

July 22-28, 2024

Alma 32–35

“PLANT THIS WORD IN YOUR HEARTS”

Summary: *Alma 32. Alma teaches the poor whose afflictions had humbled them—Faith is a hope in that which is not seen which is true—Alma testifies that angels minister to men, women, and children—Alma compares the word unto a seed—It must be planted and nourished—Then it grows into a tree from which the fruit of eternal life is picked. [About 74 B.C.]*

Alma 33. Zenos taught that men should pray and worship in all places, and that judgments are turned away because of the Son—Zenock taught that mercy is bestowed because of the Son—Moses had lifted up in the wilderness a type of the Son of God. [About 74 B.C.]

Alma 34. Amulek testifies that the word is in Christ unto salvation—Unless an atonement is made, all mankind must perish—The whole law of Moses points toward the sacrifice of the Son of God—The eternal plan of redemption is based on faith and repentance—Pray for temporal and spiritual blessings—This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God—Work out your salvation with fear before God. [About 74 B.C.]

Alma 35. The preaching of the word destroys the craft of the Zoramites—They expel the converts, who then join the people of Ammon in Jershon—Alma sorrows because of the wickedness of the people. [About 74 B.C.]

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

Where and when did the word synagogue develop?

Alma’s teaching in the streets, homes and *synagogues* mirrors an openness of religious instruction still typical in the homes, streets and *synagogues* of Israel. However, the ultimate worship site should be the home. That is where the *Kiddush* (wine, then bread ritual) and the ritual of bringing in the Sabbath, *Kabbalat Shabbat* is done. The word *synagogue*, however, comes from the Greek language. In Hebrew it is called *Bet Knesset*, which means meeting house. “Throughout the ages, the *synagogue* has played a major role in the survival of the Jewish nation. It is perhaps the most important institution in Jewish religious and social life. However, there is no exact information about the origins of the *synagogue*. Some scholars claim that it dates back to the very beginnings of

Judaism. Others point to the fact that in the days of the Temple, all sacrifices were accompanied by prayer and so a place of prayer similar to a synagogue must have existed. The most reasonable explanation, however, is that the synagogue originated during the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.) when, deprived of the Temple in Jerusalem and feeling deserted in a strange land, the Jews would gather to read the Scriptures and pray for salvation. Upon return to Erez Israel, they brought this tradition back with them, and records from the Second Temple period show that there were then numerous *synagogues* in existence, including one on the Temple Mount itself.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

When did the word “synagogue” replace “temple?”

“In the first century C.E., the *synagogue* emerged as a firmly established institution. It is mentioned in all literary

sources of that period, from various parts of the world. When the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., many of the rituals formerly conducted there were transferred to the *synagogue*, and organized prayer became the substitute for sacrifice. The sages referred to the *synagogue* as *Mikdash Me'at* ('little sanctuary'), viewing it as a miniature Temple where Jewish congregations all over the world could gather and, to some extent, fill the void left by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. "The remains of numerous synagogues dating back to the first few centuries of the Common Era have been uncovered, attesting to the widespread acceptance of the institution at that time. One of the largest such finds is the synagogue in Capernaum in the Galilee, probably built in the fourth century C.E. It was constructed entirely of stone around a courtyard, with a women's gallery on three sides. The Dura Europos synagogue on the Euphrates river is one of the most famous discoveries of this period. Its decorative frescoes were found almost as clear as when first painted 1,700 years before. And the ruins of the synagogue in Ostia, Italy, constructed at the end of the first century and altered and enlarged during the next 300 years show that it was apparently a lavish edifice decorated in marble and mosaic." ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) It should be noted that the ruins of Capernaum's synagogue have evidence going back to Jesus' time. It is evident that a major addition or "remodeling" was done later which lasted into the fourth century C.E.

What occurs in the synagogue?

"During the Middle Ages, the social aspect of the *synagogue* became increasingly important. There was practically no activity in the daily life of the Jew which was not reflected in the life of the synagogue." "Any person having a complaint could interrupt the service and petition for redress. Mourners were

officially comforted in the *synagogue* --- a custom which prevails to the present day and the appearance of bridegrooms on the Sabbaths preceding and following their weddings were occasions for congregational rejoicing." "In the 18th century, the rise of *Hasidism* (a form of orthodoxy) had a definite effect on the synagogue. The Hasidim disapproved of the formality of the synagogue service and so introduced a much more informal atmosphere. They abolished ornate furnishings, salaried officials, and overly structured services." "With the Reform movement a century later, the *synagogue* took a turn in the opposite direction. The Reform *synagogues* were elaborate, impressive buildings. Many became known as 'temples' and included an organ and choir loft." "These innovations caused much controversy within Judaism and were regarded by Orthodoxy as sacrilegious imitations of Christian places of worship. In actual fact, there are very few laws concerning the appearance of the *synagogue*. *Halakhah* (Jewish legality) stipulates only that the room must have windows and that the ark which holds the *Torah* scrolls must be on the wall, facing Jerusalem with the synagogue entrance directly opposite. The law recommends that the site of the *synagogue* be the highest spot in the city, but this has not always been feasible. Nevertheless, many traditions have arisen regarding the layout of the *synagogue*. The ark holding the *Torah* scrolls is usually covered with a decorative curtain called a *parokhet*. In front of the ark there is usually a light that is kept burning continuously (*ner tamid*) which serves as a symbolic reminder of the Temple *Menorah* (7-branched candelabra). The honored members of the community sit along the eastern wall beside the ark. In Orthodox circles, the cantor's desk is usually in front of the ark, and the *Torah* (law) is read from an elevated platform called a *bimah* in the center of the synagogue. The women are

separated from the men by a *mehizah* (partition) or else they are seated in a balcony above the main prayer area.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How did “temple” memories fade into modern synagogue services?

“The Reform *synagogues* changed much of this traditional pattern. They moved the *bimah* (podium or platform) to the front of the synagogue and allowed women and men to be seated together. These practices were also taken up by some Conservative congregations. The Sephardi (Eastern) synagogues also differ in some details from Ashkenazi (Western) ones. For example, *Sephardim* have no cantor's desk and the entire service is conducted from the *bimah*.” “In modern times, a change has taken place, not only in the appearance of the *synagogue* but also in its functions. Mordecai Kaplan of the United States formulated the concept of the ‘synagogue center’ where the Jew would spend most of his leisure time. Its primary purpose would be not just prayer and study but cultural and social activities as well. Many Jewish centers today have, in addition to the synagogue, libraries, club rooms, classrooms, gymnasiums and other facilities.” “Despite external differences, *synagogues* the world over are treated with the same dignity and respect. The rabbis have ascribed to the synagogue a holiness patterned after that of the Temple. Frivolity, gossiping, eating, drinking, sleeping and transacting business (other than charity and the redemption of captives) are all forbidden in the synagogue. One may run when going to a *synagogue*, but on leaving, one must walk in order to indicate reluctance to part with the sanctity of the house of prayer.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How did clothing begin to identify Jews and later, religious Jews?

Travelers to Israel and densely Jewish populated areas immediately notice the

stark black clothing of the very Orthodox Jews. The style of their black clothing is often a geographic indicator of their recent forefathers. The type of clothing usually indicates what sect of Orthodoxy they belong to. There is some explanation of the common black clothing that extends back hundreds of years. In an effort to remove castes and cliques, the simple black clothing served as a common denominator. Today, the material used, the cut and design seems to denote the opposite. The modern clothing practices stem from Europe and the Diaspora. “Wherever Christianity spread through Europe, laws were passed discriminating against the Jews, who were forced to wear distinctive clothing and were often forced to live in separate areas.” “Fine clothing was worn on Sabbath and holidays, simple clothing on weekdays. In many countries medieval rulers ordered Jews to wear certain colors, or special hats, or a Jewish badge. Although Jews wished to appear different from gentiles in dress and hairstyle, these orders were often made hatefully, and the Jew wearing his black pointed hat or red badge felt very bitter.” “Jews in North Africa, Yemen, Meshed and Persia were forcibly converted to Islam. They were obliged to wear specially distinctive clothing, often black, and to bear a ‘badge of shame,’ and sometimes a wooden calf's head as a sign of their idolatry in Sinai.” “From the 13th century the Jews of Bohemia were humiliated, herded into ghettos and forced to wear special clothing.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What is read during synagogue services?

Jewish worship practices include reading the *Torah* (the Law) and *Haftarah* (the Prophets). Anciently, this was done once a week on the Sabbath. In modern times there are three readings each week: Monday, Thursday and Saturdays (and extra Sabbaths). The entire Bible text (Old

Testament) is covered in one year. “The custom of reading the *Torah* publicly is very, very ancient --- originating with Ezra in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E. At some later date a reading from the *Nevi'im* was added; this corresponding passage from the Prophets is known as the *Haftorah*.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) When Jesus lived, apparently the Jews read the “Law and the Prophets” just once a week. “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” **(Luke 4:16)** It is a probability that the reason Jesus’ ministry was three years long was so that he could read, review and instruct the Disciples through the entire Law and the Prophets at least once during those training years. His instruction brought back the spirit, reopening the purpose of the law. The spirit was replacing the wall of do’s and don’ts. The obsession with the “letter of the law” had drawn the Jews away from an understanding of and looking forward to the redemption. In fairness, as stated in the previous lesson insight, 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 happened to spiritual expression in religious Judaism?

Throughout the years, Jews have weaned themselves away from spiritual experiences. One orthodox religious man stopped and listened to me while I was the Israeli Tour Guide teaching a group through Jerusalem’s Old City, Jewish Quarter. Presumptuously, he yanked at my microphone and said, “You don’t

understand the Jews, it’s the commandments that count, not the faith.” He continued, “Faith is made of feelings and feelings can be changed, but the commandments are fixed.” It is simply do’s and don’ts.” In a recent meeting of Jewish and non-Jewish scholars discussing the “Bible Code,” one prominent rabbi said, “There is no Holy Spirit in Judaism anymore!” Other comments that apply with “faith and works” show the waning posture of Jewish faith, today.

When did the rift between Judaism and Christianity widen?

“The developing rift between Christianity and Judaism and the animosity after their final split in the second century C.E. produced many great disputations. A crucial one occurred about the time of the *Bar Kokhba* revolt (c. 135 C.E.) between the Christian Justin Martyr and the Jew Tryphon. While the two adversaries expressed friendship toward each other, the argument became bitter. Justin challenged the Jewish concept of being the chosen people by pointing out their low position in the world and argued that the Jews were made to follow laws as punishment by God. Tryphon countered by charging Justin with selecting his quotes from the Bible, and - proclaiming that true salvation comes from strictly following the law, not from faith in man. He argued, ‘. . . when you forsook God, and placed your hope in a man, what kind of salvation yet remains for you?’”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What widened the gap between earth and heaven?

Shem Tov Ben Joseph Falaquera (c. 1225- 1295 C.E.), was a philosophical author and translator. He made philosophical statements that echo Jewish thinking. “Although he was a prolific writer, little is known about his life. He was born in Spain and probably lived in border

provinces of Spain and France. His writings are representative of the scientific and philosophic thought of the Jews of his time and are permeated with the striving for enlightenment. He endorsed the study of secular philosophy, arguing in his *Sefer ha-Ma'alot* (Book of Degrees) that ' . . . the truth is to be accepted from every man.' He subscribed to the view, widespread in the Middle Ages, that the Greek philosophers had derived their teachings from ancient Jewish sources. Like Maimonides, Falaquera maintained that it is the development of the intellect which leads to salvation." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) Jewish thought that is found more in the reform and Conservative Jewish movements than the Orthodox includes a diminished sense of life after death. Thus, salvation is an earthly endeavor. "This sociological interpretation of Judaism is accompanied in Reconstructionism by a theology which proposes that Judaism should not emphasize life after death, or salvation in the next world. It should place its belief in salvation in this world, and thus improve the human personality and establish a free, just and cooperative society. It does not consider the Jews a chosen people, or the *Torah* divine revelation to Moses." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

What changed the personal nature of private prayer?

Even in modern times, prayer and worship for the Jews is usually prewritten. It includes a mannerism of moving and chanting that shows the worshiper is praying and using language different from that used in daily chatter. "In recent times, many attempts have been made to adapt the traditional prayer texts to the sensibilities of modern readers. The Reform Movement began in fact with the adoption of fundamental changes in the liturgy so as to harmonize the content of the prayers with Reform theology. For example, all references to sacrifices or to

the desire for a return to Zion were completely excised from the prayer book. In addition, free translations into the vernacular of many of the prayers were produced, and these were used in place of the traditional Hebrew texts. During the last 100 years, following the changes which developed within Reform ideology, several 'authoritative' prayer books were issued by the Reform movement, the most recent and most radically revamped version having appeared in 1974. In similar fashion, the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements have produced prayer books (with full translations into the vernacular) to suit the needs of their prayer rituals." "In general, biblical prayer was spontaneous and personal; the more formal aspect of worship probably consisted of bringing sacrifices at set times and with a fixed ritual. It seems, however, that even during the period of the First Temple there were already some prayers whose wording was set and which were always recited on certain specific occasions. Some scholars, basing themselves on **Psalms 55:18** and **Daniel 6:11**, believe that the practice of worshiping at least three times a day may be traced back to the biblical period." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How did written, prescribed prayers overrun Judaism?

"Even though there is no specific biblical verse which commands daily prayer services (for exceptions see Grace after Meals and *Shema*), the rabbis of the *Mishnah* (c. 200 C.E.) and the *Talmud* (c. 200 C.E.) assumed that Jews pray at least three times a day, once in the morning (*Shaharit*), once in the afternoon (*Minhah*) and once in the evening (*Ma'ariv*, sometimes called *Arvit*)."

"Because the times of the services and even the words which were to be recited, were fixed, there was a danger that prayer would lose its vitality and become mere routine. In order to overcome this danger,

the rabbis urged the worshiper to meditate before he began to worship, to think of 'before Whom he was standing' in prayer, and to create a new prayer every time he worshiped. They placed great emphasis on the emotional aspect of prayer, calling it 'service of the heart' and stressing that God appreciates most the pure intentions of the worshiper. Later authorities sought to embellish the fixed prayers with original poems (*piyyutim*,) or with short introductions (*kavvanot*) whose purpose was to direct the heart and mind of the worshiper. Melodic chanting was used as a means of increasing *kavvanah* (devotion) and worshipers were taught to sway as they prayed, thus throwing their entire body into the worship."

(*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How shall I pray?

The prophets taught a form of worship and prayer that focused on the Lord instead of concentrating on personal mannerisms. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the *synagogues* and in the corners of the

streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." (**Matthew 6:5-8**) Our place and nature of meeting with God is personal. It is private. Alma's concept of planting a seed and observing its growth and fruit is personal and done in solitude with God. It is a natural characteristic of our humanity that most religions do not teach. Noteworthy in our search for learning to pray are the words, pondering, meditating, and yearning. This manner of seeking, praying, and meeting with God is so that we can see, hear, and feel the ways of the Lord that bring us back to Him.