

Church of Jesus Christ

December 2020

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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www.gospelrestored.org
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*"I will not leave you
comfortless; I will
come to you."*

John 14:18



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News & Notes

Saints, friends and family. We have missed you and hope that this edition of the MARB Newsletter finds you well and safe. We have resumed services at Mount Ayr and began using the platform, Zoom, to stream both Sunday services and Prayer services online. For those with a tablet, computer or smartphone connected to Internet, you are able to connect with us in a new way. Simply log on to the branch website at

www.gospelrestored.org.
From there you can click on a link

to be joined to the rest of the congregation, after entering a passcode of 1-8-3-0. We have elected to utilize Zoom for our meetings because it allows you to interact with us, instead of just watching like on TV. Here are the current services you may join:

Sundays	9:30-Family worship
	9:45-Adult Class
	11:00-Preaching service
Tuesdays	7PM-Scripture Class
Wednesdays	7PM-Prayer service

We hope to see you soon, on Zoom! Or in person!



THE FIRST WORD

by Sherman Phipps

The first four books of the New Testament each relates a version of Christ's crucifixion as recalled by each writer. (Please read all four in order to "fact check" the following).

When Christ told the disciples He would be killed and resurrected, some of His apostles seemed to think such a thing surely could not be so. How could such a thing happen if He was the Son of God? They did not understand, even though they had the privilege of being under Christ's ministry for some time and hearing Him recite the words of the prophets, that His death was necessary in order to achieve God's plan of redemption and salvation for all mankind. (Matthew 26:54; John 17:1-24) Yet the apostles grieved and wept (Mark 14:26) and apparently at some point in this whole experience all the disciples felt that all was lost and "the cause" had failed and they turned and fled. (Matthew 26:55)

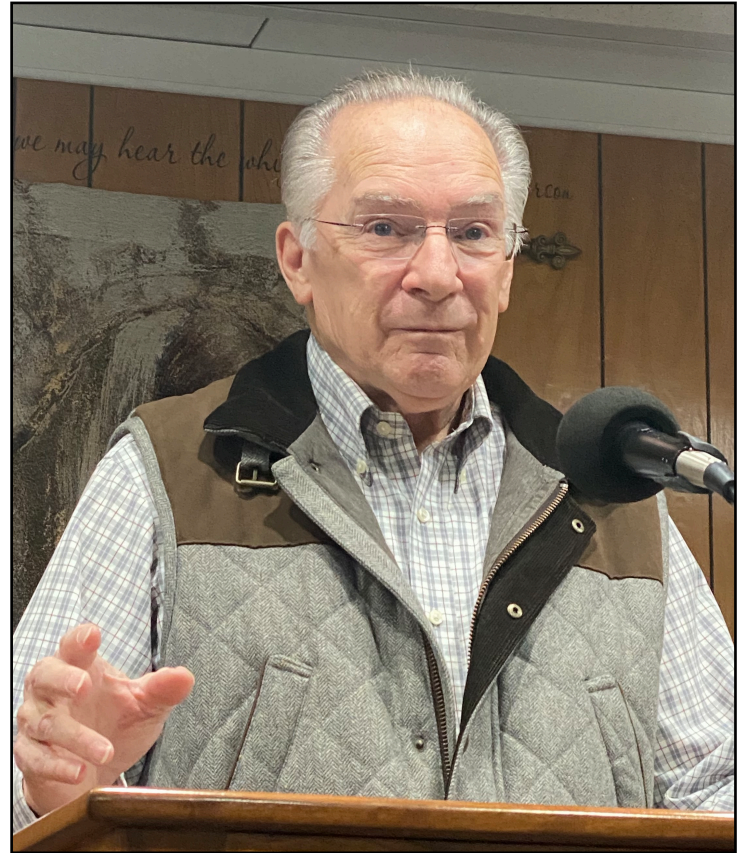
Even Peter denied Him as Christ had foretold.

Why am I reciting this: Well, many Christians have been praying for God to intervene in our Nation's current crisis. But it seems that what we are asking is that our will be done. In many cases this seems to mean that we want to go back to our peaceful, "secure" lives and have the nation go on as it always has. And, when we don't see that happening, we begin to question, and even doubt God and His power. But I would suggest to you that Christ's words in Matthew 25:51-54 may well apply to our current situation.

If so, what is it that must be done in our day in order for the scriptures and the prophets to be fulfilled? We might get a hint from reading 1st Nephi 3:176-180, 187, 201-202, 214-216; Ether 1:29-35 and 3rd Nephi 14. They set out pretty clearly what is required of this nation and this people, and what the consequences are if we fail to maintain Jehovah, the Great I AM, the creator and sustainer of everything that exists as our only God and keep His commandments. If we fail to do this (and we have not) then would not God cease to be God if He did not fulfill His words?

This is not a time to think God is not hearing our prayers, but to repent and pray more. This is not a time to panic and flee from the faith. This is a time to study and know the promises. (Here are just a few – there are many more: Luke 21:33; 1st Nephi 6:17-56; Matthew 24:11; D & C 107:27g; 1st Nephi 7:35-37; 2nd Nephi 5:32-37, 42, 88; *Alma 14:85-88; D & C 36:12e; Genesis 7:68-69)

This is a time to repent and remain faithful, rejoice, obey, praise God and watch as His plan for His people and His Kingdom unfolds!



COVENANT

High Priest Sherman Phipps

Lamoni, Iowa

November 1, 2020

As a Call to Worship High Priest Joel Loving read Alma 4:9-10. *And Alma went and began to declare the word of God unto the church which was established in the valley of Gideon, according to the revelation of the truth of the word which had been spoken by his fathers, And according to the spirit of prophecy which was in him, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who should come*



to redeem his people from their sins, and the holy order by which he was called. And thus it is written. Amen.

Good morning. I picked a scripture this morning from Psalms, Psalms 139. I won't read the whole thing but maybe more of it than I should. This being Communion Sunday it is an opportunity for us to renew our covenant or to reaffirm it maybe is a better word. I thought it might be important for us as we did that to remember what I think is the message of this Psalm. I think it is reminding us that God is everywhere. He knows everything. We can't hide anything from Him and so when we make a covenant with Him we need to be very serious then in what we do with that covenant because He knows what is done with it and His promises then are based on what He knows. It also, I think, expresses to us how much He loves us and how much He wants for us to be successful in the keeping of those covenants.

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance (my very being) was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet I knew none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee. (1-18) Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (23-24)

I didn't really come here this morning to preach. I really just came to discuss a couple of things with you and hopefully share some things that you can think about that will be worthwhile to you. Because that is my hope and my goal, I am not very concerned this morning about whether you even hear what I say or if you remember it but I am concerned, very concerned that you feel the Lord calling out

to you this morning, begging you to look at the covenant that you made with Him at baptism. It is not that difficult. It's really pretty simple, to say anyhow. But it takes a lifetime to do. I hope you will hear Him begging you to fulfill that covenant so that He will be free to bless you and to do everything for you that He has said He will do for His people even from before the beginning of time.

This is important enough to Him that He sent His only begotten Son to the earth to be sacrificed, literally sacrificed for us. I don't know what that means to you or what it says to you. When I think of that, I think of God being God, being completely omnipotent, knowing everything, having complete control of everything and then being willing first of all to give us our agency knowing full well what we would do with it and knowing that we would stumble and fall and that because of that the only way He could preserve us would be to sacrifice His only begotten Son who is one with Him. He knew that ahead of time. He knew that before He created us and yet He went ahead and created us and then He gave us our agency. Then He sacrificed His Son and through that He provided a way for us to come back into His presence with joy and happiness, not with sorrow and regret. He sent His Son and His Son agreed that He would be sacrificed and that He would be willing to take upon Him all of our sins, all of our failings. He would take upon Him everything that keeps us out of the presence of our Heavenly Father so that we could be free of those things and allowed to come back into the presence of His Heavenly Father, our Heavenly Father and to be the beings that God created us to be.

You are going to hear some prayers read on the bread and the wine in a little bit. I hope you will listen carefully to them. They basically say pretty clearly what we are here for today. They ask the Father in the name of His Son to bless and sanctify the bread and the wine to the souls of all of those who partake of it. Is that amazing to you? It is to me when I read that. Here we are sinful creatures and even before we get to this He says already He's prepared to bless and sanctify this bread and this wine to the sake of our souls if we'll just partake of it seriously with a true intent to keep the covenant that we made at baptism.

So as usual God's standing there with His arms out to us. He's prepared to give us everything He's promised. He's just waiting on us to do our part and yes, He gives us a lifetime to do that so right up to that very last second, I believe, if we truly in our hearts repent and humble ourselves and reaffirm that covenant that we made with Him at baptism, He's willing to accept us but let's don't do that. Let's don't wait for the last second.

Jesus speaking in 3rd Nephi the 8th chapter tells us what we are about here today and makes it very, very simple again. Basically it's the same thing. He says, unto the people of His church, them which shall believe and be baptized in His name, that if we will always observe to take this communion and do it in remembrance of His body and of His blood, if we really do that as a testimony unto the Father that we will



always remember Him then He will always remember us. How serious do we take that, that we will always remember Him? If that's what we do here today then He makes the same promise here that He makes in Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants that we shall always have His Spirit to be with us. It brings a smile to my face when I think that God Himself is willing to always be with us no matter where we go, no matter what we become, no matter how far away from Him we try to get. He's always there waiting, holding His arms out, pleading with us to come back, to give ourselves to the fulfilling of this covenant that we made when we were baptized.

So how important is it to us to have His Spirit to be with us? Do we just say the words here today and go on living our lives the way we always have? Or will there be something that happens between you and God here this morning that will get your attention and cause you to understand that if you will keep your covenant with Him to always remember Him and to obey His commandments that He will truly be in charge of your lives, every part of them. He will never leave your side.

You know we have some examples in the scriptures of people who I believe if you read their story you would say they were faithful in keeping their covenant with the Lord. I'm sure they were human and they made mistakes and they had low points. Alma went out to preach to the people and when he got to the City of Ammonihah he preached to them and they pretty much totally rejected him. The scripture talks about how he just decided to turn around and go home so even Alma, and I think of Alma as being a great guy, somebody who really fulfilled the Lord's will, had a point where he kind of gave up. If you know the story you know that as he turned around and started to leave the angel, the same angel that had originally come to him to turn his life around, came to him again and said you need to go back. But the angel also reassured him that he would be blessed of God because of his efforts.

I hope this morning that somehow the Spirit of the Lord will rest on you and reassure you that if you will truly consider the covenant that you made with Him at baptism, to always remember Him and to obey His commandments, that His promises will be yours. We live in a day and age that is, I don't even know how to describe it, full of chaos and tumult. It's depressing. It's discouraging and if you are like me you kind of wonder what in the world is going to happen especially if you look at your children and your grandchildren and everybody else's children and grandchildren. You wonder what is going to happen to them. I don't know what the answer to that is except that I do know if you keep your covenant, you have the Lord's promises and those promises extend even to His care for your family and your loved ones. When I say care I don't mean they won't have to go through trials and tribulations because we know from the scriptures that that's how we grow but the promises are theirs, they are ours.

There are other examples in the scriptures. When I said examples I mean examples of why I think it's important to have the Spirit to be with us. Do you remember Samuel? He went to preach to the Lamanites and as he stood on the wall they tried to kill him with their arrows and their slings, their stones, etc. but it says they couldn't hit him and it specifically says they couldn't hit him because the Spirit was with him. The Spirit shielded him and protected him. We know that the Spirit being with you doesn't always keep you from being hit or whatever but it does when that's what the Lord has in mind for you. If that's the calling that is yours to go and do that thing like Samuel for the Lord, then He will protect you long enough to accomplish what He sent you to do. He will do that for us. He will protect and shield us for the purposes of allowing us to accomplish what He created us and sent us to accomplish.

The next step is when we come to the end of those errands that the Lord has given us, what happens? It's His Spirit that raises us up from the grave. That's said several times in the scriptures. In fact it tells us in the scriptures that it's God Spirit that raised Jesus up out of the grave and it's the Holy Spirit we're told several different places that raises us up from the grave, raises us up from the dead and grants us eternal life with joy and peace in God's presence, if we've kept that covenant.

So this is a really important thing that we do here today. I have a little story that I want to tell you. I debated whether I should waste your time with this story or not. It has a point and I hope it is worth making. I had a divorce case where I was hearing it not trying it. This young man had filled out all the paperwork relative to child support, relative to his income and his resources. Of course, then the court bases the child support according to charts that have been created. It doesn't always make sense. So he prepared all this paperwork and in the paperwork he had shown that he had very, very little income and very few assets and his future looked very bleak. But when he came to court, I can just remember this happening. He was sitting at the counsel table and there were a couple of young ladies sitting in the courtroom who were really not related to the case but who were there for other reasons. They were very attractive and they came in and sat down and he turned and saw them and suddenly, this may sound like it's fiction but it's not. You could just see it. He felt a NEED to impress those two young ladies and suddenly his income that he had shown on his paperwork was wrong and actually he was a very talented, skilled guy. He was making this much on the side doing this and this much on the side doing that. Yeah, he really just had an old junk pickup but it wasn't junk it was a collectible and he had great plans for it. It was going to be worth a fortune. In just that moment when these two young ladies walked in and they got his attention, he lost his focus. It became important for him to get their attention. He forgot what he was doing and he, in his testimony, was very convincing and so while he was testifying I had my calculations out and I tripled the child



support that I had planned to order. Even almost as he got to the end of his testimony you could see he realized what he had done but he kept looking at these two young ladies. Afterwards he came and talked to me and said, ‘Really, really I don’t have that much income, etc.’ I said, ‘I just rule on the basis of your testimony under oath before the court.’

My point in telling you this story is that we are too often, and again I am speaking for myself, easily distracted from what should be the primary and only goal in our life. That is to fulfill this covenant that we reaffirm here today. By allowing himself to be distracted for just a few moments the young man created consequences that affected him for years to follow. (This probably was just in his case.)

In our case if we allow ourselves to be distracted from fulfilling our covenant the consequences can be eternal! Fulfilling or failing this covenant made at baptism and reaffirmed today will determine how/where we spend eternity. It might be helpful, if you are really interested and concerned about “your eternity,” to read Alma 8:63-9:61.

It is my prayer that as you partake of this bread and wine today that you will do so with true intent to repent and renew your efforts to fulfill His commandments and to let your life reflect the light and love of Christ to all those around you. This is sorely needed in our world for the sake of the whole world, as well as our own souls.

My prayer for you, in closing, is reflected in the words of Alma to the Gideonites. *And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive, and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive, And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works; And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless, even as their garments are spotless in the kingdom of heaven, to go no more out. And now my beloved brethren, I have spoken these words unto you, according to the Spirit which testifieth in me; and my soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word. And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess; your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and for ever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.* (Alma 5:39-44)



BEING FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IS NOT HARD!

Priest Rod Bastow

Mount Ayr, Iowa

November 8, 2020

As a Call to Worship Elder Michael Jordison read 2nd Nephi 11:39-55. 39 *Yea, behold, I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven, save it be this Jesus Christ of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved. Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write, shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand. Wherefore, these things shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and they shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; And the nations*



which shall possess them, shall be judged of them according to the words which are written; For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. And notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled; for, for this end was the law given; Wherefore, the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ, because of our faith; Yet we keep the law because of the commandments; And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophecy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. Wherefore, we speak concerning the law, that our children may know the deadness of the law; And they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ, and know for what end the law was given. And after the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him, when the law ought to be done away. And now behold, my people, ye are a stiff-necked people; wherefore, I have spoken plain unto you, that ye can not misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken, shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way: For the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him, ye also deny the prophets and the law. And now behold I say unto you, that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel.

My scripture this morning is selected from Galatians 5:22-23. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance; against such there is no law.*

When I first saw the assignments for this month I wasn't sure what to do. Since we started going online I have resisted any speaking assignments or any assignments to preside. I'm just not comfortable doing that. If I don't have a live audience I just don't think I could feel blessed. I don't think I could feel the Spirit if I didn't have people out here to look at and smiling faces looking back and that would make a difference for me. Since I haven't served since back in March I've really felt out of touch with the Spirit. I wondered how I could expect the Holy Spirit to bless me with any kind of a message to present? When Michael moved my speaking date to today it gave me more of a sense of urgency. The night after he contacted me I don't think I slept. I just kept thinking, 'Lord, I don't know if I can do this. Lord, if you want me to do this, tell me what I should say.' Well, slowly as the night progressed an idea came to my mind, something that I maybe could present today. It was to me a sign that God's Spirit would be with me and I would be able to do this. So it's good to be here. I give credit to our Heavenly Father

for this blessing today and to Him I would give all the praise and all the glory.

After I told Michael I would do this today Monday night I came down with a cough and I was sure it was "it," the big Covid virus. I thought I was dying and was not going to be able to be here today. I called Michael to tell him he better have a backup plan because I'm sure this was it. I love you all but I probably wouldn't be around Sunday. He said he would pray. He must have prayed and I prayed a lot about it and Wednesday I felt good, I felt really good so I have a feeling that God has been blessing me.

When you come upon people you haven't seen in a while they want to know what you have been doing. Silly people. I do the same old routine. Nothing much changes in my life. I take care of the cows. I put up hay. Sometimes I do what Debbie asks me to do but there is always something to do on the farm. I try to keep busy because if I don't keep busy Debbie will keep me busy. I've also just finished (wait for this) my sixth season of coaching Jr. High football, six seasons of doing that so I guess I have one last football story to share with you today. This will likely be the last time for this since I have resigned from this position.

The group that I had this year was a really good group and I really enjoyed them. They were really nice, maybe too nice to be football players. There was no ego there. There was no nastiness. There wasn't a mean spirited bone in any of their bodies. It just wasn't their nature. The season went well. They didn't break any legs or arms. The weather was pretty good. I did have one kid break his foot a little bit but I'm not sure about that. I don't think he was really hurt. There were not as many wins as I wanted. You want to win every game. I expected to win every game but every game we were very competitive. I felt like every game that we played we had a chance to win and I thought we were going to win.

I don't know if I have told you this or not, I don't know how many of you in here have played football but to me football is just a really simple sport. It's 10 guys pushing 11 other guys or in Lamoni's case it's 7 guys pushing 8 other guys down the field. You want to go down either 100 yards or 80 yards so this guy carrying a ball can go across that goal line. That's simple isn't it? How tough can that be? Here's the hard part to it. There's 11 others guys that are on the other side trying to get past the 10 guys so they can grab the guy that's carrying the ball. That's what complicates it a little bit.

As coaches we have the boys practice proper techniques. We teach them how to block. We teach them how to tackle. We tell them this is what you should do. You should do this, this and this. We have these big foam-filled pads that stand up about that tall and they are about that wide. We practice the boys tackling them and they love to do that. They take about a 10 yard run and they attack those things and they



really get after it. We also have this kind of padded sled. It's not like the old sleds they used to have for football. It's kind of got the form of a person on it so it's a little more realistic. They enjoy pushing that sled all over the field. They can't wait for their turn to get there. We do that for a while to help them learn those skills. Then we have them work in small groups tackling and blocking. We do that a little bit and then we finally get to where we can actually scrimmage. We make that look like a game situation so they can practice in a game-like setting. If they don't do it right they do it again and keep working on it.

So you think that by the time you get to the first game everything has been covered. They know exactly what to do in every situation. They know how to block. They know how to tackle. So you think that the game is going to be a piece of cake. But for some reason when they actually get to that game it doesn't happen. The blocking which you have worked so hard on training them to do, they just stand there or they might put an elbow or shoulder out but they don't get into it like what they've been doing in practice. You teach them in tackling to get in tight to the guy, grab him low but in the game they are jumping around, flying through the air thinking I can tackle the guy this way. That's not going to work.

There's a thing called an onside kick where the other team kicks the ball and it's got to go 10 yards and then it is a live ball and either team can get it. Well, we worked on that. We had it not happen to us once but twice where the other team did an onside kick and we didn't get it. You think what happened there? They freeze. They think they are doing it. I told a kid one time, 'You didn't move on that kickoff.' He said, 'Oh yeah I did.' 'No, you didn't. You stood in that same spot the whole time. I watched you.' 'Oh, well I thought I moved.' Why does this happen? Heaven only knows.

I think about us a lot of times. Being followers of Christ it's not that hard is it? Serving Jesus and doing the things that He wants us to do, it's not that difficult is it? We've heard about it. We've talked about it. We know what to do. We practice it. We come and listen every Sunday and the speakers tell us 'you need to be doing this and this.' What happens?

Last Sunday we were here for Communion. We heard Sherman speak. I wish I could remember everything that he said because he did a really good job and I enjoyed it very much. I know that he talked to us about honoring our commitment and he said that when we were baptized we made a commitment with the Lord and that when we take Communion, we are renewing that commitment. We're telling the Lord again that we are going to follow Him. We are going to obey His commandments. The Communion Prayer says that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son and always remember Him and keep His

commandments which He has given us that we may always have His Spirit to be with us. That's what we hear. That's what we say.

Sherman quoted from Alma 5 and said this also. *And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive, and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive, And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.* (39-41) And then he said this *And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess; your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and for ever. And thus I have spoken. Amen.* (44)

That was his message to us. That's what he said we should do. He was telling us those words right there in that scripture from Alma. It's simple. We should be able to do this. We've heard it many times. We've heard that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Right? We know that. When we left that service we had that good Spirit with us. We had felt it. It was with us. We were committed but how long did it last? Did it last until we made it to our homes. For Debbie and I that doesn't take too long. Did it last that long? Did it last a day? Did it last a week? Do we still have that same Spirit that we had last week?

I read a devotional once about repentance that goes like this.

*Our problem is that we think of repentance as something negative. When we recognize our sin, we prefer to "rededicate" our lives to God. We may even tell others we have resolved to be more faithful to God than we were before we failed Him. Yet the Bible does not speak of rededicating oneself. It speaks of repentance! Repentance indicates a decisive change, not merely a wishful resolution. We have not repented if we continue in our sin! **We have not repented if we continue in our sin!***

Repentance involves a radical change of heart and mind in which we agree with God's evaluation of our sin and then take specific action to align ourselves with His will. A desire to change is not repentance. Repentance is always an active response to God's word. The evidence of repentance is not words of resolve, but a changed life.

So many times in my life I've said I will do better. I come to Communion Service and say I'm going to do better but then nothing changes. Maybe we need more practice. It is definitely a game that we need to win. The Zoramites had a tower and every Sunday the people would go up into that



tower, one at a time, and they would say a prayer. They all would say the same prayer. They would thank God that they were good and that others were bad. Each person said that same prayer every Sunday. The rest of the week they never spoke of God. Are we that way? Are we just going through the motions because it's the thing to do?

One thing I did a little bit of this summer, and I don't want to admit this to too many people, was fishing. I don't usually fish a lot until I can get Bob (Rowland) to come over. If Bob comes over I like to watch him fish because he catches something. I just sit there and watch while he catches. I would probably fish a lot more if I had somebody who would clean the fish after we caught them but I don't have anyone like that. I have a nephew named Kevin who loves to fish. He is about my oldest son's age and is quite good at fishing.

This summer he came down a few times. I've been telling him that he needed to come down and fish with me. I have several ponds that we could fish on. Let me tell you a little bit about Kevin. Kevin has cerebral palsy. He got picked on quite a bit growing up because he walks with a limp and he couldn't do a lot of things that the other kids could do. In high school he was a little bit annoying. Somehow, and he's explained this to me before, he decided that that wasn't the way that he wanted to be and he dedicated himself to Christ. As he says it, 'he was saved.' So he became a youth pastor and right now he's associate pastor up here at Wishard Chapel. In fact he's speaking today. If it weren't so late we could go up there and catch it.

You can't be around Kevin for very long before he'll say, 'Let me share this testimony with you. I want to tell you about something that happened to me. I want to tell you about these people that I talked to about Jesus.' He does that automatically. You don't have to beg him to tell you or ask him. You are out there fishing and you are concentrating on whether the bobber is moving or if you are feeling a tug and Kevin says, 'Now let me tell you about Jesus.' I'm thinking, 'Kevin, not now. You can pray that this fish gets landed but other than that I'm not sure I want to hear it.' But I do enjoy going fishing with him. I enjoy hearing these stories that he tells about his experience with the Lord.

He shared one with me that I would like to share with you. He said he was at a Wal-Mart or some grocery store one day and the Lord spoke to him. I thought that was a little odd. The Lord speaks to us. I mean we hear the Lord speak, right? That's just a restoration thing but Kevin said, 'No, the Lord spoke to me and said pay for that guy's groceries up front of you.' Kevin said, 'What! I can barely pay for my own groceries. I've got \$20 worth in here and he's got \$40 worth there. I can't do that.' The Lord said, 'Pay for his groceries. You need to do this.' So Kevin said OK and when they got to the cashier he said that he wanted to pay for the guy's

groceries. He went ahead and paid for the guy's groceries but he still wasn't sure why the Lord was having him do this. But as he walked out to his car the guy came up to him and thanked him for what he had done and he said, 'I've been praying. I've been praying to know if there was a God or not and you showed me that there is.' I thought, WOW! What a wonderful testimony. The man told Kevin that he had answered his prayer. The Lord speaks to us and how do we respond? Do we respond like Kevin would? Do we obey that voice? Is the Spirit within you like it is with Kevin?

I have a friend who I heard one time say that he really struggled and this guy did. He was in rehab a couple of times. He went through a couple of marriages, he's on his second one now. He said, 'I really struggled until I took the word of God from my head and put it in my heart.' We know God's words. We know we need to put them into action.

My wife has inspired me to read the Book of Mormon. Actually she tricked me into doing this. Debbie wasn't raised in the church so she doesn't know the scriptures. I grew up going to Sunday School where you learned the Book of Mormon but she didn't have that. I keep saying just pick up the book more and start reading it so she did. She started reading the Book of Mormon. She said, 'This is difficult to do. This is hard to read. I don't understand all of this.' I said, 'Well, if I were doing it I would get something that is more of a condensed version or more of a storybook type thing. That's the way I would start in and then after you have done that you can go back and the scriptures will make more sense to you. I said, 'We've got the book Between the Covers of the Book of Mormon. It's kind of a condensed version and it's pretty good to tell you the basics of what will be in there.' So I started searching for that. I searched both houses and I couldn't find it. I did find a thing that was my brother's that I had swiped but he probably doesn't care. It had Book of Mormon stories in it so I gave that to her to read. She read that and said, 'What's this about a tower?' I said, 'What tower are you talking about?' She was talking about the Zoramite Tower and she is the one who pointed that out to me.

So I thought I've got to find Between the Covers of the Book of Mormon. I have Between the Covers of the Doctrine & Covenants, I had Bible studies and other books. So we decided to come up to the church, to our library. I thought the book Between the Covers of the Book of Mormon should be in there somewhere but it was not. We searched and could not find it. We did find a book though called The Sword of Laban. Have you ever heard of that book? I must have been the only one who has never heard of that book before apparently. There are four volumes to it. The library has three of those volumes, had three of those volumes. I have them now. Although there is another set that is still in the library and it's just three of the four volumes too. For some reason



volume 2 is not in either set. I don't quite understand that. There must be something really good in volume 2. I have to find a way to get that volume.

I looked at these books a little bit and thought that they reminded me of what I learned when I was growing up in Florence Irving's class when she would teach us the Book of Mormon. She used a book from Thelona Stevens. She had a series of about 4 or 5 books that went through the Book of Mormon really good. I enjoyed that. Of course, Florence could teach you about Halloween and it would be interesting. I thought that maybe The Sword of Laban is similar so I took it home and didn't even give Debbie a chance to read it. I read the first volume right through and thought it was pretty good. It's kind of fictitious in a lot of ways. I don't think they took camels with them but I read that and it was pretty good. In the first volume they got out of Jerusalem, crossed the desert, and got ready to sail across the ocean.

If you read that volume what is your first thought? If you read the first part of the Book of Mormon what do you think? My first thought is why didn't Lehi leave Laman and Lemuel in Jerusalem? None of you have ever thought that before? Just think how much different things would have been over here in this country if he would have left them over there. It would have made things so much easier for everyone involved.

In that first volume they get ready to cross the ocean. I don't know what happened in volume 2 but volume 3 begins shortly after the birth of Christ. They had seen the days when the sun didn't go down so they knew He had been born. How could they doubt any of that? You would think that all the faithful who witnessed that would have been faithful but apparently they weren't. Apparently the country was in turmoil. It was really bad because there was this group called the Gadianton Robbers who are going around terrorizing all of the believers of Christ. They were killing a lot of the priests and the judges and people were scared. They were so scared that a lot of them went to the hills to hide.

I read that and I was thinking this seems familiar somehow. Where have I heard of a country that is divided? There is one side that wants this and another side that wants that and there is nobody much in the middle. This side hates this side and this side hates that side. Where have I heard of that? It seems like it was just recently that that came up somewhere. I'm thinking we have people in our country today, not so much murdering people, but they are saying do whatever you want to do. If it feels good, go ahead and do it. Maybe you were deprived as a child or maybe your great great great grandfather was a slave. It's OK now for you to do these things because of what has happened to you in your life or in your heritage. These people say you don't have to believe in Jesus. You don't have to follow His commandments. It's OK if you marry someone of the same

sex. It's OK if you are pregnant and you go ahead and abort that child. There's no problem with doing that. We know better. We know what they are saying isn't right and we know that God is still in control and that Jesus is coming to restore His Kingdom.

I've heard people say that now that the election is over maybe things will calm down, maybe there won't be the divisiveness that's in the country, maybe there won't be as much hate. I hope they are right, that there is not as much hate between the two sides because we have to love each other. We have to do that but there is always going to be some divisiveness. We're never going to be able to accept some of the things that some of these people that are very outspoken say or that the media promotes. We are NEVER going to be able to accept that.

Nephi and his brother Timothy (I didn't even know Nephi had a brother Timothy) went to the Gadianton Robbers. This is what the book says. I don't know if this is what the Book of Mormon says but this is the way that this book told it. They went to the Gadiantons and found their camp. The Gadiantons had been pretty secretive and used different signs and codes among themselves. But they found their camp and told them that they should repent. They told them that Jesus was returning and that they needed to repent but the Gadiantons grabbed them and captured them and said that they were going to kill them. From what the book said they took Timothy and started throwing stones at him until they had killed him. I know that he did die and that he was raised from the dead. I'm pretty sure that is true. When that happened the skies got dark and storms came up and the people that had been doing those evil things were destroyed and cities that were wicked were destroyed and the whole face of the earth changed during that time.

We know that Jesus is coming. We're not sure what will happen to the wicked people but we know that we want to be those on God's side. That we want to eagerly look forward to His return. We want to be walking in His Spirit. We want His Spirit to be with us.





ALMA SPEAKS TO OUR DAY

Priest Jim Barber
Bethany, Missouri
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I am going to talk about Alma in the Book of Mormon this morning. I try to read the Book of Mormon about every morning. I've read it several times but it seems like every time I read it I keep finding things I either didn't remember or have forgotten. Reading the Book of Mormon kind of sparks my mind to what I wanted to talk about this morning. Mosiah was the last king in the Book of Mormon and nobody wanted to take over the kingship after Mosiah died and so they set up the reign of the Judges and they appointed Alma to be the Chief Judge over all of them. But he noticed after a few years (it says in the 8th year) that a lot of the people were falling away from the teachings of God and they were puffed up and proud. They worshiped money more than they worshiped God and they were just not becoming a very good people so Alma decided that he needed to do something about it. He decided that he would give the judgeship to another man and then he would go out and preach to the people.

The 2nd chapter of Alma verses 23-27 says, *And he selected a wise man who was among the elders of the church,*

and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given, and to put them in force, according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people. Now this man's name was Nephiah, and he was appointed chief judge; and he sat in the judgment seat, to judge and to govern the people. 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. As I read this I compared it to what the world is like today. We seem to have a lot of people who worship material things more than God and have strayed away from following God's commandments.

Alma wanted to do something about this so in Chapter 3:1 it talks about him going into Zarahemla. *Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land. Now the things that he was telling them was that they were lifted up in pride. They didn't take care of the poor people, they thought only of themselves. In verses 54-56 it says, And again I say unto you, Is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions? Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent, or he can not be saved; Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it. So he preached that they needed to be repentant. I'm reminded too that this is what we are supposed to do is to cry nothing but repentance unto this my people. That's what he was trying to do. In verses 77-80 he said And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you, They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.*

I think the song that Tony picked this morning verifies this also that we need to be seeking for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives to lift us up. It says also, *And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying, Go forth and say unto this people, Repent, for except ye repent, ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of heaven. (Alma 3:89) 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; Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another. It goes on to say they are ignoring the poor and needy.

Verses 103-106 says *For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep, doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock, doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him. And now I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice, he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; And he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.* And after he ministered to the people there a lot of them begin to repent of their sins and were baptized. Alma set up the church in the city of Zarahemla and established many churches.

In Alma 4:1-4 it says *And now it came to pass that after Alma had made an end of speaking unto the people of the church, which was established in the city of Zarahemla, he ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church. And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins, were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church. And it also came to pass that whosoever did belong to the church, that did not repent of their wickedness, and humble themselves before God; I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts; the same were rejected, and their names were blotted out, that their names were not numbered among those of the righteous; and thus they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla.*

Alma didn't stop there. After he got things in order in Zarahemla he went on to another city, the city of Gideon and he did the same thing there. *Behold my beloved brethren, seeing that I have been permitted to come unto you, therefore I attempt to address you in my language; Yea, by my own mouth, seeing that it is the first time that I have spoken unto you by the words of my mouth, I having been wholly confined to the judgment seat, having had much business that I could not come unto you.* (Alma 5:1-2) So he wanted to talk to the people there also and he said the same things. In Alma 5:17-18 it says, *But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying, Repent ye, 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.* He had much success here too and he told the people about the gospel of Christ and about the plan of salvation. In 5:40-41 it says, *Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive, And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.* So he established churches there also

and the people became a better people, following the commandments of God.

Then he also went into the land of Melek on the west of the river Sidon and he began to teach the people there throughout all the land. *And they were baptized throughout all the land, so that when he had finished his work at Melek, he departed thence, and traveled three days' journey on the north of the land of Melek; and he came to a city which was called Ammonihah.* (Alma 6:7) Now things looked a little bit different in the city of Ammonihah. *Now Satan had gotten great hold upon the hearts of the people of the city of Ammonihah; therefore they would not hearken unto the words of Alma. Nevertheless Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city: that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance.* (Alma 6:10-11) But the people of Ammonihah rejected him and they said in verses 13-15 *And we are not of thy church, and we do not believe in such foolish traditions. And now we know that because we are not of thy church, we know that thou hast no power over us; And thou hast delivered up the judgment seat unto Nephiah; therefore thou art not the chief judge over us.* They knew that he had given up the judgment seat and so they said you are not judge over us and we are not going to listen to you and they cast him out. Alma was very weighed down. He was very sorrowful because of the things that were happening there and he was in much tribulation and anguish because of these things so he left the city of Ammonihah but while he was on his way . . . *behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying, Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice: For thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou received thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you; and behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. Yea, say unto them, except they repent, the Lord God will destroy them.* (18-21) Now this would be quite a challenge when you had been thrown out of the city and the people were not listening to you and then this angel comes and says you need to get back there but Alma was joyful because he had a second chance to preach to the people.

I know sometimes we get discouraged. We try to share the gospel with people and they kind of turn their backs against us and we kind of walk off and become discouraged. That's Satan's way of getting us to not do what we should be doing which makes us discouraged. We need to lift up our hearts and voices and go back and try to do God's will. God will take care of us if we will do these things. I think there is a lot of that going on today. It's not so much that we're persecuted as Saints but there is so much indifference. People just don't seem to care. If you want to believe in God that's your right but leave us alone. Sometimes that is even worse than being persecuted.



So he went back to Ammonihah *And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah. And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man, Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat? And the man said unto him, I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision, Thou shalt receive.* (24-26) Now this man's name was Amulek and an angel had come to him and showed him a vision and said that he needed to take care of this man that he was to meet. So Amulek took Alma home and fed him and took care of him. In verses 37-39 of chapter 6 it says, *And the word came to Alma, saying, Go; and also say unto my servant Amulek, Go forth and prophesy unto this people, saying, Repent ye, for thus saith the Lord, Except ye repent, I will visit this people in mine anger; yea, and I will not turn my fierce anger away. And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people to declare the words of God unto them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost; And they had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither were it possible that any man could slay them.*

So Alma went out talking again to the people and in chapter 7 verse 6 it says *And they said, Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?* Then Alma said, *Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying, that inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said, that inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments, ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.* (Alma 7:15-16) We've always talked about the promise that God gave the people in this land, the Promised Land, that as long as they obeyed God's commandments they would prosper but when they didn't then they would be cast off. I think the same thing is happening today. We are ignoring God. We're just letting things go by. We're letting things creep in that keep us further away from God.

Amulek also went in and was prophesying of the same thing. I think it was interesting as I read that in Chapter 8 verse 10 *As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me, and said, Amulek, (Now this was back when Amulek met the angel and the angel told him what to do.) return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; For he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house.* So God prepared a way for Alma to come back in to this land. He spoke to Amulek and told him what he was supposed to do. If we go on to verse 18 it says *And now when Amulek had spoken these words, the people began to be astonished, seeing there was more than one witness who testified of the things whereof they were*

accused, and also of the things which were to come, according to the spirit of prophecy which was in them. As I thought about that I thought about how the people had first said to Alma, why would God just send one witness so God sent two. He did the same thing for us. We have the Book of Mormon. It is a second witness that Jesus is the Son of God.

I still remember George Knotts saying that he thought that the Book of Mormon was the best kept secret ever. We don't share the Book of Mormon the way we should. We should be sharing this book all the time and telling people about it. What it actually is is the word of God and it's a second witness that Jesus is the Son of God and we need to be telling people this.

There is one thing that I definitely wanted to share today. It is talking about the judges and in verses 21-23 it says, *Now it was those men who sought to destroy them, who were lawyers, who were hired or appointed by the people to administer the law at their times of trials, or at the trials of the crimes of the people, before the Judges. Now these lawyers were learned in all the arts and cunning of the people; and this was to enable them that they might be skillful in their profession. And it came to pass that they began to question Amulek, that thereby they might make him cross his words, or contradict the words which he should speak.* (21-23) *But it came to pass as they began to question him, he perceived their thoughts, and he said unto them, O ye wicked and perverse generation; ye lawyers and hypocrites; for ye are laying the foundations of the devil; For ye are laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God; ye are laying plans to pervert the ways of the righteous, and to bring down the wrath of God upon your heads, even to the utter destruction of this people.* (25-26) Just stop and think about the judges that we have now who have okayed abortion, okayed gay rights and same sex marriage. You want to blame the judges but then you stop and think, is it really the judges or are they just giving the people what they want? There are so many people that are out demonstrating for gay rights or abortion or whatever, for legalizing drugs. What are we doing? Are we out proclaiming God's word? Are we out doing the things that we need to be doing? We need more Almas and we need more Amuleks. We need to cry unto the people that they need to repent. Otherwise we are going to be destroyed if we don't.

One of the main judges was a man named Zeezrom. He was the most cunning among all of them. *Now Zeezrom was a man who was expert in the devices of the devil, that he might destroy that which was good; therefore he said unto Amulek, Will ye answer the questions which I shall put unto you? And Amulek said unto him, Yea, I will if it be according to the Spirit of the Lord which is in me; for I shall say nothing which is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord.* (68-69) Now the first thing that Zeezrom said unto Amulek was *Behold here are six onties of silver, and all these will I give thee if thou wilt deny the existence of a supreme being.* (70) That was a lot of money and Zeezrom wanted to tempt him



with money because that's what the people there worshiped so he thought that if he would offer Amulek money that he would deny Christ. But Amulek said *O thou child of hell, why tempt ye me? Knowest thou that the righteous yieldeth to no such temptations?* (71-72) And then Amulek said *Believest thou that there is no God? I say unto you, Nay; thou knowest that there is a God, but thou lovest that lucre more than him.* (73-74) Amulek knew that Zeezrom knew that there was a God but Zeezrom was rebelling against Him and he loved the money more than he loved God. Amulek told Zeezrom that he had lied to the people and he had lied to God.

And Zeezrom said unto him, Thou sayest there is a true and living God? And Amulek said, Yea, there is a true and a living God. Now Zeezrom said, Is there more than one God? And he answereth, No. Now Zeezrom said unto him again, How knowest thou these things? And he said, An angel hath made them known unto me. And Zeezrom said again, Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God? (79-85) Isn't Zeezrom actually admitting that he knows there is going to be somebody coming? Isn't he actually saying that it is the Son of God? Amulek says "Yea" but then Zeezrom says, *Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him, I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word.* (87-88) Then Zeezrom said, 'Well you are commanding God to do these things.' He tried to trick him into saying that this wasn't right but then Amulek had to go and say that God could not save them in their sins but he would save them from their sins if they would repent but they had to take that first step. They had to repent.

Then Alma and Amulek both got together and they were talking with Zeezrom. Alma knew that Zeezrom was very troubled and he began to shake and to tremble because he knew that the words they were speaking were true. Even in his misery Zeezrom tried to convince the people that they needed to believe Alma and Amulek but they turned against Zeezrom and they cast him out. During this time Alma and Amulek actually converted a few people but these people were cast out too and men were sent to cast stones at them. Then they took the wives and children and cast them into the fire along with their records. Amulek told Alma that they needed to do something to save these people but Alma said that they could not because it was God's will. He knew that those people that were being stoned and killed would have an eternal reward. Sometimes we think about death but there are a lot of things that are worse than death. If you deny Christ then that is a lot worse but if you allow Christ to enter into your heart and not deny Him, your reward will be great in the next life. Life goes on. It doesn't end with death. We have to choose wisely in this life so that we will have life everlasting with God.

Then Alma and Amulek were thrown into prison. A lot of people would go into the prison and mock them and beat them. *And it came to pass after they had thus suffered for*

many days – and it was on the twelfth day, in the tenth month, in the tenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi – That the chief judge over the Land of Ammonihah, and many of their teachers and their lawyers, went in unto the prison where Alma and Amulek were bound with cords; And the chief judge stood before them and smote them again and saith unto them: If ye have the power of God, deliver yourselves from these bands; And then we will believe that the Lord will destroy this people, according to your words. And it came to pass that they all went forth and smote them, saying the same words, even until the last; And when the last had spoken unto them, the power of God was with Alma and Amulek and they arose and stood upon their feet; And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord! Give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they brake the cords with which they were bound; And when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them. (Alma 10:73-77)

And Alma and Amulek came forth out of the prison and they were not hurt, for the Lord had granted unto them power according to their faith which was in Christ; And they straightway came forth out of the prison and they were loosed from their bands. And the prison had fallen to the earth, And every soul which was within the walls thereof, save it were Alma and Amulek, were slain; And they straightway came forth into the city. (81-83)

And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek were commanded to depart out of that land; And they departed and came out even into the Land of Sidom; And behold, there they found all the people which had departed out of the Land of Ammonihah, who had been cast out and stoned because they believed in the words of Alma; And they related unto them all that had happened unto their wives and children, And also concerning themselves and of their power of deliverance. (86-88) Zeezrom was also in the Land of Sidom and he was very sick. He was burning with fever and he thought that Alma and Amulek probably had been slain but then in verse 91 it says, *Now when he heard that Alma and Amulek were in the Land of Sidom, his heart began to take courage, And he sent a message immediately unto them, desiring them to come unto him.* So Alma and Amulek went to Zeezrom. *And when he saw them, he stretched forth his hand and besought them that they would heal him. And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, taking him by the hand: Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation? And he answered and said: Yea, I believe all the words that thou has taught. And Alma saith: If thou believest in the redemption of Christ, thou canst be healed. And he saith: Yea, I believe according to thy words. (94-98)* *And Alma baptized Zeezrom unto the Lord; And he began from that time forth to preach unto the people. (102)* *But as to the people that were in the Land of Ammonihah, they yet remained a hard-hearted and a stiff-necked people; And they repented not of their sins, ascribing all the power of Alma and Amulek*



to the devil, For they were of the profession of Nehor and did not believe in the repentance of their sins. (105-106) Even though it sounds like Alma and Amulek failed there they didn't really because a lot of the people that believed on their words left Ammonihah. Yes the people of Ammonihah were very wicked people and it goes on further and says that the people of Ammonihah were eventually destroyed.

I think it is well that we remember the things that are in the Book of Mormon and we need to relate them to what is going on today. Christ is still in charge. If you obey His commandments and ask for the Holy Spirit to become a part of your life and be filled with the Holy Ghost, you can do many wonderful things if you will just believe on Him and go out in faith.



CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Evangelist Ron Smith

Lamoni, Iowa

November 29, 2020

Ron Smith started with two scripture verses.

2 Peter 1:16 "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power

and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

2 Nephi 11:48 "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophecy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins."

It's such a privilege to be with you. We come at the time of transition between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Since this is the one time I will have an opportunity to address you in this part of the season, I thought I would just talk about both Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I don't know how many of you pay attention to the President's proclamations for Thanksgiving. Every president since Abraham Lincoln has proclaimed Thanksgiving as a holiday. There were some presidents before Abraham Lincoln that did it, but Abraham Lincoln's stuck, and it has been going on ever since. The proclamations are a reflection of the understandings and the thoughts of the various presidents at the time. I am not going to read them all to you--don't worry about that. I am just going to share little teeny bit, because I think it is so important that we recognize that this country does depend on God. We need to teach our children that we are not following "cunningly devised fables," and that they can "know where to look for a remission of their sins" as the two scriptures that I read this morning said.

When President Lincoln first proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving, it was 1863. The Civil War was still going. He said,

"The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God...It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people."

Then he goes on to proclaim the day that is going to be set apart for Thanksgiving. All of the proclamations start with a little history lesson about why we are here and what is deemed important. And then they generally say something about the State of the Union. Finally they have a little statement where it actually says, this is what I proclaiming. I am going concentrate on these last parts of the documents. By the way, in the days of computers, each president does his own variation, and it gets copied and pasted to the next year. So I don't have to read all 2002 to 2008 of George W Bush because they are all the same, and Obama's are the same, etc. Here is George W Bush's Thanksgiving proclamation:

"I encourage all the people in the United States to assemble in their homes, places of worship, and community centers to share the spirit of fellowship and prayer and to reinforce the ties of family and community to express our heartfelt thanks to God for our many blessings and to reach out in gratitude and friendship to our brothers and sisters



across this land who together comprise our great American family. "

So he acknowledges that we need to be there to thank God. In 2009, it changed with the new president:

"I encourage all the people of the United States to come together, whether in our homes, places of worship, community centers, or any place where family, friends and neighbors may gather, with gratitude for all we have received in the past year; to express appreciation to those whose lives enrich our own; and to share our bounty with others."

Did you notice the difference there? There wasn't any mention of God. It just says we are going to express our Thanksgiving to each other, and those who enrich our lives.

With the present president. God has come back into the proclamation. Donald Trump's 2020 Thanksgiving proclamation, which was just given the day before Thanksgiving this year, says,

"I encourage all Americans to gather in homes and places of worship to offer a prayer of thanks to God for our many blessings."

I just thought I would throw that out and let you know that this Thanksgiving, we are being asked by our president to be thankful to God, and I appreciate that.

When we last gathered, Joel told us that the first Thanksgiving was in 1621. That wasn't really the first Thanksgiving that we have record of. Just so you know, the first Thanksgiving that we have record of was several years before that. It is recorded in Ether 3:13-14.

"And thus they were driven forth, three hundred and forty and four days upon the water; and they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land, they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them."

So I count that one as the first Thanksgiving that we have on record. There is another notable one that I would like to share with you, and that is George Washington's proclamation, which was given October 3, 1879. It starts out like this.

"Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor—and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me 'to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.'"

I find it remarkable that both houses of Congress asked him to have a day of prayer and thanksgiving and acknowledging to God the blessings that He has given. I wonder how long that would take for our country to do these days. Probably not.

FDR's Thanksgiving proclamation recommends that we read the scriptures from Thanksgiving until Christmas and pray and thank the Lord. I find it interesting to see the way that the country has gone. Of course, FDR, Abraham Lincoln,

and George Washington were all in wars. The times we really give our thanksgiving to God are the times we have been involved in that kind of thing. Today I am really grateful that we have been asked to thank the Lord for His blessings.

Having said that, I would like to transition to Christmas. For those of you out in Zoom land, We are going to have a quiz after a little bit. It is open book, and you are certainly welcome to join us. If you want to, get a piece of paper and write down the numbers from 1 to 26. The questions are all true falls except for one. Because we are socially distant, nobody is going to see this except for you. So you don't have to worry. This is not like school where I would collect it, check it, and give you a grade on it. This is for your eyes only. I call this particular presentation, "Christmas and the Book of Mormon."

When we look at the Bible we find that it contains two very different stories of the birth of Jesus. Our tradition has woven these two stories together in ways that make them almost inseparable in many of our minds. But the Book of Mormon adds details that reinforce an understanding of the Christmas story that is quite different in many respects from our traditions. In this presentation. We will refresh our memories by hearing the Christmas stories directly from the Bible, so that you'll have them there in your mind and you can get 100% on the quiz. Then we will take a quiz to make sure we heard the details correctly. Next, I will present a version of the Christmas story that includes the Book of Mormon narrative and hopefully gets more of the Biblical details right than our traditional stories and paintings and songs do. Finally, I'm going to tell you why this is important.

There are two stories in the Bible. The first one we will read is from Luke. If you have your Bible you are certainly invited to read it with me. It is a very familiar story.

(Ron read Luke 2:1-24. If you want to do well on the quiz, you probably should read it now.)

That's the story that we find in Luke, and of course you're all familiar with that story. The other story is from Matthew. It is in the third chapter of Matthew in the Inspired Version and the second chapter of Matthew in the King James Version. But the words are the same in both of those versions.

(Ron read Matthew 3:1-16. If you want to do well on the quiz, you probably should read it now.)

So that is the story from Matthew. Now, you have heard the two stories in the Bible about Jesus birth, and of course we have heard them all of our lives and are very familiar with them. Luke tells about the angels and the shepherds who came to see the Messiah. And Matthew tells you about the Wise Men and Herod and the star and the gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. And now it's time for our Quiz!

So, get something to write with; you may want to keep track. We will give each question and then the answer. You are welcome to keep track of how well you do. No one is going to see your score. No one is going to care. This is just for your own benefit.

Question 1. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem in order to pay taxes. True or False?



It is true. Luke 2:4-5 "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) To be taxed, with Mary his espoused wife, she being great with child."

In some of the translations it says they came to Bethlehem for the census, but that is why the census is done, so they can tax people.

Question 2. Jesus was born in a beautiful palace because he was to be a King, True or False?

False. Luke 2:7 "And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was none to give room for them in the inns."

You see how easy this is. This one is actually kind of interesting because it doesn't say that there wasn't any room in any of the inns or that all of them were full. It says there were none to give room for them in the inns. Remember that Joseph was going back to his hometown, that everybody knew who Joseph was. They were all related to him. And his wife was pregnant and they weren't married, and there wasn't anybody to give room for him in the inns. I think that may have had something to do with it.

Question 3. The shepherds went to the manger, found Jesus, and told everyone who would listen. True or False?

That one is true. Luke 2:16-17 "And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child."

So they actually went and told people about it.

Question 4. The shepherds knew that Jesus was the Christ child because they saw the star shining over the stable. True or False?

That one is false. Luke 2:12 "And this is the way you shall find the babe, he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, and is lying in a manger."

But wait a minute! The picture shows the star, right? (The picture on the screen had the shepherds looking at the star shining over Bethlehem in the distance,) Well, the painter got it wrong.

Question 5. The Wise Men visited Jesus in the stable. True or False.

False. The Bible says, Matthew 3:11 (2:11 KJV) "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother."

Some people think I am splitting hairs on this, but I'm going to split this hair. The scripture says that Jesus was a young child when the Wise Men got there, and that they were in a house. But the picture shows them visiting Jesus in a manger! Wrong!

Question 6. According to the Bible, three Wise Men visited Jesus as a child. True or False?

That one is also false. All the Bible says about these Wise Men, is: Matthew 3:1 (2:1 KJV) "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold,

there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem." It does not say that there were three of them. Why do we think there were three of them? Well, they brought three gifts. And, of course, everybody knows that at Christmas time you can only give one gift, especially if you're a rich person, right? It is just our tradition that there were three of them; the Bible does not say that.

Question 7. According to the Bible, the Wise Men were kings from the Orient. True or False?

That is false. We just read the only verse on the subject, which says that they were wise men from the east. It does not say they were Kings from the Orient.

(Someone in the audience asked) What about the song? Some of our beloved Christmas carols got it wrong too. After the second verse of "The First Noel" I sing the chorus this way:

"Oh well, Oh well, O well, O well. Born is the King of Israel."

Question 8. People in America knew when Christ was to be born. True or False?

That one is true. In Helaman the fifth chapter, we have Samuel the Lamanite standing on the wall of Zarahemla, and he says, Helaman 5:55 (14:2 LDS) "Behold, I give unto you a sign: for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name." Now not only did Samuel tell them five years but Lehi prophesied it would be 600 years. Of course, a prophecy of 600 years in the future can be off a little bit and no one would notice, but Samuel's prophecy said five years, and that's getting pretty close to the time. Some people felt like the time had passed by the time it actually happened, but it was five years from then, approximately.

Question 9. The Bible prophets told of a star to appear at the time of Christ's birth. True or False?

That one is false. There is no prophecy in the Bible about a star to appear. There is one that talks about a star, but it is talking about a person, not a star in the sky.

Question 10. Prophets in America told of a new star to appear at the time of Christ's birth. True or False?

That one is true. Helaman 5:59 (14:5 LDS) "There shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you."

Samuel said there would be a day and a night and a day, that would be light at the time of Jesus' birth, and that a new star would arise, and you will know, because that will be a sign unto you.

Question 11. People in America saw the new star and knew that it signaled Christ's birth. True or False?

That one is true. 3 Nephi 1:22-24 (1:19-21 LDS) "They knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given... And it came to pass also, that a new star did appear, according to the word."

Nephi is talking about Samuels prophecy here. That was actually fulfilled.



Question 12. People in America knew that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. True or False?

I am going to put false there. We may not have every prophecy that ever was prophesied in the Book of Mormon, but but we do have the one from Alma, which said: Alma 5:19 (7:10) "And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers ..."

You must understand that these people had been in the Promised Land for 400 years. Nobody knew where Bethlehem was, but they did know where Jerusalem was, because that is where their forefathers came from. That's where Lehi's family came from and Bethlehem is a tiny suburb of Jerusalem. It is about 3 miles away--not very far. Also, they were in the habit of calling the land by the name of the central city. There actually is archaeological evidence that people in Israel referred to the "land of Jerusalem" before the Babylonian captivity. So Jerusalem is where the American people understood that Jesus was to be born.

Question 13. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. True or False?

False. This may be a little tricky, but it was Micah, not Isaiah, whose prophecy Herod's wise men looked up.

Question 14. Wise men who studied Hebrew Scripture could have known that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. True or False?

True. I kind of just gave it away there. Herod's wisemen looked it up. They found Micah's prophecy that said, Micah 5:2 "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. "

So, if the wise man had studied the Hebrew Scriptures, they could have already known that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not Jerusalem.

Question 15: Wise men who had studied American scriptures would have gone to Jerusalem to inquire with the new King could be found. True or False?

True. Well, I kind of gave that one away, too. If the prophecy you were familiar with said that Jesus would be born in Jerusalem the land of our fathers, you might have gone to Jerusalem to inquire too!

Question 16. Wise men followed the star from the time they first saw it until they found Jesus. True or False?

False. What? Matthew 3:9-10 (2:9-10 KJV) "When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Think about this. Why would Wise Men stop at Jerusalem to ask where Jesus was born, if they had been following the star from wherever they started for however long it took them? Why wouldn't they just follow it? And second, why would they have exceeding great joy when they saw it again? The Scripture says that they followed the star from Herod's place to the house where the young child was.

Question 17. The Wise Men spoke to Herod in a language that he understood. True or False?

True. For this one, we have to read between the lines a bit, but it's not too hard. Matthew 3:7 "Then Herod, when he had called the wise men privily, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared." The word privily means, "privately". See, he asked in front of everybody where the child was born, and they looked it up. Then he called the Wise Men privately and asked them for the exact time the star appeared. Now, maybe he had a translator, but either Herod or his translator would have had to understand the language that the Wise Men spoke, and vice versa.

Question 18 Wise Men from America were familiar with the Hebrew language. True or False?

That one is true. Remember, Nephi, when he got the plates of brass, said: 1 Nephi 1:82 (3:19) "And behold it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers;" That was 600 years before Christ. 400 years after Christ (so 1000 years later,) Mormon says: Mormon 4:99 (9:33) "And if our plates had been sufficiently large, we should have written in the Hebrew;"

Mormon says, we have altered it, but we could have still written in Hebrew. Just like our English that we would write now would not be the same as King James' English. That has been 500 years ago. Writing has changed so it would look a little different, but it would still be English. Mormon is saying the same thing about the Hebrew. So, people who had known the scriptures in America would have been familiar with the Hebrew language.

Question 19. Angels appeared to Wise Men in America about two years before the birth of Christ. True or false?

This one is true. Helaman 5:125-126 (16:13-14) "In the ninetieth year of the reign of the Judges, ... the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled; And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled." And just so you know, Jesus was born in the 92nd year of the reign of the judges so two years before Jesus was born, it says that angels appeared to Wise Men and told them, "he is coming." Three years before that Samuel had said it would be five years, and two years later he came.

Question 20. Prophets or Wise Men left Zarahemla shortly before the birth of Christ. True or False?

This one is true. 3 Nephi 1:1-3, 46 (1:1-3, 2:8-9) "The ninety and first year had passed away... And Nephi, the son of Helaman, had departed out of the land of Zarahemla... and whither he went, no man knoweth; and his son Nephi did keep the record in his stead... Therefore, nine years had passed away, and Nephi, who was the father of Nephi, who had the charge of the records, did not return to the land of Zarahemla, and could nowhere be found in all the land."

The 91st year passed away and Nephi left. Jesus was born in the 92nd year, and nine years later he had not returned. Isn't that amazing? This guy had preached Christ all his life, and Samuel had come and stood on the wall and said it'll be five years before Christ comes, and then three years



later an angel comes and visits wise men and says he's coming. And Nephi, who is in charge of all the records and all the prophecies of all the prophets that have been there for the last 600 years, gives the charge to his son, and he goes on a long trip, and nobody knows where he goes.

I wonder, where would you go. Samuel is never heard of again by the way.

Question 21. Approximately how long before they arrived in Jerusalem did the Wise Men see the new star? (A) One night before, (B) One week before, or (C) Nearly two years before.

The answer is C. Nearly two years. Remember King Herod inquired of the Wise Men privately what time the star appeared. And when he slew the children in Bethlehem and all the area around that, he slew them from two years old and under. "according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men."

Now Herod might have given himself a year on either side so they might have said it was one year ago, but it certainly wasn't the night before. If it had been the night before, Herod wouldn't have had to kill two year old children. There's a difference. You can tell if a child has been born the night before, or born two years before. Herod wasn't really worried about politics, in terms of the individual people who were around him. He killed his own family. he killed his children and killed his favorite wife. He killed all kinds of people because he thought they were going to overthrow him. But still, killing two year old children and under can't make you real popular. And that's what Herod did, according to the time that he found out from the Wise Men when the star appeared.

Question 22. King Herod wanted to find the Christ child in order to worship Him, True or False?

I heard it, Somebody said false. Yes, he slew the children. He was concerned about himself, not about worshipping anybody else.

Question 23. Joseph was warned by an angel to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod soldiers. True or False?

That one happens to be true. Matthew 3:13 (2:13 KJV) "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord, appeared to Joseph in a vision, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and tarry thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

Question 24. The Wise Men gave gifts a gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus shortly before the trip to Egypt. True or False?

That one is true. Matthew 3:11, 14 (2:11, 14 KJV) "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh... And then [Joseph] arose, and took the young child, and the child's mother, by night, and departed into Egypt." I wonder what they did with that gold, frankincense and myrrh? I

never heard that Jesus was a rich man. But these were rich gifts. I suspect that a journey to Egypt and a stay of unknown length there could be rather expensive.

Question 25. 40 days after Jesus birth Joseph and Mary offered a poor woman sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. True or False.

That one happens to be true. Luke 2:22-24 "And when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished; they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord... And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is written in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons."

Well, where did I get 40 days from and where did I get the poor woman's sacrifice? I got that from Leviticus, the 12th chapter. It has instructions for what you do when your first child is born. Leviticus 12:3-8 "If a woman have ... borne a man child, then she shall be unclean seven days;" That means that nobody can touch her. She had touched blood, and so had to be separate from everyone. "And in the eighth day, the man child shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the time of her purifying which shall be three and thirty days;" So she had the seven days and then thirty three more days of purification, and that makes 40 days all together. "...And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled...she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle dove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest; ...And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons;"

So if you're not rich enough to have a lamb and a turtle dove, you can bring just two turtle doves, and that and that will work. And you recall that when Mary's days of purification were ended, she brought a pair of turtle doves to the temple. She didn't have gold, frankincense and myrrh then. And this is 40 days after Jesus was born.

I first became really aware of this in Nigeria, because there, among the Igbo, when a woman has her firstborn son, they wait 40 days, and then they have a big bash. She brings the child to the church, and they dance and they celebrate and give offerings and all of that. And they say they are of the house of Israel. I participated in that one time so the forty days makes sense to me.

So here's the way that I've put together the Christmas story with details from the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Someone is saying, oh, there's one more question. Well, there is one final question, but it comes at the end. My version is not the only way to piece these details together, by the way. Neil Simmons puts them together a little bit differently, but most of the details are about the same. Clearly this is the way I think it works out best. (The following story was given with slides.)

Many prophets prophesied of the coming Messiah. Over 1000 years before Christ, Moses told of a prophet who was going to come. Over 700 years before Christ, Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah. Lehi prophesied that the Messiah would come in 600 years. Adam, Enoch, Noah, David, Zenos, Zenock, Jacob, Abinadi, King Benjamin, Mosiah, Alma, and many others, spoke of Christ. Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that the Son of God would be born in



five years. There would be a day and a night and a day without darkness, and a new star would appear as a sign that Jesus was born. And of course they tried to kill Samuel, but the arrows couldn't hit him, and he jumped down from the wall.

Angels brought the good news to Wise Men in America. Two years before Jesus was born, angels appeared to Wise Men in America saying the prophecies were beginning to be fulfilled. And Nephi, the son of Helaman, left Zarahemla the year before Jesus was born. Nephi, who had looked forward to the coming of Christ all his life, gave the records to his son Nephi and left Zarahemla, and neither he nor Samuel was seen again.

God protected his people. Unbelievers set an evening to kill all that believed in Samuel's prophecy.

Nephi spent the whole day in prayer. The Lord said he would give the sign that night. And the prophecies were fulfilled. That night the sun set, but it did not get dark. The believers were saved. The next day, Jesus was born. Now the Bible says that Jesus was born at night, but when it is day in America, it is night in Bethlehem. That night, angels brought good news to the shepherds near Bethlehem. The angel told them Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And if you were here last week, you heard Jackie Phipp's class in which she said the shepherds may have been the ones that were raising the lambs for the temple sacrifice. And so they understood the significance of being wrapped in swaddling clothes. When the angels left, the shepherds visited baby Jesus. They came to Bethlehem and found Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. When they left, they told everyone that would listen the good news. And a new star arose. The new star was seen, and people who believed Samuels prophecy knew that Jesus was born.

Mary presented Jesus at the temple. Mary and Joseph kept the law of Moses. After 40 days they went to the temple and offered two turtledoves, and in the law, a mother who could not afford a lamb was to offer two turtledoves.

The Wise Men came to Jerusalem sometime after that. It was the land of their fathers, and they came to look for Jesus. Wise Men told King Herod about the star and asked where the Messiah of the Jews was born. Herod's wise men found Micah's prophecy that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. Herod talked privately with the wise men and ask them when the star had appeared. They told him it was about two years earlier. Aaron told them to find the child and report back to him.

The Wise Men visited Jesus. When the Wise Men went left Herod, they saw the star again and rejoice exceedingly, and they followed the star to the house where the young child was. And the Wise Men gave gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Mary and Joseph.

The angels protected Jesus. The Wise Men were warned by an angel not to return to Herod, and Herod ordered all the children in Bethlehem and the surrounding area two years old and under to be killed. The angels also warned Joseph to take the family to Egypt, and they left that night. They stayed in Egypt until Herod died, and they returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. And that is the Christmas story.

So it is now time for Final Jeopardy!

Question 26. Ron Smith believes that there is more evidence that the Wise Men were: (A) Believers in astrology who were Kings from the Orient, or (B) Believers in Christ from America.

The answer is B. I believe they were believers in Christ from America, just so you know.

But why is understanding this so important? Well, I have already taken way too much time, but professors of Bible criticism point out the inconsistencies between the Biblical account and the traditional interpretations, and conclude that these are just fables. They say that Matthew made up his story to emphasize the Kingship of Jesus, and Luke made up his story to emphasize the servanthood of Jesus. Our children need to know how angels worked in former days so they can know what to expect in these days. They shared the good news with the Shepherds and the Wise Men who believed in him and went to see Jesus. And they protected the believers in the Promised Land and Israel. They need to know that can happen still today. Our children need to know that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables" and our children need to know "where to look for a remission of their sins"—that it is Jesus Christ who is our hope.

I hope and pray that the things we have said will help in distinguishing these stories, and let them be one story, with an appropriate emphasis on Jesus Christ and what he does. May God bless you all, and have a Merry Christmas.



We hope that
you had a
Blessed and
Happy
Christmas &
New Year.

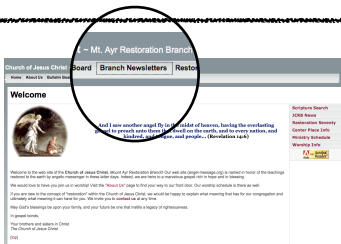


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And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:6-7)

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to Rodney and
Debbie Bastow on their **50th**
Wedding Anniversary.

