

June 24-30, 2024

## Alma 13–16

“ENTER INTO THE REST OF THE LORD”

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**Summary:** *Alma 13. Men are called as high priests because of their exceeding faith and good works—They are to teach the commandments—Through righteousness they are sanctified and enter into the rest of the Lord—Melchizedek was one of these—Angels are declaring glad tidings throughout the land—They will declare the actual coming of Christ. [About 82 B.C.]*

*Alma 14. Alma and Amulek are imprisoned and smitten—The believers and their holy scriptures are burned by fire—These martyrs are received by the Lord in glory—The prison walls are rent and fall—Alma and Amulek are delivered, and their persecutors are slain. [About 82–81 B.C.]*

*Alma 15. Alma and Amulek go to Sidom and establish a church—Alma heals Zeezrom, who joins the Church—Many are baptized, and the Church prospers—Alma and Amulek go to Zarahemla. [About 81 B.C.]*

*Alma 16. The Nephite monetary system is set forth—Amulek contends with Zeezrom—Christ will not save people in their sins—Only those who inherit the kingdom of heaven are saved—All men will rise in immortality—There is no death after the Resurrection. [About 82 B.C.]*

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### Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

#### Where can I see the past, present and future?

Alma teaches, as prophets taught in the past and as they teach today, to look forward to the past! In other words, our memory must be “before” us so that we can learn from the past. At the same time, our future is before us as well. In that way we have the advantage of a “wide screen” view of life. “. . . again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember . . .” (**Alma 13:1**)

#### Where was I before birth?

In the last lesson we looked at the “Order of the Church.” Alma also speaks of it as the “Order of the Son.” He teaches us to look forward to the redemption. As we are using the past to define our forward

progress, it stands to reason that our earth life was preceded by a past, or in other words, a pre-earth life. Today, this is a doctrine quite unique to Latter-day Saints, yet it is scriptural. The concept of pre-earth life can be found in Jewish writing before Maimonides (1138-1204) and among the Dead Sea Scrolls (about two thousand years ago). I think that the term “foundation of the world” presupposes an existence “before now,” even a pre-earth-life. “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands.” (**Psalms 102:25**) “Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth . . .” (**Isaiah 48:13**) “. . . the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.” (**Zechariah 12:1**) “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

(Jeremiah 1:5) “. . . for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

### How can I define time?

God’s time has a differentiation to man’s time. God is without beginning or ending of days (man’s days). “And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.” (JST Genesis 6:70) “Therefore, unto this parable I will liken all these kingdoms, and the inhabitants thereof--every kingdom in its hour, and in its time, and in its season, even according to the decree which God hath made.” (Doctrine & Covenants 88:61)

### How does less become more?

Another consideration is that God’s math has a differentiation to man’s math. Man will think that 100% goes farther than 90%. Yet God’s instruction is to bring the tithes, 10%, to him and that the remaining 90% will go farther than the 100% could. Alma reminds the people that Melchizedek paid tithes. Those tithes were part of the true order of things. The Jewish view of tithing still has some biblical meaning even though Jews do not have an order or organized way of collecting and distributing tithes. The Hebrew words used for tithes are: *terumat*, “heave offerings,” and *ma’aserot*, “tithes.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### What is the Jewish explanation of tithing?

“During Temple times Israelites would set aside a portion of their agricultural products as tithes which were given to the priests, Levites, and alternately to the poor or were to be taken to Jerusalem and eaten there. The Bible only prescribes tithes for grain, wine and oil, but the rabbis extended this obligation to cover all agricultural and horticultural produce.” “Before the produce was considered fit for consumption, a small

amount was first set aside for the priest: this was called *terumah gedolah* (‘major heave offering’). The Bible itself does not stipulate a fixed amount but the rabbis said, ‘A generous person will give a fortieth, an average man a fiftieth, and a mean person a sixtieth.’ From what remained, a tenth was set aside for the Levite: this was known as *Ma’aser Rishon* (‘first tithe’); from this, the Levite himself would separate a tenth for the priest, called *Terumat Ma’aser* (‘heave offering from the tithe’). During the third and sixth years of the seven-year sabbatical cycle, a special tithe was given to the poor, consisting of one-tenth of what remained, and called *Ma’aser Ani* (‘tithe for the poor’). In the other years of the cycle, the poor man’s tithe was not separated, but instead a second tithe (*Ma’aser Sheni*) was taken and either set aside to be eaten later in Jerusalem or redeemed for a sum of money which would be used to buy food in Jerusalem, to be consumed there.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### What was tithing used for and what was the benefit?

“The tithes served the purpose of supporting the priest and Levite who did not have any ancestral holdings of land and were occupied with the Temple service and other ritual duties, of supporting the poor, and of strengthening the position of Jerusalem in the consciousness of all the people of Israel. Basing themselves on the close similarity in sound between the words *te’aser* (give tithes) and *tit’asher* (become rich), Rabbi Johanan said: ‘Give tithes so that you will become rich,’ and Rabbi Akiva added that, ‘tithes are a fence which guards one’s riches.’ After the exile from Erez Israel, pious people became accustomed to give one-tenth of their earnings to charity, although this ‘tithe’ is of comparatively modern origin.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **What is the current-day Jewish view of tithing?**

“It is still customary among Orthodox Jews to set aside tithes from all produce of the Land of Israel, and the produce marketed by *Tnuva*, the large agricultural collective, is tithed at source before it is sold. The *Terumah* part is either destroyed or used as fodder for animals owned by priests; because they are ritually unclean, the *Kohanim* (priests) themselves cannot eat it. The other tithes are distributed to the poor and needy.”

“Included in the commandments of tithing was the obligation to set aside a tithe of dough for baking, called *Hallah*, to be given to the priest. Nowadays it is customary to set aside an olive's bulk from the dough and burn it.” “The priests were allowed no share in the land; in compensation certain benefits were assigned to them and these originally formed their sole source of income. 48 towns in various parts of Erez Israel were allocated for their residence. Those who found no employment in the Temple earned their livelihood through teaching as they traveled throughout the country. For the maintenance of the Levites, a tenth (tithe) of all the early produce was set aside for them. The Levites in turn contributed to the priests a tenth part of that which they had received from the people (*Ma'aser Min ha-Ma'aser*).”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

### **How was the priesthood a distinct right?**

In ancient days, the Levites carried the responsibility of the priesthood. There may have been exceptions such as Nazirites who may have had priestly duties (in that they were not allowed to be by or touch the dead) yet were not from the tribe of Levi. Today, for the Jews, the priesthood is still not an acquired, but a hereditary, right. “All priests (*Kohanim*) and Levites (*Levi'im*) are descendants of the tribe of Levi, but priests are a distinct

sub-group, the heirs of Aaron, the first High Priest. The distinction given to the tribe of Levi to serve as Levites is explained in the Bible as having been based on their zealotry toward God after the sin of the Golden Calf. Aaron's special distinction as priest was based upon his being Moses' brother and his role as Moses' mouthpiece before Pharaoh. The importance of maintaining the hereditary integrity of the priesthood can be seen from the fact that when the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity after the destruction of the First Temple, all those who claimed priestly rank but were unable to produce documentary evidence of their descent from Aaron were disqualified ([Ezra 2:62](#)).” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

### **What was included in priestly duties?**

“The principal duties of the priests were those connected with performing the sacrificial service. They would also serve as teachers and instructors in the laws of the *Torah*. In the course of time, the number of priests increased to such an extent that it was necessary to divide them into twenty-four groups. Each group (*Mishmar*) served in the Temple in rotation, one for each week. In addition, each group was subdivided into several families who each served one day. This arrangement gave every priest an opportunity of discharging his duty. However, at the three main annual festivals, (*Pesah*) Passover, *Shavuot* (Giving of Torah) and *Sukkot* (festival of booths), all the twenty-four divisions officiated simultaneously.” “Levites were entitled to serve at the sanctuary as assistants to the priests. Their duties included serving as custodians of the sanctuary, as musicians, judges, scribes and teachers.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

### **What remains as an echo of Jewish priestly rights?**

“In the course of time, the real control of priestly pedigrees has been replaced by family tradition. The duties and privileges of priests are now limited to pronouncing the priestly benediction on festivals (and Sabbaths in Israel), the symbolic redemption of the firstborn males on the 31st day after birth (*pidyon ha-ben*) and the precedence of a *kohen* at functions such as the *Torah* reading.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) The idea of calling for a “Kohen” when the *Torah* reading is done implies the special spiritual nature that came from the priests understanding of the word of God.

### **What is an ultimate witness of belief?**

“Jewish history is replete with examples of those willing to die for their faith from *Shadrach, Meshach* and *Abednigo*, who in the Book of Daniel refused to worship an idol and thus endangered their lives, up to the present generation of Soviet Jews who suffer indescribable hardships rather than give up their Jewishness. Under Antiochus Epiphanes, Hellenizers applied violent methods toward the Jews. The Fourth Book of Maccabees is almost entirely a sermon on the meaning and glory of self-sacrifice. Whereas in Christian and Muslim thought martyrdom is chiefly regarded as the act of individuals warranting canonization as saints, in Judaism it remains a task for each and every Jew to fulfill if the appropriate moment should come.” “Rabbinic tradition teaches that Rabbi Akiva (second century C.E.), just before he was tortured to death by the Romans, recited the *Shema*, explaining to his pupils that he now understood what it meant to love God with all one's heart, soul and might. Ever since, many who have sacrificed their lives because of their religious beliefs, have done so with the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) on their lips. (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

### **When does Martyrdom become better than surrender?**

There is a wall sculpture at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, that carries a consequential message. Naphtali Bezem's sculpture includes a panel depicting the Jews being brought into the slave/extermination camps. Underneath is a “broken woman” representing the broken Jewish family line. Next to her is a broken fish with wings. A fish is sometimes used as an art metaphor for the spirit. Its wings seem to represent an ascension to heaven, a reward for martyrdom. It reminds me of Alma's response to Amulek's plea to have Alma use his prophetic priestly power to stop the carnage. “But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.” (Alma 14:11)

### **What is the difference between martyrdom and dying to kill others?**

It may have some significance in understanding the difference between righteous martyrdom and those would cause themselves to die in their evil intent destroying and killing others. “Martyrdom is permitted only in the most exceptional circumstances; to lay down one's life, even for the fulfillment of divine laws, when such sacrifice is not required by law, is regarded as a mortal offense.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) In Alma's day, the lawyers and judges of the land rejected the priestly teachings and those

who accepted them. The persecution and ultimate death of the believers became a martyrdom to the faithful that resulted in their heavenly reward. It also became a condemnation to the lawyers and judges. Not a thing will escape our memories. Yet, for those who turn to Him, The Lord stands by every harrowing recollection with peace, power, comfort and salvation.

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;”  
**(Isaiah 61:1)**