



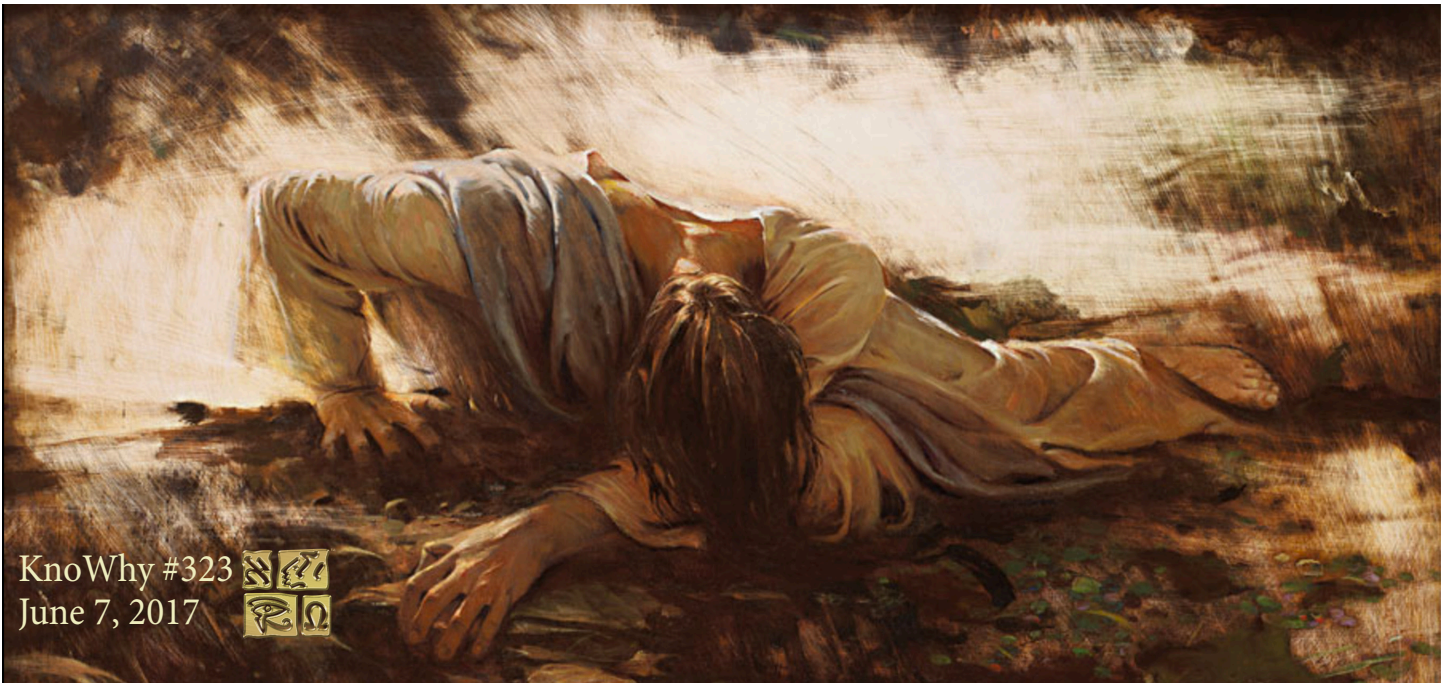
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KnoWhy #223 - What Did Alma Reveal About The Savior's Mission?

Author(s): Book of Mormon Central Staff

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Abstract: Regarding Alma's teachings of Christ, his use of chiasmus makes it clear that Christ's mortal nature—the "flesh"—was an essential part of His Atonement. It was His mortal nature that enabled Him to suffer in Gethsemane, and to endure death at Golgotha. But Alma also taught that Christ's mortal experience itself—His "go[ing] forth" and experiencing the "pains, afflictions, and temptations" of mortality—was a vital aspect of His atoning sacrifice



Not My Will, but Thine by Walter Rane

KnoWhy #323
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WHAT DID ALMA REVEAL ABOUT THE SAVIOR'S MISSION?

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

Alma 7:11–13

CONTEXT AND CONTENT

When Alma visited the city of Gideon, he was pleased to find the people there were living righteously (Alma 7:5–6, 17–20). Because of their righteousness, Alma was permitted to share with them important truths about the Savior's atoning sacrifice that he had not shared in Zarahemla.

Alma started by teaching about the birth of the Son of God (Alma 7:10),¹ and then taught that the Savior would “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” (Alma 7:11, emphasis added). Alma appears to have been quoting or alluding to Isaiah 53:4, which more accurately speaks of “pains” and “sicknesses” in Hebrew, rather than “griefs” and “sorrows” as found in the King James Bible.²

As Alma testified of the Savior, he organized his thoughts into a chiasm—a literary pattern where key words, phrases, or ideas are repeated in reverse order.

- A And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind
- B and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
- C And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people
- D and he will take upon him their infirmities
- E that his bowels may be filled with mercy
- F according to the flesh
- F that he may know according to the flesh
- E how to succor his people
- D according to their infirmities
- C Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh
- B that he might take upon him the sins of his people
- A 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. (Alma 7:11–13)³

The center is typically the most important part of a chiasm, thus this pattern places emphasis on the fact that the Savior would suffer all of this “according to the flesh.” Alma described the Atonement in intensely physical terms. His comprehensive list of things Christ would take upon himself is comprised largely of physical suffering: pains, sicknesses, infirmities, and death. But Alma also included the crucial, spiritual forms of suffering: temptations, sins, and transgressions.

DOCTRINES AND PRINCIPLES

Alma’s understanding of Christ’s atoning sacrifice was based both on his reading of scripture (specifically Isaiah) and personal knowledge revealed by the Holy Spirit (Alma 7:9, 26). This sets an example for readers today, who can likewise learn eternal truths through both scripture study and personal revelation.

Alma’s inspired choice to only share this information with those whom he sensed by the Spirit were better spiritually prepared also teaches an important principle: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6).

Regarding Alma’s teachings of Christ, his use of chiasmus makes it clear that Christ’s mortal nature—the “flesh”—was an essential part of His Atonement. It was His mortal nature that enabled Him to suffer in Gethsemane, and to endure death at Golgotha. But Alma also taught that Christ’s mortal experience itself—His “go[ing] forth” and experiencing the “pains, afflictions, and temptations” of mortality—was a vital aspect of His atoning sacrifice.⁴

This aspect of His Atonement enabled Him to be merciful and succor all who come unto Him during their own times of suffering. Elder Dallin H. Oaks recently taught:

Our Savior’s Atonement does more than assure us of immortality by a universal resurrection and give us the opportunity to be cleansed from sin by repentance and baptism. His Atonement also provides the opportunity to call upon Him who has experienced all of our mortal infirmities to give us the strength to bear the burdens of mortality. He knows of our anguish, and He is there for us.⁵

Elder David A. Bednar similarly taught,

The Savior has suffered not just for our sins and iniquities—but also for our physical pains and anguish, our weaknesses and shortcomings, our fears and frustrations, our disappointments and discouragement, our regrets and remorse, our despair and desperation, the injustices and inequities we experience, and the emotional distresses that beset us.

Elder Bednar concluded, “There is no physical pain, no spiritual wound, no anguish of soul or heartache, no infirmity or weakness you or I ever confront in mortality that the Savior did not experience first.”⁶

FURTHER READING

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2015, 61–64.

Elder David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 87–90.

NOTES

1. Some have criticized the Book of Mormon because it says that Christ would be born “at Jerusalem, the land of forefathers” (Alma 7:10). For responses to this, see Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 6–7; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 100–102; Robert F. Smith, “The Land of Jerusalem: Place of Jesus’s Birth,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 170–172; Gordon C. Thomasson, “Revisiting the Land of Jerusalem,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT), 139–141; Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, “On Alma 7:10 and the Birth Place of Christ,” (FARMS Transcripts, 1995); Daniel C. Peterson, “Chat-

tanooga Cheapshot, or the Gall of Bitterness,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5, no. 1 (1993): 62–78.

2. See Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103, 130. See also Monte S. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vols. (Orem, UT: Granite Publishing, 2003), 3:90. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 4:129 probably meant to refer to Isaiah 53, but instead said Isaiah 14, seemingly confusing it with Mosiah 14, which is the chapter where Abinadi quotes Isaiah 53.

3. Adapted from Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), 241.

4. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 3:85, 90–91; Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vol. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987–1992), 3:57.

5. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthened by the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 2015, 64.

6. Elder David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 89–90.