When Alma the Younger returned to Zarahemla following his mission to the Zoramites, “he caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining to righteousness” (Alma 35:16). The Book of Mormon contains a significantly larger amount of counsel from Alma to his wayward son Corianton than to Helaman and Shiblon.

Within Alma’s teachings, we discover a concise explanation of the Fall of Adam and three elements necessary to reclaim each individual from the Fall, namely, death, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. This chapter will discuss the Fall of Adam and these three elements in Alma’s teachings to Corianton and also in the inspired teachings of modern apostles and prophets. This chapter will conclude that we can control only one of the three elements necessary to reclaim mankind from the Fall: whether we use the Atonement to repent of our sins and forgive others.

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The Book of Mormon is “a just and a true record” (3 Nephi 5:18), but it is by no means an exhaustive history. The prophets who wrote and compiled the Book of Mormon stated that they could include only a very small portion of what happened among their people (see Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 5:8; 3 Nephi 26:6; Ether 15:33). These prophet-writers carefully selected the material they incorporated into the record. Concerning the small plates, Nephi stated: “The fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved. Wherefore, the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world” (1 Nephi 6:4–5; emphasis added; see also 2 Nephi 4:15).

In other words, Nephi and other Book of Mormon prophets included information by inspiration that would lead readers to come unto Christ and be saved. President Ezra Taft Benson summarized this truth: “The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us . . . Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning, [Mormon] abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us . . . We should constantly ask ourselves, ‘Why did the Lord inspire Mormon (or Moroni or Alma) to include that in his record? What lesson can I learn from that to help me live in this day and age?’”

Thus, one of the most important approaches to the Book of Mormon is to study its stories and doctrines and then apply its principles to the situations we encounter in our daily activities. While knowledge of the Book of Mormon is important, such knowledge is ultimately hollow unless used to live better lives. Concerning the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book.” Consequently, throughout the following discussion of the Fall of Adam and the three elements necessary to be reclaimed from it, this chapter will suggest valuable ways we might incorporate these important
principles into our own lives to become more effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

“THE VIRTUE OF THE WORD OF GOD”

When Alma the Younger learned that the Zoramites were “perverting the ways of the Lord” (Alma 31:1), he resolved to reclaim them from their state of wickedness. Alma took two of his younger sons, Shiblon and Corianton, on his mission among the Zoramites (see Alma 31:7). Alma carefully considered what approach he might take with the Zoramites: “The preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5; emphasis added).

The use of the word virtue is noteworthy. We don’t know what Nephite word was on the plates, but by inspiration Joseph Smith felt that virtue was the best translation. The primary definition of virtue in the 1828 Webster’s Dictionary is “strength.” Thus, rather than trying to enforce obedience by the sword—or any other means—Alma felt inspired to employ the strength or power of divine persuasion that comes from preaching the pure truths of the word of God.

President Boyd K. Packer has taught that the doctrines of the gospel have power to change people’s lives: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. . . . That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.” It is true that a study of human psychology or sociology is worthy of our attention and can yield helpful insights. But the mere understanding of basic information about human behavior or environment does not contain the necessary power or strength to change lives. When people understand the basic doctrines of the gospel, such as the Fall and the Atonement, they will be more likely to change their behavior to conform to the truths of the gospel. Alma had so much faith in this principle that it guided not only his missionary actions but also his parenting strategy. Rather than reject or force his
son, Alma taught Corianton the pure doctrines of the gospel to help change his life—cultivating opportunities to hear the word of God. This highlights the importance of opening up our souls to the word of God through repeated studying, pondering, and teaching.

Corianton’s choices in the mission field had revealed his carnal nature—boasting, neglecting his ministry, and ultimately going after the harlot Isabel (see Alma 39:2–4). Alma emphatically told his son concerning Isabel: “She did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted” (Alma 39:4). Not only was Corianton’s bad example an embarrassment to his family, but it also frustrated the work Alma had set out to accomplish. As Alma lamented, “When they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

This principle can be applied to our own lives. The example we set for others really does matter. Elder Marvin J. Ashton observed: “You don’t know how many people are looking at you and copying you. . . . Others are watching you—often unannounced—and they don’t want you to let them down. They’re going to emulate you, follow your example. . . . How great it is to have others see our performance, our conduct, and be lifted and led by the pattern we set!”

Alma explained he was going to preach the very message Corianton should have taught the Zoramites: salvation through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. “And now, my son, I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people. And now, my son, this was the ministry unto which ye were called, to declare these glad tidings unto this people” (Alma 39:15–16).

While counseling his sons, Alma perceived that Corianton was very concerned with a few key points of doctrine, including the coming of Christ, the Resurrection, the law of restoration, and the justice of God against sinners (see Alma 39:17; 40:1; 41:1; 42:1). Corianton seems to have been attempting to use a misunderstanding of some doctrines to justify his wicked actions. Alma warned Corianton: “Deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins” (Alma 42:30). In particular, Corianton seems to
have misunderstood, or at least underestimated, the heavy consequences for evil actions. Alma told his son, “Ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1).

Likewise, as mortals, we regularly fall short of perfection and may be tempted to rationalize our shortcomings. Rather than make excuses for our own imperfect conduct, it is much better to accept responsibility and put forth renewed effort to improve our behavior. As President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “It is better to obey than to rationalize.”

Throughout Alma’s counsel, we read the heartfelt declaration of pure doctrine from a loving father to a wayward son in hopes that Corianton would also, like some of the Zoramites, be persuaded by “the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5) and come unto Christ.

THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL

Like any good parent, Alma sought first to understand and then to instruct. At the beginning of Alma chapter 42, Alma states that he knew Corianton was concerned about the “justice of God in the punishment of the sinner” (Alma 42:1). Corianton apparently felt that it was “injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). To clarify and explain this important issue, Alma taught Corianton about the Fall. President Benson seems to have described Corianton’s situation when he declared: “Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ. No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind. And no other book in the world explains this vital doctrine nearly as well as the Book of Mormon.”

Robert J. Matthews has explained that “the Book of Mormon testifies that the Fall is a companion doctrine with the Atonement. . . . In other words, to teach the Atonement without understanding the Fall is to offer medication without knowing of the malady, to present a solution without pointing out the problem.” So that Corianton might more fully understand the Atonement of Jesus Christ, Alma first explained to him the doctrine of the Fall.
When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and “they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth” (2 Nephi 2:19). God had created Adam and Eve “in a state of innocence” in which “they knew no sin” (2 Nephi 2:23). Therefore, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “It is proper and according to the scriptural pattern to speak of the transgression of Adam, but not the sin of Adam. . . . Knowledge of good and evil is an essential element in the commission of sin, and our first parents did not have this knowledge until after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

As a result of their transgression, Adam and Eve “became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man” (Alma 42:6). But the Fall was no accident, nor was it a tragedy. Father Lehi concluded, “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). Elder Orson F. Whitney described the Fall in the following terms: “The fall had a twofold direction—downward, yet forward. It brought man into the world and set his feet upon progression’s highway.” In other words, rather than being a tragedy that mankind should lament and condemn, the Fall was part of God’s plan for His children.

President Brigham Young once taught: “How did Adam and Eve sin? Did they come out in direct opposition to God and to His government? No. But they transgressed a command of the Lord, and through that transgression sin came into the world. The Lord knew they would do this, and He had designed that they should.”

The transgression of Adam and Eve brought both physical and spiritual consequences to themselves and to all mankind. Adam and Eve were “cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:7), and this Fall “brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal” death (Alma 42:9).

**Physical Death**

Adam and Eve and all mankind inherited the ability to die physically. In the Garden of Eden, God warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:17). Alma explained to Corianton that after they partook of the forbidden fruit, if Adam and
Eve had then partaken of the fruit of the tree of life, they “would have lived forever” on earth in a sinful state, “and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated” (Alma 42:5). Thus, as Alma stated, “it was appointed unto man to die” (Alma 42:6). This appointment granted to mankind a temporary time on earth “to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God” (Alma 42:4).

Spiritual Death

Adam and Eve and all mankind became separated from the presence of God and experienced what is called a spiritual death. Samuel the Lamanite taught that because of the Fall, we are “cut off from the presence of the Lord” and “are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual” (Helaman 14:16). In the Garden of Eden, our first parents were in the presence of God, subject to the will of God. But when they were cast out and separated from God’s presence, they “became subjects to follow after their own will” (Alma 42:7).

RECLAMATION FROM THE FALL

Having explained the doctrine of the Fall, Alma emphasized the fact that the Fall created a nearly hopeless situation for mankind. As a consequence of the Fall, all mankind would become “miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:11). Hugh W. Nibley concluded: “The Fall has put us into a state of corruption in which it would be disastrous to remain. . . . Nobody wants to live forever in a sewer.” The purpose of life, however, is “that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). The Prophet Joseph Smith emphasized this principle in his famous statement: “Happiness is the object and design of our existence.” Because the purpose of our existence on earth is to experience joy and happiness, but the Fall brought misery, “it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death” (Alma 42:9).

But how could mankind be reclaimed from this dreadful situation? Alma shared three primary elements necessary for mankind to be reclaimed from the Fall: death, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the Resurrection from the dead.
Death

First, in order to be reclaimed from the Fall, we must die. As ironic as it may sound, death is an essential part of life. Jacob, brother of Nephi, declared, “Death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:6). Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught, “We know that death is a necessary transition. It will come sooner or later to each of us.”

What does the necessary step of death accomplish? Alma explained to Corianton that “the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life” (Alma 40:11). In other words, death facilitates the solution to our physical separation from God—eventually everyone is brought back into the presence of God to be judged. Jacob taught, “When all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment seat of the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 9:15). Without our own death, we—like Adam and Eve if they had partaken of the fruit of the tree of life—would remain on earth in our sinful condition, forever separated from the presence of God.

Perhaps Alma, because of his years of experience in life and war, was more grateful for mortal probation than was Corianton, who is described as young and in need of counsel from his brothers (see Alma 39:10). As we grow older, many of us experience vivid reminders that death is an inescapable and unpredictable part of life. For some, this awareness prompts an adoption of the hedonistic attitude, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (2 Nephi 28:7).

For those seeking true happiness, however, such reminders motivate a more urgent and immediate reliance on the Atonement, for the ability to die and to return to the presence of God will not help reclaim us from our fallen condition unless we are clean. Alma taught this important truth to Corianton: “No unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God” (Alma 40:26; see also 1 Nephi 10:21; Alma 11:37; 3 Nephi 27:19; Moses 6:57). Those who are unclean at their judgment will again be separated from God’s presence—permanently.
The Atonement

The second element necessary to reclaim mankind from the Fall is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Alma declared: “The plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state. . . . And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence. And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made” (Alma 42:13–15).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks aptly summarized this important principle: “In the course of mortality, we would become subject to death, and we would be soiled by sin. To reclaim us from death and sin, our Heavenly Father’s plan provided us a Savior, whose atonement would redeem all from death and pay the price necessary for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions he prescribed.” Thus, only through taking advantage of the blessings of the Atonement by repenting of our own sins and forgiving others can we be clean and confident in that inevitable “interview” with God at the judgment bar.

The Resurrection

Being clean and passing our interview with God will also not completely reclaim us from our fallen condition unless we have a resurrected body. Therefore, the third and final element necessary to reclaim mankind from the Fall is the Resurrection from the dead. Alma taught: “It is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself” (Alma 41:2).

Concerning this issue, Alma further taught his son that “the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God” (Alma 42:23).

Having a resurrected body is necessary to experience complete happiness—the ultimate purpose of life. The Lord declared this fundamental truth in modern revelation: “For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness
of joy; and when separated, man cannot receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:33–34; see also D&C 38:17). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body.” He further testified: “God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world, and this He has given an assurance of in that He raised up His Son Jesus Christ from the dead—the point on which the hope of all who believe the inspired record is found for their future happiness and enjoyment.”

Why must a person have a resurrected body to receive a full amount of joy? Modern revelation declares that the dead who are separated from their physical bodies look upon “the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage” (D&C 138:50; see also D&C 45:17). Elder Melvin J. Ballard explained this concept more fully: “I grant you that the righteous dead will be at peace, but I tell you that when we go out of this life, leave this body, we will desire to do many things that we cannot do at all without the body. We will be seriously handicapped, and we will long for the body; we will pray for the early reunion with our bodies. We will know then what advantage it is to have a body.”

Thus, the three crucial elements necessary to be completely reclaimed from the Fall are death, so that we might return to the presence of God; the Atonement, so that we might be clean when we are reunited with God; and the Resurrection, so that we might receive a fulness of joy—the purpose of life.

THE EFFECT OF THE WORD

Alma the Younger knew that the most effective way to bring a person to Christ was through the simple but powerful preaching of “the word of God” (Alma 31:5). This seems to have been Alma’s strategy not only among the wicked Zoramites but also with his own wayward son, Corianton. After Alma taught his son concerning the elements necessary to be reclaimed from the Fall, he pleaded with his son to apply these important teachings to his own life, saying, “May God grant unto you even according to my words” (Alma 42:31). Alma instructed Corianton to return to his missionary service and follow the pattern that his father had just demonstrated: “And now, O my son, ye are called
of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy
way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring
souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim
upon them” (Alma 42:31).

By recommissioning Corianton to the mission field, Alma once
again demonstrated his faith in the Atonement—both for his son and
for those he was called to serve.

Corianton seems to have taken his father’s teachings seriously, for
he did indeed return to preach the gospel among the people (see Alma
43:1–3). Mormon subsequently declared: “There was continual peace
among them, and exceedingly great prosperity in the church because of
their heed and diligence which they gave unto the word of God, which
was declared unto them by Helaman, and Shiblon, and Corianton, and
Ammon and his brethren, yea, and by all those who had been ordained
by the holy order of God, being baptized unto repentance, and sent
forth to preach among the people” (Alma 49:30). 27

Corianton’s courageous repentance changed his life and brought
many of his fellow Nephites unto Christ. Not only did he learn from
his father, but he also applied the Atonement to his life and actively
lived the gospel.

CONCLUSION

How might modern disciples apply the principles that Alma
explained to his son Corianton? A close examination of the teachings
above reveals the proper course of action. Of the three elements nec-
essary to reclaim mankind from the Fall, then, the only one that
mankind can have any control over is whether to take advantage of the
blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Death will come to “all
men” (2 Nephi 9:6), in the due time of the Lord. Further, every person
who has ever lived upon the earth, whether good or evil, will eventu-
ally be resurrected (see Alma 11:43–44). 28

Therefore, the focus of our daily activities should be repenting of
our own sins and forgiving others of their sins. Concerning the vital
necessity of each of us applying the Atonement of Jesus Christ to our
lives, Hugh W. Nibley concluded: “There are only two things in this
world that we can do very well. We can’t build very good buildings—
they come falling down after a few years. We can’t build very big
dams—they get washed out after a while. We can’t paint perfect
pictures. We can’t do anything very perfectly. But the two things we can
do perfectly are to repent and forgive. Forgive ourselves, forgive other
people, and come to the Lord, to return to him with full purpose of
heart.”

The most important thing that we can do in this life is to follow
the example set in the Book of Mormon and humbly take advantage of
the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ through repentance and
forgiveness. As the people of King Benjamin declared, we should “apply
the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins,
and our hearts may be purified” so that we may be “filled with joy, hav-
ing received a remission of [our] sins” and have “peace of conscience,
because of the exceeding faith which [we have] in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah
4:2–3).

NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, A Witness and a Warning (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book,
1988), 19–20; emphasis added.

2. Jacob warned, “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels
of God” (2 Nephi 9:29). President David O. McKay taught that correctly applying
information is the key difference between having knowledge and having wisdom:
“Gaining knowledge is one thing and applying it, quite another. Wisdom is the
right application of knowledge; and true education—the education for which the
Church stands—is the application of knowledge to the development of a noble
and Godlike character” (Gospel Ideals [Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union
Board, 1957], 440).

3. Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-
day Saints, ed. B. H.

4. This was no empty rhetoric for Alma, having personally led his people into
tremendous battles (see Alma 2:16–38). Following his experiences in battle, Alma
gave up his position as chief judge so that he might devote himself to preaching
the gospel among his people, “seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it
were in bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19).

5. See Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language (New York:
S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “virtue.”

Henry B. Eyring, “The Power of Teaching Doctrine,” Ensign, May 1999, 73–75; and


19. Samuel the Lamanite explained, “Whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Helaman 14:18).

20. See also the words of Amulek, Alma’s missionary companion, who had been taught the gospel by Alma: “It is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made” (Alma 34:9). Nephi’s brother Jacob similarly testified, “I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost” (Jacob 7:12).


22. Ironically, it is through the blood of the Savior that we clean our own garments from the bloody stain of sin (see Alma 5:21–22).


27. At the end of the book of Alma, after the wars between the Nephites and Lamanites had ended, Corianton assisted in bringing provisions to the Nephites who had migrated northward (see Alma 60:13).

28. Even the sons of perdition will be resurrected, although their resurrected bodies and their eternal destiny will be devoid of any glory. Concerning the final state of the sons of perdition, the Lord has stated, “All the rest shall be brought forth by the resurrection of the dead, through the triumph and the glory of the Lamb” (D&C 76:39; emphasis added).