



## alma 33

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## Alma 33.<sup>1-3</sup>— Meditation 1

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<sup>1</sup>Now 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.

<sup>2</sup>And Alma said unto them: “Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. <sup>3</sup>Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?”

The Zoramite apostasy follows immediately upon the heels of Korihor’s apostasy and has much in common with it. Korihor’s doctrine was centered on the contention that “there could be no Christ,” Because there was no Christ, “there could be no atonement made... but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore, every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength.”<sup>1</sup> We see a direct impact of these doctrines on the Zoramite poor who were “cast out” and “not permitted to enter their synagogues.”

It is unlikely that the poor were, essentially, “excommunicated” through any form of physical coercion or violence. More likely it was accomplished through stigma and justified by doctrine. Their poverty, it was asserted, was the result of poor life management and genius, and was indicative of a lack of devotion to God. Being excommunicated for these reasons, the poor not only felt institutionally bereft but personally unworthy, leaving them with the feeling that they could not worship God. Alma will address all these issues in this sermon.

Unfortunately, today’s American society—including, and sometimes, especially, those who call themselves “Christian,” and so should know better—feels much the same about the poor. Poverty is seen as indicative of spiritual weakness. Though utilizing different vocabulary, modern American attitudes toward the poor are, much like that of the Zoramites, anti-Christ. Alma’s sermon, then, is as pertinent to 21st century American society and religion as it was to ancient Zoramite society and religion. In Alma’s sermon, today’s poor can still find balm to heal the wounds that flow from their own struggles and the salt that society so often rubs into them.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 30.<sup>17</sup>

## Alma 33.<sup>1-3</sup>— Meditation 2

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<sup>1</sup>Now 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.

<sup>2</sup>And Alma said unto them: “Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. <sup>3</sup>Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?”

One of the first questions that the Zoramite poor who had been “cast out” of their synagogues posed to Alma was “whether they should believe in one God.” This might, at first glance, seem like an odd question. However, in the context, it is appropriate and perfectly logical.

Previous to what was essentially their excommunication, they had stood with others to confess, “thou [God] wast a spirit... thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever” (Al. 31.<sup>15</sup>). This confession was meant to directly contradict the orthodox Nephite belief in Christ. It stood as a challenge to the doctrine that, in the language of Abinadi, “God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man” (Mos. 13.<sup>34</sup>), or, in the language of Benjamin, “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mos. 3.<sup>5</sup>).

This doctrine, as it would in early Christianity, caused confusion, especially for hard core monotheists. While addressing other issues—for example, the audience’s sense that they could not worship God because they lacked institutional sanction, and their sense of guilt and unworthiness that they were made to feel at their poverty—in the following sermon Alma will reaffirm through his own and multiple other prophetic testimonies the reality of Christ and the very real benefit he brings to those who believe and have faith in him.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

## Alma 33.<sup>1-3</sup>— Meditation 3

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<sup>1</sup>Now 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.

<sup>2</sup>And Alma said unto them: “Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. <sup>3</sup>Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?”

Having been deemed unworthy specifically because of their poverty, the Zoramite poor were “cast out” from their synagogues. Essentially excommunicated, these poor Zoramites felt that they could not worship God. No doubt, the fact that they possessed no institutional structure contributed to this feeling. However, they undoubtedly also felt a sense of guilt, shame, and unworthiness before a god who, the institution had taught them, found poverty to be indicative of a sinful lack of devotion to him. Alma’s sermon seeks to address the poor’s concerns and correct their false ideas about God Himself and how/when/where they could worship Him.

Alma begins by quoting “Zenos, the prophet of old” and what he had to say about “prayer or worship.”<sup>2</sup> Before turning to this quotation, we should note Alma’s “prayer or worship.” Here, Alma essentially uses “prayer” and “worship” as synonymous. Prayer is an act of worship. Prayer should be worshipful. Now, one could argue, I suppose, that asking God to act in one’s life is an act of worship since it indicates a belief or hope that he is powerful and interested enough to act in our lives. But, as everyone knows, children can make many requests of parents without really appreciating them for who they are, or even for the benefits they bring.

More than requests, true “prayer or worship” is dominated by expression of gratitude for, and awe and worship of God. It is dominated by talking to God about God. It is dominated by an inquiry into and about God, Himself. If you’ve done this, you know of its joys, insights, and benefits. If you haven’t, you should give it a try.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)

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<sup>2</sup> Alma 33.<sup>4-11</sup>

## Alma 33.<sup>4-7</sup>— Meditation

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<sup>4</sup>“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.  
<sup>5</sup>Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field;  
when I did cry unto thee in my prayer,  
and thou didst hear me.  
<sup>6</sup>And again, O God, when I did turn to my house  
thou didst hear me in my prayer.  
<sup>7</sup>And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord,  
and prayed unto thee,  
thou didst hear me.

In this reading, Alma addresses a misunderstanding concerning prayer that he observed among the apostate Zoramites. They were under the false notion that one could only pray in designated, sanctified locations. Thus, those unjustly excommunicated from that sanctified place—the famous Rameumptom—felt separated from God as they could not pray. Utilizing a quotation from a mostly unknown prophet, Zenos, Alma demonstrates the error of this view. Zenos testifies that God has heard his prayers no matter where he was. From the most distant place, the wilderness, to the nearest and most private place, his closet, and all parts in between, field and house, God has heard and responded to his prayers. Location does not matter and is of no hindrance or advantage in God’s hearing of prayer.

But, neither Alma nor Zenos are satisfied in leaving it at that. Rather, they wish to make an even more important and determinative point. God hears prayers, wherever their launching point, because of His own divine nature. God hears prayers because He is merciful. This truth is repeated three times in this reading and will be repeated several more times in what follows.

We might pray in all the right places, at all the right times, dressed in all the right attire, with all the right words, but if God was not merciful in Himself, all this rightness would be for naught. Rather than making an appeal to God based on any such personal rightness, we should always appeal to His mercy. In fact, an acknowledgement of and appeal to God’s mercy ought to be a central and sincere feature of every prayer—beginning, middle, end, and all parts in between. We enter, remain in, and leave meaningful and communicative prayer in the same way that the ancient Hebrew Psalmist entered, remained in, and left his beloved temple where he hoped to commune with God and see His beauty.<sup>3</sup>

“I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy.”<sup>4</sup>

“Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice:  
have mercy also upon me, and answer me.”<sup>5</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)

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<sup>3</sup> See Psalm 27

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 5.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Yea, 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.

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

<sup>10</sup>Yea, 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.

In addressing the Zoramite misconception that only prayers offered from the Rameumptom, a sort of prayer altar, Alma quotes the prophet Zenos (vs. 4-11) in hopes of illustrating his assertion that God hears sincerely offered prayers no matter their provenience. Three times, Zenos repeats his insistence that this divine willingness to hear and answer prayers wherever they may come from is a consequence of the divine character of mercy (4-7). In this reading, Zenos insists that not only does God hear and answer prayers no matter where they are offered, but that he hears and answers prayers in whatever circumstance the petitioners find themselves. It matters not at all whether one is among friends or foes. Once more, Zenos stresses, repeating it twice, that this divine willingness is the result of divine mercy.

In appreciating Zenos' witness of God's merciful willingness to hear prayer no matter the location or circumstances of the petitioner, we might miss the rather radical nature of Alma's message. He might have selected any number of quotations. But he chose this one. Alma, it seems, can walk and chew gum at the same time. He can make his point that God hears and answers prayers no matter where they come from or what the petitioners' circumstances might be. He can also make his point that God is merciful and that his willingness to hear and answer prayers comes from this divine character trait. With this reading, we find that Alma can make a third point.

“Thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies.”

How applicable to the Zoramite condition is that?! Because prayer is real and in it we address our life as it really is, it is not all sweetness. With God, we address the good and the bad. We discuss with him those who are dearest to us: friends and family. We also, discuss our “enemies.” We address those who “cast out.” We address those who “despise.” We address those who display enmity. The names of those who do evil in the world—targeting ourselves and others—drop from our prayerful lips as easily as those who do good.

God, Zenos assures, hears such prayers. He takes note of the enemies and makes note of their names. And he answers such prayers. He visits the oppressor in “anger with speedy destruction.”

In prayer, then, we find a powerful form of resistance. Through prayer we resist evil and oppression and hate. Through prayer, God joins our resistance. This must have been music to the oppressed Zoramites' ears. On the other hand, to the oppressors, the Zoramite elite, this must have sounded like a shot across the bow, an incitement to resistance; for if one believes in the power of prayer, one does not wish to have that power turned against them.

No doubt, it is godly to pray that our “enemies” and, indeed, all oppressors repent and change their ways.

But history tells us, and scripture affirms, that many, perhaps most, will not make the necessary changes. They will continue to hate and oppress. So, our faith is such that we are prepared to boldly and fearlessly take the next step. We offer prayers of resistance. We accept the need for and reality of a “speedy destruction” upon those who are enemies of righteousness and oppressors of the vulnerable. It becomes the only weapon we are justified in taking up against them. It is wielded, not, in the end, for the express purpose of punishing or destroying the oppressor, but to liberate the oppressed. It is Zenos’ testimony that it works. And it is Zenos’ testimony that this too, the “speedy destruction” of the enemy, is an act of divine mercy showered upon the oppressed.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

## Alma 33.<sup>11</sup>— Meditation

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<sup>11</sup>“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.”

In his desire to prove to the Zoramites that they don't need the Rameumptom to have their prayers heard, Alma utilizes a prayer that the prophet Zenos offered. In that prayer Zenos confesses that God has heard his prayers wherever he was and under whatever circumstances he found himself. God was particularly attentive to him when he was in affliction and expressed sincere desire for help; thus revealing God as one who is drawn to those in need, and abundantly willing and able to help. Zenos repeats numerous times and in every instance that God heard his prayers because of the divine trait of mercy that exists in Deity.

In wrapping up his prayer, and thus the end of Alma's quotation, Zenos turns his attention to “the Son.” He confesses to God that “it is because of thy Son” that God has been merciful and “hast turned thy judgments away from me.” Whoever Zenos was and whenever or wherever he lived, he seems to have had intimate glimpses, as many others had, into the coming of Christ and events surrounding his ministry and his atoning sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Zenos was able to witness Jesus' revelation of God. This revelation included Jesus' portrayal of God's mercy.

Perhaps Zenos witnessed, as Nephi did,<sup>7</sup> how people with all manner of afflictions came to Jesus in sincere desire for help. Perhaps he saw that rather than scold individuals because of the imperfections that resided in them, he generously assisted them without judgement. Perhaps Zenos saw that Jesus, the purist revelation of God, was the sort of Being who was drawn to those in need. He lived to make things better for all.

Thus, through Zenos, Alma reminds us of the importance of seeing and witnessing Jesus, the Son of God. It is only through him that we can come to know, appreciate, and experience God and His divine character. Among the many characteristics of God; among the many divine characteristics that we must come to understand and accept, “mercy” is one of the most important.

With Zenos' reminder that Christ is the key that unlocks our hearts and minds to God's mercy, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the New Testament Gospels, our most direct and present access point to Jesus' revelation of God and His character. It is impossible to overstate how vital it is that we engage in reading and pondering the Gospels until the revelations of God's love and commitment to us written in them are finally and irrevocably written on the stony tablets of our own hearts.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>6</sup> See 1 Nephi 19.<sup>10-12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Nephi 11.<sup>31</sup>



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

It is a common rhetorical device. Whether you consciously recognized it or not, you have certainly witnessed speakers use it. Possibly, you have used it yourself. A speaker utilizes a quote. After reading the quote, the speaker rereads some smaller portion of it. After rereading the small portion, the speaker often offers remarks and commentary on that portion. This smaller portion contains the main idea that the speaker wishes to teach and have his audience to consider and understand from the quote. It often contains the main point of the entire discourse.

Alma utilizes this rhetorical device to good effect in his sermon delivered to a small gathering of Zoramites in the land of Antionum. This small gathering had been excommunicated from their synagogues with their central prayer altars, the famous Rameumptum. Because of their exclusion, these Zoramites believed that they could not pray, and felt disconnected from God. In addressing their misunderstanding, Alma utilizes a prayer offered by one, Zenos, a prophet whose exact era and location remain unknown.

Making use of Zenos’ prayer, Alma is able to teach his Zoramite audience that they can pray at any location—home or abroad— and under any circumstances—favorable or unfavorable, in public or in private. Quoting Zenos, he teaches that this open access to God through prayer is possible because of the divine trait of mercy that is central to God’s Being. He teaches, further, that it is the Son of God that “turns away” our fears that the “judgements” of God might keep God from hearing our prayers.

Having made these points, so pertinent to Zoramite misunderstanding, Alma ends his quotation. It is at this point that he repeats this small portion of his quotation: “for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son.”

It is in this requoted portion of Zenos’ prayer that we find the principal point Alma wishes to make. Yes, the problem of where, and when and how one prays is important. But Alma seems to realize that the most common roadblock to consistent, meaningful, and anticipatory prayer is not found in such mundane and formalistic issues, but in human psychology. We believe that God is a very demanding God. We believe that He is easily irritated when we do not meet His expectations. We believe that His irritation leads Him to ignore our prayers and deny our requests and expressions of faith. Such beliefs destroy the prayer life of believers. They cause them to pray less often and with diminished faith and hope.

But Jesus, Son of God, solves this psychological problem. In and through him, we discover a God who is merciful, generous, and understanding. In and through Christ we find the judgements of God turned away, and Him hearing, accepting, and responding to our heartfelt prayers. The true and serious Zoramite misunderstanding was not concerning the formalities of prayer. Rather, the misunderstanding came in not keeping the eye of faith on Jesus and through Him discovering the most merciful of Beings.

The Zoramite misunderstanding is alive and well today. It is amongst us. We could use a good reading, and rereading, and rereading of Zenos prayer. Often and always. It is a master class into the character of God as revealed through Jesus and the access to God that that divine character grants us.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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

“Anger” is probably not the right word. “Anger” is probably not an emotion that finds itself stirring in the bosom of God. “Anger,” human anger is always accompanied by a loss of control. We cannot and do not believe that God loses control. He is always master of himself. So, another word is in order—disappointment, maybe? I don’t know.

Anyway, we meditate today on Alma’s quotation from Zenock: “Thou art angry [disappointed?], O Lord, with this people, because....” Stop right there! Finish the sentence yourself. Finish it again, this time differently. Finish it again and again. A hundred times. Did you ever finish it as Zencok did?

“...because they will not understand thy mercies.”

What’s so bad about this misunderstanding? You decide. But Father went to an awful lot of effort to help us understand, and, understanding, to accept and experience his mercy. He sent his Son to reveal it by portraying it in his own life day after day after day by the way he interacted with others. It cost His Son’s life.

We don’t want to anger God, or disappoint him, or sadden him, or whatever else we may wish to call it. Possibly, this might require some “careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts.” More significantly, though, it will require some time and experience with God. It will require a personal encounter with that Being whose mercy is as expansive as the great expanse of the universe.<sup>8</sup> Then our meditations will raise to new, unheard of heights.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

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<sup>8</sup> See Psalm 103.<sup>11</sup>

## Alma 33.<sup>15-17</sup>— Meditation

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

<sup>16</sup>For 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.

<sup>17</sup>And 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.

Every once in a while, someone will ask me which book of scripture or which passages of scripture have been most influential in my life. Immediately, Alma 26.<sup>16-17</sup>. Though it is difficult to choose, if I was forced to choose just one passage to take with me to a deserted island, this would be the one. Ammon’s wonder at God, especially the extent of God’s generosity resonates deeply within me. Verse 16 of today’s reading would likely be in my top ten. The reason is personal, but not so personal as to avoid sharing.

Some years ago, as I was reading Alma 33, I came to verse 16. I no longer remember what happened to distract me—my own wondering thoughts, a phone call, the entrance of my wife or a child—but whatever it was, it was timed such that I my reading stopped with this: “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because...” When whatever the distraction was had ended, I picked up my scriptures to pick up where I had left off. But before I could begin reading again, the phrase came back forcefully into my mind. It was accompanied by a thought: “Finish the sentence yourself.”

So, I did. I no longer remember the exact attitude or behavior that I thought of, but I finished the sentence myself with something that I felt angered or saddened God. As I went to return to the text, I was prompted to write whatever it was I had thought of on a piece of paper. I retrieved an 8½ x 11 sheet of lined composition paper and wrote at the top: “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because...” I then, noted the first thing that had come to my mind. I was then prompted to write down another thing that might anger or sadden God. I did so. This happened repeatedly. Soon, I had quite the list. In fact, I had filled one side of the sheet of paper. This probably contains some deep dark insight into my psychology at the time, but we’ll leave that alone for now.

Finally, I felt prompted to return to Alma’s text. So I read, “because they will not understand thy mercies...” That was as far as I read before this question came forcefully into my mind, “Is that on your list?” I already knew the answer to the question, but I went through my list anyway, item by item. When I reached the bottom, what I already knew was confirmed.

“No, it is not,” I answered in my mind.

As if another spoke, I heard, “No, it is not indeed. Zenock’s reason for God’s anger or sadness with us is no where to be found among your dozens of reasons. Why do you think that is?”

The is final six-word question seemed to send an electric shock through my system. I knew why. I knew why Zenock’s reason was not on my list. It was missing from my list because I did “not understand God’s mercies.”

I began that day diligently seeking to understand His mercies. I have come to understand a little better. They are still too much for me to grasp. They are still, on many days, more than I would or could have

supposed. But at least I can say this: If the same prompting ever comes again, you can bet your last dollar that the first thing on my list, in bold print, will be, “because they will not understand thy mercies...” It is simply impossible to say how many of the other sins that I, we, put on our list of those that anger or sadden God flow from this most fundamental error in understanding.

So, go ahead. Make your list. Check it twice.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

<sup>18</sup>But behold, this is not all; these are not the only ones who have spoken concerning the Son of God. <sup>19</sup>Behold, 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. <sup>20</sup>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.

In his sermon delivered to the Zoramite poor, Alma quoted the little-known prophets, Zenos and Zenock, as evidence of the mercy that God shows humankind through His Son. With this reading, Alma brings out the big guns: the prophet of all prophets, Moses.

Alma refers to a story that we find today in Numbers 21.<sup>5-9</sup>. Here, we find those who had escaped Egyptian bondage and were traveling with Moses through the wilderness assailed by poisonous snakes in consequence of sin—the sin being displeasure with Moses and his leadership. In response to the peoples’ expressions of regret, Moses, at God’s command, lifts a “fiery serpent” upon a pole with a promise that those who look upon the serpent will survive any bites they might suffer from the invasive critters.

Numbers does not explicitly inform us of the people’s response. Nevertheless, we might have guessed from its, “if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived,” that not everyone got on board with the remedy (it’s either that, or not everyone was bitten). Alma, however, seems to be aware of a stronger tradition, for he reports that “there were many who were so hardened that they would not look.” Alma chalks up the peoples’ failure to look to disbelief on their part that the proposed remedy was sufficient to the task: healing the bitten. Elsewhere, Nephi, while using the story, as Alma, to encourage trust in God, indicated that people did not look upon the healing totem because it seemed too easy.<sup>9</sup>

This latter reason given for not looking at the serpent has always perplexed me. Who refuses to do something because it is too easy? Easy is good. We love to do things that do not challenge us too much and that bring sure success. Our fragile egos, after all, need every success we can get.

But what has always captured my imagination is this: If the people did not turn their eyes to look upon the hoisted snake, where were their eyes directed? They had to be looking somewhere, didn’t they? Surely, they didn’t simply shut their eyes tightly closed and hope for the best. I mean, snakes were everywhere, writhing between and around legs, etc. Who closes their eyes in such a pickle? No, their eyes were open, sure enough. And their eyes were fixed on, fixated by the snakes. Isn’t that what you would do? Wouldn’t you keep your eyes on the ground, watching every snake’s movement so that you could avoid their deadly bite?

Alma, and Jesus after him, understand that there’s a type in the snake hoisted upon a stick: Jesus and his crucifixion. There is also a type in the poisonous snakes: sin. Finally, we suggest, there is also a type in those under threat of death.

There is a type of disciple who fears being bitten—fears to sin. It’s the worst thing they can imagine. It becomes their fixation. Sin becomes their fixation. They keep their eyes peeled to the ground awaiting its

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Nephi 17.<sup>41</sup>

attack. What hard, demanding labor this is! It is absolutely exhausting. But, not being bitten in the first place is the only solution to the problem of sin in which they can really trust. Once the poison enters the veins, who knows if the physician is really skilled enough to provide the remedy. And, even before that, and more troubling, who knows if the physician will be *willing* to provide the remedy. Perhaps he will be disgusted, irritated, by the patient's foolishness in allowing himself to be bitten in the first place.

Yes, better to do the hard work of avoiding sin altogether than the easy work of trusting in the mercy and goodness and ability of Jesus, Son of God. Hmm, I guess history does repeat itself.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*

<sup>21</sup>O 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? <sup>22</sup>If 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.

<sup>23</sup>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.

Back in Alma 32, Alma admonished the disenfranchised Zoramite poor to engage in an “experiment,” “exercise a particle of faith,” “desire to believe,” “plant” a “true seed” or “word” “in [their] hearts,” and “nourish the word” until the seed became “a tree springing up unto everlasting life.” The imagery, along with the promise, seems to have struck a chord with his audience, for immediately they asked, “how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken.”<sup>10</sup> This question drew from Alma the sermon we have explored in this series of meditations; a sermon dominated by a quotation from a prayer the prophet, Zenos, uttered.

Now, as he wraps up his sermon and prepares to hand the baton over to his companion, Amulek, Alma returns to his planting metaphor: “I desire that ye shall plant *this word* in your hearts.” What, “word,” exactly, are they to plant in their hearts? To this point, Alma’s sermon has contained 709 of them, words, that is. Is it the word, “prayer,” they are to plant? Has this been the central point of his discourse? Is prayer the key to their happiness, fulfilment, and advancement? We might certainly have thought so early on the discourse. But the longer Alma talked, the clearer it became that there was something weightier on his mind.

Our first clue came with the repetition of a “word.” We noted this repetition in a previous meditation in this series. But, here it is again, in a little different presentational form.

“Thou art merciful, O God...”<sup>11</sup>

“Thou wast merciful...”<sup>12</sup>

“Thou wast merciful...”<sup>13</sup>

“Thou art merciful...”<sup>14</sup>

“Thou hast been merciful...”<sup>15</sup>

So, is this the word, or the three of them, that one must plant in their heart in order to know true joy and fulfillment: “mercy” or “God is merciful”? Certainly, knowledge of this foundational divine trait is vital.

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<sup>10</sup> Alma 33.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Alma 33.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Alma 33.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Alma 33.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Alma 33.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Alma 33.<sup>9</sup>



As Moroni wraps up his *magnus corpus*, he admonishes those who “read *these things*” and “receive *these things*” to “ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if *these things* are not true.”<sup>16</sup> But before or as we do such asking, Moroni suggests that something very important must be underlying the asking: “remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive *these things*.” We are to do more, though, than “remember” God’s mercy. We are to “ponder *it* in [our] hearts.”

Here, in this admonition, Moroni always refers to his *magnus corpus* as “these things.” Plural. But, when it comes to pondering, it is suddenly “it.” Singular. As we progress in our appreciation of his *magnus corpus*, we may come to “ponder” more and more words. But to know of its truth, we must ponder and come to accept a more fundamental truth. We must ponder these three words, “God is merciful.” For if we do not believe in a merciful God, we, who are ignorant and weak in knowledge and spiritual capacity, cannot believe he will answer our prayer to know “if *these things* are not true.”

So, yes, knowing that God is merciful is central to our happiness, fulfilment, and advancement. Yes, it is central to Alma’s message to the Zoramites. But, notwithstanding the importance of knowing that “God is merciful,” we still have not arrived at “the word” that is to be planted.

As we saw in a previous meditation from this series, Alma advanced slowly toward his main point as he quoted one sentence after another of Zenos’ prayer to God. Finally, he arrives at his destination.

“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.”

Having arrived at his destination, Alma ends his quotation. “Do ye,” he then asks, “believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?” Then, to emphasize his main point, he repeats it.

“Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: ‘*Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.*’”

God *is* merciful. This is vital. But God is merciful “because of [His] Son.” Or, better, we discover that God is merciful because of His Son. His Son came to earth, above all else, to reveal or introduce His Father.<sup>17</sup> The Son was “the brightness of [God’s] glory, and the express image of [God’s] person.”<sup>18</sup> In the Son “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”<sup>19</sup> As we see and watch the Son walk and minister on the dusty roads of Judea, we are seeing and watching God, Father.<sup>20</sup>

So, yes, prayer is vital to our happiness and fulfillment and advancement. However, for prayer to achieve its potential in our lives, we must know that God is merciful, for we know the depth of our inadequacies all too well. But we are reliant on the Son to know God is merciful. We must see and believe the Son’s message of God’s mercy that he reenacted in person on earth. We must believe in the Son. We must plant him and his display of mercy in our lives.

This, then, is the word, the name that we must plant in our hearts: Jesus. Oh, what a blessed name! Just the sound of it warms our hearts, fills us with hope and joy, and gives access to “everlasting life.”

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<sup>16</sup> See Moroni 10.<sup>3-4</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See John 1.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 1.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Colossians 2.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See John 14.<sup>7-10</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: October 24, 2024)*