

July 15-21, 2024

Alma 30–31

“THE VIRTUE OF THE WORD OF GOD”

Summary:

Alma 30. Korihor, the anti-Christ, ridicules Christ, the Atonement, and the spirit of prophecy—He teaches that there is no God, no fall of man, no penalty for sin, and no Christ—Alma testifies that Christ will come and that all things denote there is a God—Korihor demands a sign and is struck dumb—The devil had appeared to Korihor as an angel and taught him what to say—Korihor is trodden down and dies. [About 76–74 B.C.]

Alma 31. Alma heads a mission to reclaim the apostate Zoramites—The Zoramites deny Christ, believe in a false concept of election, and worship with set prayers—The missionaries are filled with the Holy Spirit—Their afflictions are swallowed up in the joy of Christ. [About 74 B.C.]

**Supplemental
Jewish and
Holy Land
Insights**

**How important are
death rituals for
religious Jews?**

Ancient Israel
insights are echoed

today with a brief description of death, mourning and burial. In Judaism, there has always been a great deal of procedure surrounding death. There is an immediate preparation of the body which includes washing, completely immersing and anointing of the dead. There are periods of mourning. The immediate mourning after death is called *Shiva*. It is derived from the word for seven and *Shiva* continues for seven days. Another period of mourning continues for a month. There is also an annual remembrance of death called *Yarzeit*. “When a person dies, the body is covered with a sheet and a lighted candle placed at the head. There is an ancient custom to cover all the mirrors in the house and to pour out any water that was in containers or vessels at the time of death. This latter practice may be the result of superstitious beliefs, but it has been suggested that it was a way to tell the neighbors that a death had occurred without having to say the actual words. In strictly Orthodox circles it is customary for men to stay with the body from the time of death until the funeral

and recite the Book of Psalms. This is a sign of respect to the deceased.”

(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

**What reason might Jewish mourning
have been suspended on Sabbaths?**

There is a certain symbolism to covering the dead with a white sheet. The emblems of the restored sacrament are covered with a white sheet in remembrance of the Savior’s death and resurrection. The Jewish religious practice of pouring out of water can also be seen as symbolic of “living water” being removed. It should be noted that Jewish mourning is suspended on the Sabbath. To continue the symbolism, it seems that mourning of a mortal person was suspended anciently on Sabbaths in order to reflect in the future on the Savior’s death and resurrection.

**How can I recognize Jewish customs
reflecting death?**

“*Shivah* . . . is the Hebrew (word) for ‘seven’ and refers to the seven-day period of mourning which starts immediately after the funeral. All those required to mourn stay indoors (normally at the house of the deceased) for the week. They sit on low stools or on the floor and may not wear shoes made of leather. At the funeral, the

relatives perform the rite of *Keri'ah*, which is making a tear (or rip) in the lapel of their outer garments. During the week of *Shivah* they wear the torn clothes. A very ancient custom is for neighbors and friends to prepare the first meal for the mourners on their return from the funeral." "The mourning is suspended for the Sabbath and should a major festival occur during the week, it stops the *Shivah* altogether." "After the *Shivah*, a modified period of mourning continues till the thirtieth (Hebrew: *Sheloshim*) day after death. During this period the mourner should not attend places of entertainment or participate in social gatherings. A mourner may not marry during the *Sheloshim*. When mourning for parents many of these laws apply for the whole year after death, and a son recites the *Kaddish* (Jewish Prayer for the Dead) at the daily services for the whole year." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What coincides with a "birthday?"

For the Jews, a death day is important as a memorial day. "*Yahrzeit* . . . is a *Yiddish* word which comes from the German meaning 'year-time' or anniversary. Among *Ashkenazi* (European) Jews it has come to refer exclusively to the anniversary of the death of a relative for whom one was required to mourn. The anniversary is according to the Hebrew date of death, and so in the secular calendar it will be on different dates each year. Very pious people observe a fast on the *yahrzeit* of parents and it is the general custom that a candle or light is kindled for the whole day, and that a mourner who is able to, leads the daily services on that day. Sons recite the *Kaddish* prayer on the *yahrzeit* of parents." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) There are other occasions of mourning that include remembrance of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem as well as experiencing blasphemy. "*Tish'ah be-av* [is] (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of

Av, usually falling within the first week of August) is the traditional day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. It is the culmination of the three weeks of mourning that start on the 17th of *Tammuz*. On *Tish'ah be-Av* in the year 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar stormed the great Temple built by Solomon, turned its marbled columns and gilded rooms into a useless pile of rubble and exiled Jerusalem's inhabitants."

How does blasphemy correspond with death?

And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death." (Leviticus 24:16) ". . . the code of Jewish law, tells us that whoever hears blasphemy in any language from a Jew must tear his garment as if he were in mourning." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) Just to remind us, Caiaphas, in his response to supposed blasphemy, tore his clothing at the mock trial of Jesus. "And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death." (Matthew 26:63-66) To many Jews, Christian missionary work among the Jews is considered blasphemy and even anti-Semitic. There was a certain Rabbi Mordechai Goldstein in Jerusalem who counteracted this activity by conducting seminars and lectures to

refute missionaries and Christian polemics.

What is a source of Jewish written prayers?

Prayers in Jewish religious settings are usually prepared – to be followed, rather than spoken from the heart. Yet, many of these prewritten prayers carry and admonition to go beyond the “do” and embrace faith (*Eumunah*). In the Synagogue Prayers; “. . . During the morning service the entire *Hallel* is said on each of the eight days (of *Hanukkah*) and a special addition, *Al Ha-Nissim* (For the miracles . . .) is made in every *Amidah* (central prayer of Jewish liturgies) as well as in the Grace After Meals (*Birkat HaMazon*). The reading from the *Torah* describes the sacrifices brought by the princes at the dedication of the sanctuary, and the kindling of the candelabrum; special *haftarot* (readings from the Biblical Prophets) as prescribed for the Sabbaths of *Hanukkah*. In the *Ashkenazi* (European) rite, a hymn called *Ma'oz Zur* (O Fortress, Rock of my salvation) is sung. This song originated in Germany, probably in the 13th century. It consists of five stanzas, each of which describes a period in Jewish history, the last being the *Hanukkah* miracle. A final stanza is a prayer for the coming of the Messiah.” “Foremost among the Jewish holy places is the Western (Wailing) Wall, the only visible remaining part of the destroyed Temple of antiquity. Prayer services are held at the Wall daily from sunrise to sunset, and thousands of people come there for prayer or meditation. Other Jewish holy places in Israel include the graves of biblical figures, famous rabbis and pious men. Visiting holy graves has long been a Jewish tradition, and some graves have become the focus of pilgrimages.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Jews may describe private prayer as a meditation or yearning. “The yearning for

the Messiah underlies the . . . teaching that the mystical task of the Jewish people is to correct the imperfection in the world -- the existence of evil and impurity. This can be done through devout prayer and strict observance of the precepts of the *Torah*. Only then will the Messiah come.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What value could come from disputations?

“Throughout history Jews have often been called on to defend their faith against non-believers in public debates known as disputations or polemics. Often these disputations were conducted in friendly atmospheres of mutual respect, but all too often these debates took on aspects of bitterness.” “In the Greco-Roman era, pagan polytheism challenged Jewish monotheism. The *Mishnah* (written Jewish oral traditions) records that pagans asked the Jewish elders in Rome: if God does not desire idolatry, why does He not destroy it? The Jews answered: If men had worshiped objects unnecessary for the cosmos He would have destroyed those objects, but they worship the sun and moon and the stars and the planets. Should He destroy His world because of fools?” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What are Israel's legal religious rights?

There are, however, religious rights in Israel. There are two legal systems, secular and religious so that religious people of some major religions in Israel can take disputes or legal processes to their own judges. The British set up this system before the State of Israel was formed. There are several different religious courts throughout Israel. They include the Orthodox Jews, Moslems, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Catholics, Syrian Orthodox and the Bahai's. The Bahai religious courts are the only ones established after the State of Israel was recognized, albeit, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was

recognized as a non-profit Religious Entity as early as 1977.

What is the truth about Israel and non-proselytizing?

It is also important to know that there is NO law in Israel prohibiting proselytizing. An anti-missionary society has tried to pass such an anti-proselytizing law in Israel but has failed every attempt. The closest thing they managed to bring through the Israeli Knesset is a law prohibiting bribing people to change their religion. (Latter-day Saints don't pay people to become members. they charge them!) On the other hand, although there are Christian missionaries in Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not engage in any proselytizing in Israel. It is their choice. The agreement signed by President Howard W. Hunter and added as an addendum to the lease of property where the BYU Jerusalem Center stands, clearly states that the Church will not engage in missionary activity if it is against the laws of Israel.

Who requires "signs?"

"Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." (John 4:48) The freedom of

religion in the Book of Mormon account shows that Korihor became so wrapped up in his polemics that he believed the misinformation he was teaching. Much like the Pharisees in the days of Jesus, he wanted to be given a sign. Notice how the scriptures repeat the principle. "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas . . ." (Matthew 12:38-39) The Zoramites were so wrapped up in their misinformation that they praised God that they were "better" than others. In the Book of Mormon, a high stand on which the Zoramites, apostate Nephites, prayed (Alma 31:8-14, 21) was called *Rameumtom*, a high place. "High or exalted" in Hebrew can be called a *Ramah* or *Ramat*. Note the similarity of the word *Ramah* and "*Ramah-umptom*." In contrast, Alma and his companions praised God for the joy they experienced in a humble, unpretentious way. Their time of joy was filled with the spirit of the Holy Ghost.