

Introduction

You used your agency in the pre-earth life to make righteous choices and to prepare for mortality (see Alma 13:3–5). As a result of your premortal righteousness, further blessings and opportunities have been prepared for you in mortality—upon condition of your continued faithfulness. Note that Alma emphasized our need to be sanctified in mortality and to prepare for the ultimate goal of entering “into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 13:12).

Remember that God’s mercy and justice are greater than the wickedness of this world. In Ammonihah those who repented and accepted the teachings of Alma received the Lord’s blessings even though many of them were cast out or destroyed (see commentary for Alma 14:7–11 on p. 195). Amulek pleaded with Alma to petition the Lord to save the righteous from the actions of the wicked. Alma’s explanation to Amulek, however, confirms the principle of agency and the blessings awaiting those who suffer for the gospel’s sake. The wicked will receive God’s justice either in this life or in the life to come.

Commentary

Alma 13:1–2. Priests Ordained “After the Order of His Son”

- Alma referred to priests who were ordained “after the order of his Son” (Alma 13:1). The phrase *after the order of his Son* is a reference to the Melchizedek Priesthood. In modern revelation, the Lord stated that before the days of Melchizedek, the priesthood was called “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. But out of respect or reverence to the name” of God, the name was changed to the Melchizedek Priesthood (D&C 107:3–4).



Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained why Alma 13, like many other passages in the Book of Mormon, does not

distinguish between *priests* of the Aaronic Priesthood and *high priests* of the Melchizedek Priesthood: “Book of Mormon prophets gave the title *priest* to officers known in this dispensation as *high priests*. That is, they were priests of the Melchizedek Priesthood, or as Alma expressed it, ‘*the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son.*’ (Alma 13:1–20.)” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 599).

Alma 13:3–5. “Called and Prepared” before the Foundation of the World

- The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that those who are ordained to a calling in mortality were foreordained to that calling in the pre-earth life: “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose that I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council” (*History of the Church*, 6:364).
- Those who were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world” were chosen by God in the pre-earth life because of their “exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3; see also D&C 138:55–56; Abraham 3:22–23).

President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) taught that all of the elders of Israel who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood were foreordained, in addition to the prophets: “Joseph Smith was appointed by the Lord before he was born as much as Jeremiah was. . . . So I say with regard to Joseph Smith, he received his appointment from before the foundation of the world, and he came forth in the due time of the Lord to establish this work on the earth. And so it is the case with tens of thousands of the elders of Israel. The Lord Almighty has conferred upon you the Holy Priesthood and made you the instrument in His hands to build up this kingdom. Do we contemplate these things as fully as we ought?” (*Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham [1990], 281–82; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], 15).

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught that both men and women were given assignments in the pre-earth life: “In the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while

faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. While we do not now remember the particulars, this does not alter the glorious reality of what we once agreed to. You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as are those we sustain as prophets and apostles!" ("The Role of Righteous Women," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 102).

- Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles described the responsibilities God's children have in mortality regardless of their chosen state in the premortal life: "Premortality is not a relaxing doctrine. For each of us, there are choices to be made, incessant and difficult chores to be done, ironies and adversities to be experienced, time to be well spent, talents and gifts to be well employed. Just because we were chosen 'there and then,' surely does not mean we can be indifferent 'here and now.' Whether foreordination for men, or foredesignation for women, those called and prepared must also prove 'chosen, and faithful.' (See Revelation 17:14; D&C 121:34–36.)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 21; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 17).

- President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) described the source of some of the blessings we receive in this life: "All these rewards were seemingly promised, or foreordained, before the world was. Surely these matters must have been determined by the kind of lives we had lived in that premortal spirit world. Some may question these assumptions, but at the same time they will accept without any question the belief that each one of us will be judged when we leave this earth according to his or her deeds during our lives here in mortality. Isn't it just as reasonable to believe that what we have received here in this earth [life] was given to each of us according to the merits of our conduct before we came here?" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 7–8; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 5).

Alma 13:4. Agency Existed in the Premortal World

- How were those in the premortal world able to "reject the Spirit of God"? (Alma 13:4). President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) confirmed the eternal principle of agency as he answered this question:

"God gave his children their free agency even in the [premortals] spirit world, by which the individual spirits had the privilege, just as men have here, of choosing the good and rejecting the evil, or partaking of the evil to suffer the consequences of their sins. Because of this, some even there were more faithful than others in keeping the commandments of the Lord. . . .

"The spirits of men had their free agency. . . . The spirits of men were not equal. They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:58–59).

- As spirits in the pre-earth life, we developed worthy characteristics that showed our abilities. God observed our progress and gave us responsibilities according to our faithfulness. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: "During the ages in which we dwelt in the pre-mortal state we not only developed our various characteristics and showed our worthiness and ability, or the lack of it, but we were also where such progress could be observed. It is reasonable to believe that there was a Church organization there. The heavenly beings were living in a perfectly arranged society. Every person knew his place. Priesthood, without any question, had been conferred and the leaders were chosen to officiate. Ordinances pertaining to that pre-existence were required and the love of God prevailed. Under such conditions it was natural for our Father to discern and choose those who were most worthy and evaluate the talents of each individual. He knew not only what each of us *could* do, but also what each of us *would* do when put to the test and when responsibility was given us. Then, when the time came for our habitation on mortal earth, all things were prepared and the servants of the Lord chosen and ordained to their respective missions" (*The Way to Perfection* [1970], 50–51).

ALMA 13:6, 18

What responsibility does one have after being ordained to the high priesthood?

Alma 13:9. “They Become High Priests Forever”

- Because the Melchizedek Priesthood is “without beginning of days or end of years” (Alma 13:9; D&C 84:17; see also Hebrews 7:3), those who obtain the priesthood on earth continue to exercise it even after death. Thus, holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood who die righteous “become high priests forever” (Alma 13:9).

President Harold B. Lee recounted an experience, explaining that every priesthood office a person holds in this life will have an effect in the next world:

“I had reorganized the presidency of the Ensign Stake. We had named the bishop of one of the wards as stake president. . . .

“Six weeks after they were sustained, the stake president suddenly passed away.

“Then I began to receive a barrage of letters. Where in the world was the inspiration for you to call a man whom the Lord was going to let die in six weeks? They invited me to talk at his services, and some seemed to be expecting me to try to explain why I had appointed a man that the Lord was going to take home in six weeks.

“President Joseph Fielding Smith sat on the stand and heard my attempt to satisfy these people, and he said to me, ‘Don’t you let that bother you. If you have called a man to a position in this church and he dies the next day, that position would have a bearing on what he will be called to do when he leaves this earth.’

“I believe that. I believe that every President of this church, every apostle of this church, every bishop, every stake president, every presiding position will have a bearing on what one is called to do when he leaves this earth” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1972, 129–30; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 107).

Alma 13:10–13. Many Were Called and Foreordained

- Alma taught that there were many who were called in the pre-earth life because of their “exceeding faith” (Alma 13:10). He pled with his brethren to exercise faith again and to “bring forth fruit” to obtain their blessings (Alma 13:13).

President Harold B. Lee explained that although many were called and foreordained in the premortal life because of their valiance, they must exercise faith and good works during mortality to realize the full blessings of their calling (see D&C 121:34):

“God may have called and chosen men in the spirit world or in their first estate to do a certain work, but whether they will accept that calling here and magnify it by faithful service and good works while in mortality is a matter in which it is their right and privilege to exercise their free agency to choose good or evil.

“. . . I fear there are many among us who because of their faithfulness in the spirit world were ‘called’ to do a great work here, but like reckless spendthrifts they are exercising their free agency in riotous living and are losing their birthright and the blessings that were theirs had they proved faithful to their calling. Hence as the Lord has said, ‘there are many called but few are chosen’” (*Decisions for Successful Living* [1973], 169).

Alma 13:11–12. Sanctification

- Alma taught that many became clean through the “blood of the Lamb” and were “sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Alma 13:11–12; see also Moroni 10:32–33). Once sanctified, they “could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence” (Alma 13:12; see also 2 Nephi 4:31). However, even after a person has been sanctified and has felt cleansed by the Holy Ghost, he or she will continue to be tempted throughout mortality. Modern revelation warns, “Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:33–34).

President Brigham Young (1801–77) defined sanctification as follows:

“I will put my own definition to the term sanctification, and say it consists in overcoming every sin and bringing all into subjection to the law of Christ. God has placed in us a pure spirit; when this [the spirit] reigns predominant, without let or hindrance, and triumphs over the flesh and rules and governs and controls . . . , this I call the blessing of sanctification. Will sin be perfectly destroyed? No, it will not, for it is not so designed in the economy of heaven.

“Do not suppose that we shall ever in the flesh be free from temptations to sin. Some suppose that they can in the flesh be sanctified body and spirit and become so pure that they will never again feel the effects of the power of the adversary of truth. Were it possible for a person to attain to this degree of perfection in the flesh, he could not die, neither remain in a world where sin predominates. Sin has entered into the world, and death by sin. [Rom. 5:12.] I think we shall more or less feel the effects of sin so long as we live, and finally have to pass the ordeals of death” (in Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* [1976], 2:248–49).

Alma 13:13–19. Melchizedek, the Great High Priest

- The high priest Melchizedek holds a place of great respect among Latter-day Saints. Alma noted the importance of Melchizedek when he said “none were greater” (Alma 13:19). Who was this great prophet? Melchizedek lived about 2000 B.C. and was the high priest and king of Salem (Jerusalem; see Genesis 14:18). He was the presiding priesthood authority in his day and was the one Abraham paid tithing to (see Genesis 14:20). When Melchizedek was a child, “he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire” (JST, Genesis 14:26). Although he is mentioned only briefly in the Bible, modern revelation confirms he was a man of great faith. Because of Melchizedek’s righteousness, his ministry foreshadowed the ministry of Jesus Christ and thus became the namesake of the higher priesthood (see Hebrews 7:15; D&C 107:2–4).

Alma 13:16. “The Rest of the Lord”

- Alma 13:6, 12–13, 16, 29 mention the “rest of the Lord” (see also D&C 84:24). President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) commented on the meaning of this phrase when he said: “What does it mean to enter into the rest of the Lord? Speaking for myself, it means that through the love of God I have been won over to Him, so that I can feel at rest in Christ, that I may no more be disturbed by every wind of doctrine, by the cunning and craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; and that I am established in the knowledge and testimony of Jesus Christ, so that no power can turn me aside from the straight and narrow path that leads back into the presence of God, to enjoy exaltation in His glorious kingdom; that from this time henceforth I shall enjoy that rest until I shall *rest* with Him in the heavens” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 426).



Alma 13:20. What Does It Mean to “Wrest” the Scriptures?

- The dictionary defines *wrest* as, “To twist. . . . To distort; to turn from truth or twist from its natural meaning . . . ; to pervert” (*Noah Webster’s First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828* [1967]). Thus, those who *wrest* the scriptures change or distort the actual meaning to match their own personal opinion or interpretation. Those who manipulate the scriptures to stir up contention are inspired by Satan (see Alma 12:1–6; 14:6–7). The fate of those who *wrest* the scriptures is their own destruction (see Alma 13:20).

Alma 13:22–26. The Reality of Angels

- The Book of Mormon testifies of the authenticity and purpose of angels (see Alma 13:22–26; 32:23; 3 Nephi 17:24; Moroni 7:29–31; D&C 20:10). In reference to the reality of angels, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“I am convinced that one of the profound themes of the Book of Mormon is the role and prevalence and central participation of angels in the gospel story. . . .

“One of the things that will become more important in our lives the longer we live is the reality of angels, their work and their ministry. I refer here not alone to the angel Moroni but also to those more personal ministering angels who are with us and around us, empowered to help us and who do exactly that (see 3 Ne. 7:18; Moro. 7:29–32, 37; D&C 107:20). . . .



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“I believe we need to speak of and believe in and bear testimony of the ministry of angels more than we sometimes do. They constitute one of God’s great methods of witnessing through the veil, and no document in all this world teaches that principle so clearly and so powerfully as does the Book of Mormon” (“For a Wise Purpose,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1996, 16–17).

ALMA 13:27

What do you learn from this verse about Alma’s love for the people of Ammonihah?

Alma 13:28. You Will Not Be Tempted “Above That Which Ye Can Bear”

- President Brigham Young taught of the constant battle we wage against Satan and sin: “The men and women, who desire to obtain seats in the celestial

kingdom, will find that they must battle [with the enemy of all righteousness] every day” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1954], 392). Each of us must actively choose to avoid and to resist temptation.

Alma taught that we must “watch and pray continually” to avoid being tempted “above that which ye can bear” (Alma 13:28). The Apostle Paul also declared that “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). By following Alma’s counsel in Alma 13:28, we will always be able to resist temptation.

Alma 14:7–11. The Martyrdom of the Righteous

- Through the power of the priesthood he held and his faith, Alma had the ability to deliver the faithful women and children of Ammonihah from their terrible deaths. The Lord did not permit him to do so, however (see Alma 14:11). Alma explained to Amulek that the Lord would receive the righteous martyrs unto Himself as a testimony against the evil acts of their persecutors (see Alma 14:11; 60:13).

While serving in the Seventy, Elder Ronald E. Poelman affirmed that, at times, the Lord permits the righteous to suffer when others exercise agency in unrighteousness: “Adversity in the lives of the obedient and faithful may be the consequence of disease, accidental injury, ignorance, or the influence of the adversary. To preserve free agency, the Lord also at times permits the righteous to suffer the consequences of evil acts by others (see 1 Nephi 18:16)” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 29; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 23).

- Certainly we grieve to consider the deaths of the righteous who suffered at the hands of the wicked. But we rejoice in knowing of their rewards in the spirit world (see Alma 40:12) as well as their final state in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 76:50–70). Doctrine and Covenants 42:46 reminds us: “Those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them.” This does not mean that there is no pain involved in the death of the righteous, but that the eternal rewards for them are so great that in comparison their pains are nothing.

President Joseph F. Smith explained: “It is true I am weak enough to weep at the death of my friends and kindred. I may shed tears when I see the grief of others. I have sympathy in my soul for the children of men. I can weep with them when they weep; I can rejoice with them when they rejoice; but I have no cause to mourn, nor to be sad because death comes into the world. . . . All fear of this death has been removed from the Latter-day Saints. They have no dread of the temporal death, because they know that as death came upon them by the transgression of Adam, so by the righteousness of Jesus Christ shall life come unto them, and though they die they shall live again. Possessing this knowledge, they have joy even in death, for they know that they shall rise again and shall meet again beyond the grave” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1899, 70).

- When the righteous and innocent suffer, some become critical or lose faith. President Spencer W. Kimball offered the following counsel for when we witness suffering:

“If we looked at mortality as the whole of existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life would be calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the premortal past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.

“Is there not wisdom in his giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified?

“If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.

“If joy and peace and rewards were instantaneously given the doer of good, there could be no evil—all would do good but not because of the rightness of doing good. There would be no test of strength, no development of character, no growth of powers, no free agency, only satanic controls.

“Should all prayers be immediately answered according to our selfish desires and our limited understanding, then there would be little or no suffering, sorrow, disappointment, or even death, and if these were not, there would also be no joy, success, resurrection, nor eternal life and godhood” (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [1973], 97).

Alma 14:25–28. The Deliverance of Alma and Amulek

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles used the story of Alma and Amulek to illustrate that the Lord will deliver us from our afflictions, but only after we have proven our faith by submitting to His will:

“Help from the Lord always follows eternal law. The better you understand that law, the easier it is to receive His help. . . .

“. . . The example of Alma and Amulek is enlightening. While striving to do good among the people of Ammonihah, they were taken captive. Amulek trusted his more seasoned companion, Alma, who led him to greater confidence in the Lord. Forced to observe women and children consumed by fire, Amulek said, ‘Perhaps they will burn us also.’ Alma answered, *‘Be it according to the will of the Lord’*—a vital principle. ‘But . . . our work is not finished; therefore they burn us not’ [Alma 14:12–13; italics added].

“The chief judge and others over many days smote, spit upon, starved, questioned, and harassed them with mocking words and threats. Though commanded to speak, they withstood, bound and naked, in silence waiting patiently for the Lord to inspire them to act. Then ‘the power of God was upon Alma and Amulek, and they rose.’ Alma cried, ‘Give us strength *according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance*. And they broke the cords with which they were bound’ [Alma 14:26; italics added; see vv. 15–26]. The earth shook; the prison walls were rent. All who smote Alma and Amulek were slain, and they were freed. . . .

“. . . The Lord will give relief with divine power when you seek deliverance in humility and *faith in Jesus Christ*” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 7–8; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 7–8).

Alma 15:2–3. Zeezrom

- The change in Zeezrom demonstrates the love God has for each of His children and shows His willingness to forgive those who covenant to follow His Son. Zeezrom was a deceitful lawyer in the city of Ammonihah who used his position to accuse Alma and Amulek and destroy that which was good (see Alma 10:13, 31; 11:21). Zeezrom’s deception was revealed, however, and he began to “tremble under a consciousness of his guilt” (Alma 12:1, 7). He changed from an antagonist to a sincere investigator (see Alma 12:8). When Alma and Amulek arrived in the city of Sidom, they found Zeezrom suffering “great tribulations of his mind on account of his wickedness” (Alma 15:3). But as a repentant believer, Zeezrom was healed according to his faith in Christ, was baptized, and became a powerful preacher from that time forth (see Alma 15:6–12). Years later Zeezrom served a mission with Alma and Amulek among the Zoramites (see Alma 31:6).

Alma 15:3–5. Sins Harrowed Up the Mind of Zeezrom

- While repenting and seeking forgiveness, Zeezrom’s spirit and mind had been harrowed up and “become exceedingly sore” (Alma 15:3). President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke of the reality of spiritual disorders that can cause powerful suffering:

“There is another part of us, not so tangible, but quite as real as our physical body. This intangible part of us is described as mind, emotion, intellect, temperament, and many other things. Very seldom is it described as spiritual.

“But there is a *spirit* in man; to ignore it is to ignore reality. There are spiritual disorders, too, and spiritual diseases that can cause intense suffering.

“The body and the spirit of man are bound together. Often, very often, when there are disorders, it is very difficult to tell which is which” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 89; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 59).

ALMA 15:16

What did Amulek give up by choosing to live the gospel and serve as a missionary? What did he gain? (see also Alma 34:8; Ether 12:12–13).

Alma 16:2–3, 9–10. The Words of Alma Were All Fulfilled

- Alma pleaded with “great anxiety” from the “inmost part” of his heart for the people of Ammonihah to repent (Alma 13:27). As their prophet, Alma warned them to repent or be utterly destroyed “from off the face of the earth” (Alma 9:12). The Lord has promised to fulfill all the words of his prophets (see D&C 1:37–38). Alma 16:2–3, 9–10 documents the fulfillment of the words of Alma by recording the destruction of those who rejected the prophets and executed the innocent.

Points to Ponder

- How did men demonstrate in premortal life that they were worthy to be foreordained to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood? (see Alma 13:3–5).
- Why does the Lord sometimes allow the innocent to suffer at the hands of the wicked? (see Alma 14:9–11).
- What can Zeezrom’s change from deceitful lawyer to powerful preacher help you learn?

Suggested Assignments

- Why did Alma say the following regarding Melchizedek: “Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention”? (Alma 13:19). Answer this question by researching the following verses to determine why Alma praised the importance of Melchizedek’s mission: Alma 13:14–19; Genesis 14:18–20; JST, Genesis 14:25–40; JST, Hebrews 7:3; Doctrine and Covenants 107:2–4.
- Using scriptures from Alma 14 and materials from the commentary for Alma 14:7–11 (p. 195), write a brief essay that answers the following questions: Why does tragedy happen to righteous people? How do God’s mercy and justice impact the tragedies of mortality?