

Come Follow Me Podcast  
Elo Viz Production  
Week 26  
Alma 13-16

This week is going to be a tough one. One of the hardest stories we encounter in the Book of Mormon. After Alma and Amulek conclude their debate with Zeezrom, he is miraculously converted so much so that he pleads with those that are condemning them that he is the one that is guilty and offers himself in place of Alma and Amulek. Then this horrific scene: this is in Alma 14 verse 8:

“And they brought their wives and children together, and whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be **cast** into the fire; and they also brought forth their records which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be **burned** and destroyed by fire.”

Alma and Amulek are forced to watch this martyrdom. With their hands stayed by God.

When we read about things like this we all seem to ask the same questions: Why did God let this happen? Some are even so shaken by this reality that they fall away from God, justifying that if God is really good and loving and kind why would He let something like this happen. It is a question that I believe everyone in their lifetime has asked at least once. And it is not just this event, there are many throughout history that leave us scratching our heads. Like when God commanded the children of Israel to go in and kill all of the Canaanites. Or Nephi slaying Laben, or Abraham asked to offer his son as a sacrifice, the floods of Noah, and the list goes on and on.

I hope to be able to help you work through some of this moral conflict this week or at least to give you a glimmer of hope and understanding why these things happen.

First let me start by saying that God is good, He is kind, gracious and He is a God of miracles. And it is important to understand that He does not inflict punishment or allow things to happen to good people for no reason. In the scriptures and in life we find that God's plan is just and He is doing His work among his children whether we believe it is correct or not. And before we look at this specific example in Alma let's look at one that may seem a little more harsh.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 20 God commands Joshua and the children of Israel to go into the land of Canaan and Destroy every breathing thing. Men, Women, children, animals, everything. Most would agree that this corporate capital punishment is cruel and uncalled for. But, here is a little secret: The scriptures don't have verses. Yes, it's true that we read the scriptures with chapters and verse, but when it was written it did not have verses. Having the scriptures segmented like this is very handy for us to use for references and to find certain spots but it also has a down side. We tend to look at each verse or chapter as its own revelation and we forget to look at it as it was written. We miss a lot of the narrative because we pause and jump around.

What was going on at this time with the people that lived in the land of Canaan was complete and total evil. For 400 years God had warned these people to repent. They were engaging in incest, homosexuality, bestiality and even child sacrifices. (Leviticus 18:24-27) They worshiped an idol named moloch. It is believed that they were giant metal statues of men with a bull's head. They would light a fire underneath it to make it red hot, then they would place their newborn children on it and burn them to death. I mean just horrific things these people did.

And we hear things like this and we wonder why God waited 400 years to destroy them. Do you see this dilemma? This topic is used by most atheists to disprove the existence of God. But here is the problem. By what standard are you judging the God of the Bible? Because if there is no God there is no objective standard. It is just your opinion. So for someone to say that the God of the old testament is evil we must first acknowledge the existence of God. Because if God doesn't exist then who is to say what the moral standard is? You? Other men? If God does not exist then there is no moral standard. And if someone concedes that there is a moral standard then they must also agree that God exists. And then once we establish or accept the existence of God we can then deal with the question of: Why does God allow evil things to happen? Or Why doesn't God stop all the evil in the world?

When God kills someone or has someone killed is He murdering them? That's an interesting question. The definition of murder is: the unjustified taking of an innocent human life. But here is the clincher: God is the creator of all things. He created life and He can take it away. When God removes someone from this mortal realm, He is simply moving them to another location in the spirit realm. And if He chooses He could put them right back here into this mortal realm with the same body. We see many examples of this in the scriptures. So this proves that God is incapable of murder. He can take and give life as he pleases.

Now, going back to this example when God orders the destruction of the people of Canaan we see a bit of mercy. In deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 1 God gives a list of all the people that Israel needs to destroy. In verse 2:

“2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, *and* utterly **destroy** them; thou shalt **make** no **covenant** with them, nor shew mercy unto them.”

And then this interesting statement just following this command, Verse 3:

“3 Neither shalt thou make **marriages** with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.”

So, how is it possible for them to destroy the people and then to not have them intermarry? Well, for all you sports enthusiasts out there here is an analogy. When your favorite football team beats the opposing team by a landslide. What are you most likely to say about this game? I have heard things like. “They were annihilated.” or “They destroyed them.” When we say this do we literally mean that they killed everyone on the opposing team? No, it simply means that they were beaten. Similarly this seems to be lost in the translation but to destroy a people does not always mean to kill everyone. In ancient times it was their history,

their records, their genealogy and their freedom. They would take people and after they won they would destroy any proof of where they came from. But that is just a side note for your consideration on this topic.

So, to answer this question: Was it fair for God to have the people of Canaan destroyed. Considering what we have learned I believe that most would say yes. And most would argue that God should have destroyed them long before the 400 years. But we would also argue that what is happening in the Book of Alam, God should have stopped. That God should not have let those innocent believers get burned to death, or any number of atrocities that happen in the world every day. We believe that God should step in and keep evil from happening. But, there are two problems with this statement. The first is that: If this is true, if we truly believe that God should destroy the evil from the earth, what is to say that he doesnt start with you, or start with me. Because we do evil every day. Sure, we could argue that other peoples evil is more evil than ours, but evil is evil in the sight of God, sin is sin in the sight of God. All are unclean before the maker and none is worthy of His presents. So, if we are to make that statement we must be willing to admit that we are a part of the problem and include our own sins and self in the destruction or cleaning of the earth.

The second problem with this statement is that one of the most important things, one of the greatest gifts we have ever received was our agency. We have the ability to choose good from evil, right from wrong. And with that agency comes the weight of our choice. If we choose to use our agency to do good then the blessings and glory and knowledge of the mysteries of God are huge in our lives. However, if we choose to do evil, the consequence of those choices demands the justice of God, or some might say: the wrath of God.

Here is Almas explanation to a questioning Amulek:

“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)

Later in the story these “evil” men did receive God's judgment. A miraculous judgment, they were crushed to death by the prison walls after an earthquake. And we say in our hearts: finally, why didn't God do that sooner, maybe before the martyrs fire.

Here is what I have learned from hard experiences. 18 years ago we lost our second child during his birth. There was a complication with the pregnancy. And after a minor surgery my wife went into labor at 22 weeks along. Our tiny little boy was born weighing only 16 ounces, he fit in the palm of my hand. He lived for an hour and then quietly passed onto the next life. We went through many faith shaking years to follow. How could God let this happen? Why did such an innocent life end so soon? Why didn't God save him? We also went through all the self

evaluation. Did we do something wrong? Was God mad at us? Or, was there something we should have done to change the outcome? All of these lead to deep reflection about God's plan and His infinite wisdom.

In all of this I will tell you what I learned. I learned that God is more boundless in His mercy than we are able to believe or conceive. I learned that His plan is both just and merciful. I learned that our mortal finite minds struggle to comprehend what He has planned for us before the world began. I learned that God knows each and every one of you so intimately, better than we even know ourselves. I learned that in the premortal life we choose the hardships that we were willing to endure to gain the knowledge and experience that God has. That we may someday become like Him. I also learned that through every trial and struggle we have, God is a lot closer than we realize. I learned that when we weep in agony and pain, that he weeps with us. Of this truth I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.