggerated self of self-worth?
2. The text also reports that wealthy individuals “grew rich in their own eyes”?
 - ? What do you understand when you read of the wealthy “growing rich in their own eyes”?
 - ? What is it about money, possessions, and riches that nearly inevitably causes an inflated and exaggerated sense of self-worth and the demeaning of others?
 - ? How do you feel about connecting the demeaning of others with a high and inflated sense of self-worth?
 - ? What is it about money, possessions, and riches that human beings find not only physically but psychologically satisfying?
3. Consider the following passage.

“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3.³⁻⁴).

 - ? How does this passage relate to today’s reading?
 - ? How does a true, God-centered sense of self-worth differ from the inflated and exaggerated sense of self-worth that comes from materialistic success?
 - ? How does a true, God-centered sense of self-worth squash the inclination of materialistic based self-worth to demean and devalue others?

Alma 46.⁴⁻⁷— just scripture

“And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power. And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people. Thus they were led away by Amalickiah to dissensions, notwithstanding the preaching of Helaman and his brethren, yea, notwithstanding their exceedingly great care over the church, for they were high priests over the church. And there were many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah, therefore they dissented even from the church; and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous.

Questionary

- ? When the author speaks of “lower Judges” is he talking about “lower judicial judges” or “lower government officials”?
- ? How is America’s Caligula like Amalickiah?
- ? How do you feel and what do you think when you read that “many in the church” were fooled by Amalickiah’s “flattery”?
- ? What is meant by “flattery”?

Alma 46.³⁹

And it came to pass that there were many who died, firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ; thus they went out of the world rejoicing.

Questionary

- ? Can you relate to the confidence of these believing souls, believing that when you pass over your soul will be redeemed?

Alma 50.²¹— just scripture

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which a brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

Questionary

- ? This statement comes in the midst of Lamanite aggression and attacks against the Nephites. How is blaming the Nephites for the success of Lamanite aggression NOT blaming the victim?

Alma 53.⁹— just scripture

And thus because of iniquity amongst themselves, yea, because of dissensions and intrigue among themselves they were placed in the most dangerous circumstances.

Questionary

1. Consider the following passages.

“...Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (Alma 46.¹⁸).

“... it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (Alma 50.²¹).

“... it was his first care to put an end to such contentions and dissensions among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction.... (Alma 51.¹⁶).

“For were it not for the wickedness which first commenced at our head, we could have withstood our enemies that they could have gained no power over us” (Alma 60.¹⁵).

“Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them; yea, and it was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God. And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions.... And because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten...” (Helaman 4.¹¹⁻¹³).

- ? How do these passages relate to today’s just scripture?
- ? How applicable to our day are these passages and their unified theme?
- ? To the extent that this can be applied to our day, what can we do as individual citizens to seek remedy for these societal dangers?
- ? How do you feel about the text’s belief that it is internal dissensions and evils as much as hostilities with the enemy and the evils that exist in them that are responsible for much of a society’s loss of national security?
- ? How is this not “blaming the ‘victim’”?