

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE (**Episodes 203.1 and 203.2**)

LESSON 29: ALMA 36-39

Give Ear to my Words

Manual Goal: To teach class members Alma’s counsel for remaining faithful in the gospel and to help parents understand how to teach and counsel both righteous and unrighteous children. (I don’t think this dichotomy of “righteous and unrighteous children” is useful)

Engaging Gospel Doctrine Goal: To help class members understand how we can frame our past experiences to help ourselves and others, and to discuss constructively Alma’s words about sexual sins.

Core Lesson

- a. Dealing with sin, past, present, and future (Alma 36)
- b. Alma’s path to peace: 1) torment (to its full measure, didn’t try to avoid it), 2) wished the pain away, 3) caught hold of the idea of redemption, 4) could remember his pain no more
- c. “joy as exceeding as was my pain” (36:20) exquisite/bitter, exquisite/sweet (36:21)
- d. The underappreciated Shiblon (figures as a middle child, right?) Steady. Faithful. Diligent. Patient. Long-suffering. (Bridle passion to be filled with love, avoid idleness)
- e. “sin next to murder”. We just have to tackle this, challenge this, change the way we talk about it.
- f. Counsel and conversations (these are great chapters, but it is a pity we don’t have Alma’s children’s perspectives)
- g. Conclusion: How we tell our stories, use our pasts to improve the present and future for others

Goal	From Alma’s intimate communication with his sons, class members will draw insights about repentance, conversion, Christlike character, responsibility, humility, and trust in God. These are powerful chapters, and close reading yields rich rewards.
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Hook	-
Overview	<p>Quite straightforward this time: Alma 36-37: Alma's words to Helaman Alma 38: Alma's words to Shiblon Alma 39: Beginning of Alma's words to Corianton</p>
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close reading of Alma 36 (it really is an extraordinarily rich chapter, well worth poring over) <p>Rack: The rack is a torture device consisting of a rectangular, usually wooden frame, slightly raised from the ground, with a roller at one or both ends. The victim's ankles are fastened to one roller and the wrists are chained to the other. As the interrogation progresses, a handle and ratchet attached to the top roller are used to very gradually stepwise increase the tension on the chains, inducing excruciating pain. By means of pulleys and levers this roller could be rotated on its own axis, thus straining the ropes until the sufferer's joints were dislocated and eventually separated. Additionally, if muscle fibers are stretched excessively, they lose their ability to contract, rendering them ineffective. (from Wikipedia)</p> <p>Harrow: an agricultural implement with spikelike teeth or upright disks, drawn chiefly over plowed land to level it, break up clods, root up weeds, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36:12: Facing difficult aspects of our past and paying the price to change our characters can be brutal as Alma so vividly describes. We need to be in a safe, loving environment. Therapist friend of mine shared: <p>It seems like to heal something like that you'd have to go there in the context of a VERY safe relationship (e.g. therapist) and be in that state long enough and frequently enough. You can't leave a place until you arrive at it. I would argue that you can't leave a place until you've sat in it with someone holding you in it - someone bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind. (Adam Fisher, alluding to http://circleofsecurity.net/)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36:17: Note excruciating description, repetition of "racked" • 36:19: HUGE deal, sign of repentance, forgiveness, and healing • 36:24: fruits of conversion, enlightened motivation <p>Lessons to Helaman 37:25. Peace of conscience of not needing to hide anything (which is different than telling everyone everything. But knowing actions can be defended. Secrets, etc. 37:32: Loaded terms, but related to lose all desire to do evil 37:34-37: Read and discuss, "bedtime scripture" ☺ 37:44: Key reason to follow true principles is to minimize consequences and regret, harm to yourself and others. Broken legs analogy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Be like Shiblon" learning from his character • Corianton's "sin next to murder" (be very clear what the text does and does

	not say, do a close reading. Yes, “lust” and a prostitute are connected with this sin, and yes, some sexual sins could be classified as next to murder, as they do intense harm and have high consequences—rape, sexual abuse, abortion is serious, as is bringing an unwanted child into the world, but we applying this ranking to all sexual transgressions is highly damaging. Allude to Ash and Jorgenson, bring it up in discussion
Other Comments/ Discussion Starters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiasmus. (don’t want to spend time on it, will link references if people wish. The power of Alma 36 does not depend on this feature) http://www.cometozarahemla.org/mosiah/alma-36-chiasmus.html Critique: https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V38N04_105.pdf Also see Spencer, Typology • Act-consequence correlation (repeated “if you keep the commandments of God you shall prosper in the land, if you do not keep the commandments you will be cast off from his presence” Does the parallel suggest spiritual prosperity? Then why “in the land”?) • Alma’s conversion: when and how God intervenes • 37:4 Prophecy still to be fulfilled about Brass Plates, cf. 1 Ne. 5:17-19 • Interesting and consistent pattern of plate transmission: record keeper to brother, then son, then brother’s son. • 37:8: function of scriptures • 37:14: apply to our gifts and responsibilities • 37:16: Appeal to the Lord in all things? How does that work? • 37:28, 31: the concept of “fully ripe” (think Jacob 5)
Concluding Points	These are some of the most important principles in life and the gospel—how we change, how we face our weaknesses and limitations, keys to godlike character, and how to communicate lovingly with those who have made mistakes.

Jorgensen quote: “As to whether Corianton did or did not fornicate, or did or did not confess to having done so, Alma and the text are strictly silent, and our judgment or our suspicion reflects more on us than on his sinning son. That may even be one of the reasons this text is constructed just as it is: to oblige us to confront our own suspicions and decisions in the absence of complete evidence, and to judge ourselves in light of the judgment we mete...We do well to judge mercifully, as we would be judged, and as I believe Alma, for all his severity, does judge his son, whom he loves and will not disown. Over and over he repeats ‘my son’...” (pp. 21-22)

This example of mercy matters more than figuring out which sin ranks near murder (p. 22)

Gives a strong argument that Corianton’s sin was not fornication (Isabel was probably above a missionary’s price range and might not have looked at him twice) as much as abandoning his ministry but above all pridefully overestimating his strength, underestimating the consequences of his actions, following his sexual curiosity and thus harming the work of his companions (paraphrasing) Corianton’s transgression was more “curiosity than sexual passion...Alma sees him

this way and swiftly, justly, and mercifully seeks a means to prevent worse damage than Corianton has already done to himself and others” (p. 26).

Chiastic Repetition in Alma 36 (<http://www.cometozarahemla.org/mosiah/alma-36-chiasmus.html>)

- a) My son give ear to my **words** (v 1)
- a’) according to his **word** (v 30)

- b) **Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land** (v 1)
- b’) **Keep the commandments and ye shall prosper in the land** (v 30)

- c) **Do as I have done** (v 2)
- c’) **Know as I do know** (v 30)

- d) **Remember** the **captivity** of our fathers (v 2)
- d’) Retain in **remembrance** their captivity (v 28-29)

- e) They were in **bondage** (v 2)
- e’) God brought our fathers out of **bondage** and **captivity** (v 28-29)

- f) He surely did **deliver them** (v 2)
- f’) He will **deliver me** (v 27)

- g) **Trust in God** (v 3)
- g’) **Trust in him** (v 27)

- h) **Supported in trials, troubles and afflictions** (v 3)
- h’) **Supported under trials and troubles and afflictions** (v 27)

- i) **I know** this not of myself but **of God** (v 4)
- i’) Therefore **my knowledge** is **of God** (26)

- j) **Born of God** (v 5)
- j’) **Born of God** (v 26)

- k) **I sought to destroy the church** (v 6-9)
- k’) **I labored to bring souls to repentance** (v 24)

- l) **My limbs** were paralyzed (v 10)
- l’) **My limbs** received strength again (v 23)

- m) Fear of the **presence of God** (v 14-15)
- m’) Long to be in the **presence of God** (v 22)

- n) **Pains of a damned soul** (v 16)
- n') **Joy as exceeding as was the pain** (v 20)

- o) **Harrowed up by memory of sins** (v 17)
- o') **Harrowed up by memory of sins no more** (v 19)

- p) **I remembered Jesus Christ, a son of God** (v 17)
- p') **I cried, Jesus, son of God** (v 18)

The structure in context: (<http://www.jefflindsay.com/chiasmus.shtml#3>)

- (a) My son, give ear to my WORDS (1)
- (b) KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS of God and ye shall PROSPER IN THE LAND (2)
- (c) DO AS I HAVE DONE (2)
- (d) in REMEMBERING THE CAPTIVITY of our fathers (2);
- (e) for they were in BONDAGE (2)
- (f) he surely did DELIVER them (2)
- (g) TRUST in God (3)
- (h) supported in their TRIALS, and TROUBLES, and AFFLICTIONS (3)
- (i) shall be lifted up at the LAST DAY (3)
- (j) I KNOW this not of myself but of GOD (4)

- (k) BORN OF GOD (5)
- (l) I sought to destroy the church of God (6-9)
- (m) MY LIMBS were paralyzed (10)
- (n) Fear of being in the PRESENCE OF GOD (14-15)
- (o) PAINS of a damned soul (16)
- (p) HARROWED UP BY THE MEMORY OF SINS (17)
- (q) I remembered JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD (17)
- (q') I cried, JESUS, SON OF GOD (18)
- (p') HARROWED UP BY THE MEMORY OF SINS no more (19)
- (o') Joy as exceeding as was the PAIN (20)
- (n') Long to be in the PRESENCE OF GOD (22)
- (m') My LIMBS received their strength again (23)
- (l') I labored to bring souls to repentance (24)
- (k') BORN OF GOD (26)
- (j') Therefore MY KNOWLEDGE IS OF GOD (26)
- (h') Supported under TRIALS, TROUBLES, and AFFLICTIONS (27)
- (g') TRUST in him (27)
- (f') He will deliver me (27)
- (i') and RAISE ME UP AT THE LAST DAY (28)
- (e') As God brought our fathers out of BONDAGE and captivity (28-29)
- (d') Retain in REMEMBRANCE THEIR CAPTIVITY (28-29)
- (c') KNOW AS I DO KNOW (30)
- (b') KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS and ye shall PROSPER IN THE LAND (30)
- (a') This is according to his WORD (30).

Biblical Examples (Referenced in Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry)

Super technical, but also interesting:

<http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=111&chapid=1289>

Isaiah 28:15-18 (ABCC'B'A')

Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death,
 and with Sheol we have an agreement;
 when the overwhelming scourge passes through
 it will not come to us;
 for we have made lies our refuge,
 and in falsehood we have taken shelter';

therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:
'One who trusts will not panic.'
And I will make justice the line,
and righteousness the plummet;
hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
and waters will overwhelm the shelter.
Then your covenant with death will be annulled,
and your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
when the overwhelming scourge passes through
you will be beaten down by it.

Jer 50:2-46

Song of Songs said to be a chiasmus