

STUDY NOTES

Lesson 10: Mosiah Chapters 21-23

They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

John 8:33-34

Abinadi prophesied before his death that the Nephite emigrant group who left Zarahemla with Zeniff, and were going downhill badly under his son king Noah, would be "brought into bondage...because of their iniquities" (Mosiah 12:2). If we pay attention to this recurring theme through the scriptures we see many examples of people in bondage—the Israelites in Egypt, Israel terrorized by the Philistines, ten tribes deported by Assyria, the Jews in captivity in Babylon, the Nephites warring with the Lamanites, the Jews enslaved under Rome, etc. All of these scriptural examples of God's people being bullied and enslaved by their enemies are meant to teach a basic spiritual lesson true of all mankind at all times and places. Sin is bondage which allows our enemy, the devil, to oppress us; all mankind lives under this bondage to sin until they are freed by the delivering power of Jesus Christ, the only One who can truly make us free.

THE EXODUS: MODEL FOR DELIVERANCE

The great "visual aid" of all scripture about God freeing His people from bondage is the story of Moses and the Exodus. The people go free on the night of Passover when they put the blood of an innocent lamb on their doors, and the angel of death passes them over. We use the word Passover to designate the celebration of this great event. Sin binds us and Jehovah sets us free. In the Exodus story freedom from slavery in Egypt represents freedom from bondage to sin in the world. The price of that freedom was the death and blood of a lamb. But we know that this too is a symbol—a symbol for the ultimate atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jehovah himself. It is not religion or membership in a church that makes people free. It is the blood of Christ that makes us free by paying the price of our sins. When we studied King Benjamin's great speech about the atonement, Christ's "blood" was mentioned four times by the angel as the cleansing sacrifice. In just one example the angel says to Benjamin: "the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood." (Mosiah 3:15?)

Christ's shed blood was the sacrifice that paid for our sins. How do we "use" this sacrifice to come out of our own bondages to sin? We do it by binding ourselves to Jesus Christ through covenant and He then unbinds us from sin. The Lord gave a type of the baptismal covenant in the story of the Exodus by bringing the people through the waters of the Red Sea, a picture of being brought down into "the watery grave" of baptism, which symbolizes death and burial of the "old man" and then coming up out of the water, which symbolizes resurrection, or the new life of the saint or "new man." After the Israelites came out of the Red Sea, they began to be led by a pillar of fire and cloud, which symbolizes the guidance of the Holy Ghost. In other words, by making the baptismal covenant with Jesus Christ we promise to obey Him and put ourselves under his authority, making Him our master and in return, He promises that by following Him in obedience, He will guide and assist us on the strait and narrow path to life and light and freedom. Either way there is a binding. We choose what we are bound to. We all have a master—obedience to some authority is inescapable.

CAN RELIGION MAKE US FREE?

The apostle Paul was bound to Pharisaic religion. He was strictly obedient to the Law of Moses. But he was bound to the Law of Moses, not to God himself. And lots of religious activity and rule keeping alone do not make a man righteous to God. After his conversion Paul tells us that before the Lord met him on the road to Emmaus, he was as religious as a man could get. He said, "we who glory in Christ Jesus, put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself [had] reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in

him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” (Phillipians 3:2-9)

After the road to Emmaus, Paul was still a very religious man. He spent the remainder of his life as a missionary after all. But the heart of his religion was now a relationship to the person of Jesus Christ, not to a set of rules. When Paul the missionary called himself a “servant” of Jesus Christ, the Greek word was much stronger than our word servant; it meant bondservant or slave, a common thing in that culture. Paul chose binding covenants to Christ rather than bondage to a Pharisaic rule manual or being in the chains of sin.

OUR COMMON BONDAGE: SIN

What is the nature of the “bond” that sin puts us in? Paul was bound by it and had no idea that he was. Are we in bondage to sin and equally blind to the fact? That sin is a universal problem, we learned from King Benjamin. “For the natural man is an enemy to God and has been from the fall of Adam and will be forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint.” (Mosiah 3:19) One of the reasons we tend to miss this point is that we are uncomfortable with the characterization of people we know as “sinners.” We tend to choke on the word “sinner.” Sin is bad by definition, and we are uncomfortable judging everyone as bad.

It is interesting to computer search on the word sinner in the New Testament. The Pharisees were always calling people sinners. Their world was divided into righteous people, like them, and sinners, everybody else. They were constantly being shocked that Jesus would eat with “sinners,” meaning people who didn't keep the ceremonial laws as scrupulously as they did. They called Jesus a sinner because he broke the law, according to their interpretation, by healing on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to their criticism with a comment that probably went right over their proud heads. He said, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Mark 2:17) In other words, “all of you are sin-sick at a much deeper and more basic level than you know and you all need the medicine that only the Son of God can provide.”

We are indeed all “fallen.” What could be clearer than the book of Mormon's statement that “we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually”? (Ether 3:2) Luckily for us, this statement does not mean that we are worthless to God or that our spirits are bad¹. We are beloved spirit children of God; but we are in trouble, very real trouble, because of the fall. And it does no good to try to undo the effects of the fall by ourselves by just trying hard to “be good” or “do what is right.” That may keep us out of prison and make us good citizens, but it is not sufficient to save us from the effects of the fall. For that we need to be born again and receive a new heart. We must “put off the natural man and become a saint.” We read a wonderful promise in Ezekiel “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26) (Note: It does not say, ‘You will give yourself a new heart!’)

Thank goodness we are saints, right? Well, a saint is nothing more than a recovering sinner. The saints of Mosiah 5:2 who say “they have no more disposition to do evil” are the sinners of Mosiah 26 whose “dissensions” cause their children to reject the church of Christ. (We'll get to the story in a later lesson.) I think we can learn something here from Alcoholics Anonymous. I knew a wonderful man who was a “graduate” of their program. Over the years that I knew him I never saw him take a drink but I also knew that he referred to himself and thought of himself as a “recovering alcoholic” not a “recovered alcoholic.” The program of Alcoholics Anonymous teaches people to have the humility to recognize their vulnerability and continue to seek for help from a “higher power” to keep their life on track. Just so, a saint must stay humble and prayerful as long as they are in this fallen world and in a body that is imperfect and subject to the lusts of the flesh.

MOSIAH 21: THE WAGES OF SIN

Mosiah 21 shows us King Limhi's people suffering all the down stream effects of their own sins and the sins of the previous generation. Sin may feel exhilarating at the time, but the piper must be paid. In the case of these Nephite people, the wages of sin was quite literally death. After three wars to try and liberate themselves in which they only succeeded in losing vast numbers of their men, they were a broken, humbled people. This is tragic, but far less tragic than a state of hardened sin. The people's afflictions brought them to “humble themselves even in the depths of humility and they did cry mightily to God that he would deliver them out of their afflictions.” (Mosiah 21:14) It is often true that men and women turn to God when there is nowhere else to turn. God will take any open door into the lives of His children. God is never interested in saying “I told you so!” He is anxious to bring His people to Himself.

Mosiah 22 shows God finally acting on behalf of His people to bring them out of bondage to the Lamanites and reunite them with their brethren, the Nephites in Zarahemla. In Exodus 19:4 God says of the

¹ We like to think our spirits are all good. However the evidence is disappointing. One third of all God's spirit children followed Satan. Our spirits are neutral. We are not inherently good or evil. We are inherently free to choose.

Israelites after He delivered them from Egypt, "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." In Deuteronomy 32:11 it explains what this means from the life cycle of the eagle: "An eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, [and] beareth them on her wings." An eagle teaches her young to fly by bearing them aloft on her own wings so they see what flight feels like and get a sense of what it means to be an eagle. Sometimes God carries us so that we see what it is like to be more like Him and less like our earth-bound selves. All the while He is bringing us unto Himself.

After all the heartache of repeated war, when the people attempted to free themselves from the terrible state they were in, God took them upon His wings and whisked them away from their years of bondage, literally overnight. Not only were they free from years of terror and slavery, they had become soft hearted and willing and ready to be bound to God through covenants, which they would soon make in Zarahemla.

GREAT LESSONS FROM CHAPTER 23

Another great example from the scriptures is the life of Alma, the Elder. We so often focus on the life of his son, Alma the younger with his dramatic conversion that we don't realize that the father also had a "turned around" life, one that went from wickedness to great humility and dependence on God. He had been a presumably wicked priest in Noah's court. When he first heard the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ preached by Abinadi he thought he was a free man. But the truth of the prophet's words pierced his defenses and he realized that he was in bondage to sin. He said, "I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance..." (Mosiah 23:9)

Alma repented. That means he said in his prayers what the people of King Benjamin had said aloud: "Oh have mercy and apply the atoning blood of Christ that [I] may receive forgiveness of [my] sins." (Mosiah 4:2) Alma then covenanted with God to serve Him and keep His commandments. The trust he used to have in his position or wealth was now in Jesus Christ. We see that powerfully in Mosiah 23. In this chapter Alma has the chance to be a king over his little band of followers and turns it down, saying "One man shall not think himself above another." (v.7) He knows what he was and how merciful the Lord had been to him. He will not let himself be lifted up in any way by pride, lest he lose the humility that will keep him free of sin.

His trust in God is remarkably tested soon after. One day while his people are tilling their fields, an army of fierce looking Lamanites stumbles upon them by accident. They flee to Alma, terrified by their impending doom. But Alma quiets their fears—the text uses the word "hushed" as if they were children—and reminds them that they may trust God. One does not get the impression that Alma is thinking, "I sure hope this works." He simply tells his people that God will protect them and then walks out and meets the Lamanites head on. It's as gutsy a move as you'll find in scripture. And surely it is there as an example to us.

THROUGH NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN

Sometimes people are in bondage in this life because of sin. Indeed, it is the most common cause of bondage and all of us face this until Christ sets us free. But there are other bondages that, like this one faced by Alma's people, come to them through no fault of their own. These people had been set free from their sins and they were the covenant children of Christ. But suddenly, they find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Perhaps the bondages we face come because of someone else's sin, like a parent or spouse. Perhaps we simply end up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes life hands us heavy burdens just because this is a fallen planet. (Think of refugees from war torn countries.) These things are a condition of our mortal existence. Our choice is to meet them as Alma did, head on, in faith. We should "not be frightened, but ... should remember the Lord [our] God and he [will] deliver [us]." (Mosiah 23:27) That way, whatever trouble comes will not destroy but temper us.

Because of their faith there is no loss of life in the encounter, but the Nephites are put in bondage to the Lamanites, with Amulon, Alma's former fellow priest, as the overseer. Amulon took out his bitter hatred for Alma upon the people by exacting heavy taxes and spiteful and tyrannical humiliations. But in these daily adversities, just as in the moment of crisis, Alma's faith is strong and sustaining. Once, when Alma had faced the bondage of his own sins, he found that "after much tribulation, the Lord did hear my cries, and did answer my prayers." (Mosiah 23:10) We will see in our next reading that Alma has faith in this same method for deliverance from this new physical bondage to his enemy.

We read in 1 Corinthians 7: 22, "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's free-man: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." Alma's people may be in temporary bondage but they know in their hearts that they are truly free, because they have become Christ's servants through their baptismal covenants. Just so may we become truly free, and able to face any difficult situation that life may throw at us, knowing that God is in charge of our lives. We have put ourselves under His authority through our kept covenants and He cares for the lambs of His fold. It was Alma that invited his hearers to baptism by saying "Behold, here are the waters of Mormon, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light..." (Mosiah

18:8) It was the prophet Nephi who reminded his people "he gathereth his children ...and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture." (1 Nephi 22:25)

No matter what you are called to pass through, remember that if you are His, you are numbered and He knows you. His covenant children are called as His servants. They live under orders. Christ is our Lord and Master. We have all been called to that high and holy calling. In this church there is not a service level and a spectator level. In order to find our lives (as Alma did) we have to lose our lives. That is a double blessing. We should be proud to serve in so great a cause and find such incredible meaning in our lives. And secondly, like Alma's people, when we are His, we are also under His protection. Nothing can happen to those who are His that He doesn't know about and care about and can't help us with. The latter-day promise to Oliver Cowdery is ours also: "Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love." (D&C 6:20)

Extra Credit Quiz: ☺

1. A sinner is:
- A) A pimp, terrorist, drug-addict, anti-Mormon, embezzler or someone like thereunto.
 - B) A human being who insists on having things their way.