

May 11-17, 2020

Mosiah 18–24

“WE HAVE ENTERED INTO A COVENANT WITH HIM”

Summary: *Alma preaches in private—He sets forth the covenant of baptism and baptizes at the waters of Mormon—He organizes the Church of Christ and ordains priests—They support themselves and teach the people—Alma and his people flee from King Noah into the wilderness. [About 148—145 B.C.]*

Gideon seeks to slay King Noah—The Lamanites invade the land—King Noah suffers death by fire—Limhi rules as a tributary monarch. [Between 145 and 122 B.C.]

Lamanite daughters are abducted by the priests of Noah—The Lamanites wage war upon Limhi and his people—They are repulsed and pacified. [Between 145 and 122 B.C.]

Limhi’s people are smitten and defeated by the Lamanites—They meet Ammon and are converted—They tell Ammon of the twenty-four Jaredite plates. [Between 145 and 121 B.C.]

Plans are made for the people to escape from Lamanite bondage—The Lamanites are made drunk—The people escape, return to Zarahemla, and become subject to King Mosiah. [About 121 B.C.]

Alma refuses to be king—He serves as high priest—The Lord chastens his people, and the Lamanites conquer the land of Helam—Amulon, leader of King Noah’s wicked priests, rules subject to the Lamanite monarch. [Between 145 and 121 B.C.]

Amulon persecutes Alma and his people—They are to be put to death if they pray—The Lord makes their burdens seem light—He delivers them from bondage, and they return to Zarahemla. [Between 145 and 120 B.C.]

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What covenant begins our return to Father in Heaven?

Alma, transformed as a result of the inquisition of Abinadi, works diligently to bring people to the Lord. Following their new-found faith and repentance he baptizes converts in “living waters.” Immersion, or baptism, as Latter-day Saints call it, is a covenant that brings God’s children a step closer to him. “As an everlasting covenant, baptism began on this earth with Adam (**Moses 6:64-67**) and has continued ever since whenever the Lord has had a people on earth. (**D. & C. 20:23-28; 84:26-28**) It was not a new rite introduced by John the Baptist and adopted by Christ and his followers. The Jews were baptizing their proselytes long

before John, as is well attested from secular sources. The Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Moses being a part thereof contains ample evidence of the practice of baptism in Old Testament times. The part of the Book of Mormon of the pre-Christian Era contains some of the best information we have relative to this eternal law.” (**Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, Pg.71**)

What historical significance does the immersion in, or crossing Jordan have?

Except for Joshua and Caleb, the entire population of the Children of Israel were second generation pilgrims. All having confessed their sins were immersed, likely in the Jordan river. “Since the tribes of Israel under Joshua crossed the Jordan to

enter Erez (land) Israel after the Exodus from Egypt, the Jordan river has come to have a deep significance for Jews, symbolizing the gateway to the homeland after years of wandering in exile in the desert. The Bible relates that Joshua led the Israelites to a place across the Jordan from Jericho, and that the waters suddenly and miraculously stopped flowing, enabling the Israelites to cross into the Promised Land. Folklore and mythology have popularized the Jordan as the gateway to Paradise, and crossing it is seen as stepping from a world of troubles to one of peace. The river is also important to Christians because John the Baptist performed baptisms on its banks and Jesus was baptized there.” “Since the tribes of Israel under Joshua crossed the Jordan to enter Erez Israel after the Exodus from Egypt, the Jordan river has come to have a deep significance for Jews, symbolizing the gateway to the homeland after years of wandering in exile in the desert.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How often are immersions repeated?

Some religious Jews who experience recurring immersions (after each monthly menstrual cycle for women and regularly for men), step into their immersion font from the East side, immerse themselves and then exit to the West side. This could be construed as a reminder of entering into the gateway of cleanness as the Children of Israel entered into their Promised Land. For the religious Jews, immersions are favored below ground level in flowing water that emanates from bedrock - the “Rock of Salvation.” Consider that the lowest spot on the face of the earth where water, originating in bedrock, flows is where the Children of Israel crossed into their erstwhile homeland. Judaism and Christianity agree that it is also the likely spot where Jesus

came to John the Baptist, a Levite, in Judea and was immersed.

How important are immersions to the Jews?

As mentioned earlier, other Jewish customs of immersion or use of the mikveh, can give added insight to an eternal covenant. “Like the synagogue and the cemetery, the *mikveh* is a basic element of Jewish family and communal life, and thus the erection of a *mikveh* was among the first projects undertaken by Jewish communities throughout the world from earliest times.” “Just how to construct a *mikveh* in accordance with the numerous legal specifications involved constantly posed a technological problem of great seriousness, and over the generations rabbinic thinkers were repeatedly challenged to come up with novel solutions to this unusual problem which demanded a rare combination of technologic and halakhic ingenuity.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What are the legal requirements?

“Briefly the basic legal requirements are these:

- 1) A *mikveh* must not be filled with water that has been drawn (i.e., has been in a vessel or a receptacle), but with water from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources, but melted snow and ice are also permitted.
- 2) The water must be able to flow into the *mikveh* freely and unimpeded (any blockage renders the water ‘drawn water’) and must reach the *mikveh* in vessels that are not susceptible to ritual uncleanness.
- 3) The minimum size of the *mikveh* is of a vessel which has a volume of ‘40 *seah*,’ variously estimated at

between 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts).

4) The *mikveh* must be watertight and must be constructed of natural materials on the spot, for otherwise it is deemed itself to be a 'vessel' and renders the water in it 'drawn water.'" ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What if there is insufficient rain, or spring water?

"Where large amounts of rainwater or spring water are available, the problem of establishing an adequate feed to replenish the *mikveh* is not great, but since most *mikva'ot* are built in urban centers where such supplies are not available, the technological and legal solution of a valid *mikveh* depends upon a fifth principle which stipulates that once a properly constructed *mikveh* is filled with the minimum amount of non-drawn water, drawn water can then be added to it indefinitely and not render it invalid."

"Several ingenious designs have been developed over the generations which take advantage of this principle, but no one design was ever universally accepted, and thus many of the *mikva'ot* differ in many of their details, in accordance with the rabbinic authority whose solution was adopted."

What preparation is necessary before the immersion ritual?

"The reasons for purity or impurity are not given in the Torah, and the rabbis devote little discussion to that aspect of the subject. It is clear, however, that ritual impurities are not to be regarded as infectious diseases or the laws of purification as hygienic measures. Indeed, immersion in a *mikveh* must be preceded by careful cleansing of the body. In the Bible, the Israelites are warned against

making the land impure by their transgressions, while the rabbis described purity as one of the grades on the path toward a state of holiness. Maimonides wrote: 'Uncleanliness is not mud or filth which water can remove . . . but is dependent on the intention of the heart.' The sages have therefore said: 'If one immerses himself, but without special intention, it is as though he had not immersed himself at all.'" ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#)) In Alma's case, the people had prepared themselves by true faith and repentance and he baptized them in pure water. "Now, there was in Mormon a fountain of pure water, and Alma resorted thither . . ." ([Mosiah 18:5](#))

How does the "bond" become a "bondage of freedom?"

Their immersions became a bond to sustain each other and bear each other's burdens as they prepared themselves to return to their God. It is a "bondage of freedom" from the chains of the adversary. Most people consider the term bondage as slavery. Indeed we are "slaves" to our God. He has bought and paid for us! "And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever . . ."

([Mosiah 2:23-24](#))

How is biblical slavery viewed differently than in modern times?

"Slavery was very widespread in the ancient world and the Bible and subsequent Jewish law recognized it as a basic social institution. However, in

contrast to the conception, common in the ancient Near East, of the slave as an acquired chattel, the *halakhah* tended to view the slave more as a hired laborer and it established numerous rules and regulations which sought to assure that the human dignity of slaves was properly maintained." "Strictly speaking, a Jew could not be sold as a slave. He could give himself voluntarily into bondage (for example, to a creditor to whom he could not pay his debts) or a court of law could hand him over as a slave (for example, if he was a thief and could not make restitution for his theft). In either case, the Jew would then be considered an *eved Ivri* and could serve a maximum of six years. In the seventh he had to be set free, unless he willingly decided to stay in his master's service. In such a case he would remain a slave until the next Jubilee Year and then go free." "Aliens and non-Jews could be bought and sold as slaves on the market and they could, in theory, serve in perpetuity. However, they were considered to be members of the master's household and as such they enjoyed many benefits as well as being subject to certain obligations. They had to be circumcised and were obligated to keep the Sabbath and the festivals. They partook of the Passover sacrifice and even succeeded the master if he had no direct heirs. They could acquire and own property, and if they came into money, they could redeem themselves from the status of slaves." "Slaves were to be treated in much the same way as hired laborers. They could not be given a workload which exceeded their physical strength and they could not be physically mistreated. A slave who was wounded by his master would automatically be set free, and a fugitive slave was not to be

returned to his master, but was to be given sanctuary and assistance."

(*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

How is keeping the Sabbath holy, a covenant?

The Sabbath and keeping the Sabbath Day holy is one additional teaching in the lesson where Jewish commentary is valuable for insight as well as contrast. God requires the keeping of the Sabbath as a reminder that he freed us from slavery. Lest we forget, violating the Sabbath in Biblical times was a capital offense, punishable by death. "The Sabbath is mentioned --- directly and explicitly --- in the fourth of the Ten Commandments in both the version in **Exodus 20:8-11** and that in **Deuteronomy 5:14--15**. The Exodus version states that: 'Six days you shall labor . . . but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, our God: you shall not do any work --- you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth . . . and He rested on the seventh day . . .' In the repetition of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy it says much the same except that it ends: '. . . so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; there for the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.' In this version another dimension is added to the Sabbath --- that it is a day of rest, not only for you but for your slaves and that God, so to speak, has the right to demand it because He freed you from slavery." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*) "Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any

work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.” (**Exodus 31:15**)

What does “Shabbat” mean?

“The Hebrew name for the Sabbath is Shabbat, which derives from a root meaning to cease or desist. It gets this name because the Bible tells us that on the seventh day of Creation, God ‘*shavat mi-kol melakhto*’--- He ‘ceased’ or ‘desisted’ from all His work (i.e., of Creation). It is from this that the supreme importance of the Sabbath derives; observance of the Sabbath is an act of testimony to the fact that God created the world.” “The first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible is in connection with the manna. On each of the first five days of the week the Israelites received one day’s ration of manna; on the sixth day, Friday, they received a double portion --- for the day itself and for the following day.” “The manna of the first five days went bad if kept overnight; but the Friday manna remained fresh over the Sabbath. The Jews learned from this that they must desist from their daily food gathering on Shabbat and that day is a ‘Sabbath to the Lord’.” “Throughout the Prophetic Books of the Bible the Sabbath is referred to as a holy day, a festival, a delight and the Jews are often castigated by the prophets for not observing it properly.” “In the course of time observance of the Sabbath became the identifying mark of the Jew. It set him apart from all other religions. According to the **First Book of Maccabees (2:31--41)**, at the beginning of the Hasmonean revolt against Syria, the Jews would not fight on the Sabbath but let themselves be killed. Later they realized that was a mistake and that if danger to life is involved, the Sabbath is suspended.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How important is the Sabbath?

“The rabbis of the Talmud thought that the Sabbath is the most important of all the laws of the Torah and that by itself it is equal to all the rest. One statement is that ‘if Israel keeps one Sabbath as it should be kept, the Messiah will come.’ They saw Shabbat as a special privilege; a gift that God gave His people Israel and as a foretaste of the world-to-come.” “In traditional Judaism there are two aspects to the Sabbath: the positive, i.e., what you should do, and the negative, i.e., what you must not do. The negative side is to desist from ‘work.’ But just what does ‘work’ include? As we have seen, the Bible expressly forbids kindling fire and, by implication, gathering wood, but is that a sufficiently exact definition of ‘work’? The rabbis, basing themselves on the Oral Law, pointed out the fact, mentioned above, that the laws of Shabbat immediately preceded the law about building the Tabernacle, and they thus deduced that the categories of work involved in the construction of the Tabernacle are those which are forbidden on Shabbat. They worked out that there were 39 main categories of work involved; in Hebrew these are known as *Avot Melakhah*, ‘Fathers of Work.’ Each ‘father’ has ‘offspring,’ *toledot*, i.e., sub-categories. For example, one of the ‘fathers’ is sowing because in order to get the linen for the priestly garments you would have to sow the plants; watering plants is an ‘offspring.’ Another example is lighting a lamp; one of its ‘offspring’ would be to add oil to an already kindled lamp. All the laws are discussed in a complete tractate in the Talmud called, very logically, *Shabbat*. All the ‘fathers’ and ‘offspring’ are considered of biblical authority. The rabbis added on some laws of their own such as a prohibition against

asking a non-Jew to do something forbidden to a Jew, and the law that it is forbidden even to touch something whose use is forbidden on Shabbat. That law is known as *mukzeh*.” “But besides the things you must not do, there are positive acts you should do in order to sanctify the Sabbath. The Sabbath law in the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy starts with the admonition ‘Observe the Sabbath day . . .’ This the rabbis understood as referring to the prohibitions of Shabbat. The Ten Commandments in Exodus, however, begin: ‘Remember the Sabbath day . . .’ which means the positive acts of sanctification. These include ushering in Shabbat with *Kiddush*, a declaration of the Sabbath's holiness which is made over a festive goblet of wine and the eating of three Sabbath meals.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

How do Jews rise above the “Do’s and Don’ts” of Shabbat?

“Many thinkers have devoted a great deal of time to explaining the laws of Shabbat. One great authority described the day as a ‘Temple in Time’ and a retreat from the world of machines and activity that the weekdays constitute. This means that everything on Shabbat must be different so that one is constantly aware that it is Shabbat and different from the rest of the week. This aim is achieved by all the ‘do not’ laws insofar as a person in fact develops a different life-style on Shabbat.” “The Talmud relates that many distinguished rabbis used to help in the physical preparation for Shabbat, such as chopping wood for the oven and cleaning the fish, and considered such activity as a privilege. One authority, Shammai, used to set aside any choice item of food he came across during the week for the Sabbath. If later on he found a choicer

item, he ate the first during the week and the later one was reserved for consumption on the Sabbath day. Just before the onset of Shabbat, the rabbis --- and since then all Jews --- used to wash themselves and put on their best clothes to greet the Sabbath which they pictured as a great queen. In the Middle Ages the kabbalists of Safed used to go out into the fields outside town to greet the Sabbath, much as people do to greet a distinguished visitor. There they recited psalms, out of which custom grew today's practice of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service.” “But even before the actual onset of Shabbat, the preparations already begin. Because cooking is forbidden on Shabbat, all the meals have to be prepared beforehand and are just kept warm in the oven. The house also is cleaned. All this activity creates a special atmosphere for Friday and even for Thursday nights.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What would be the readings and recitation for Shabbat?

“Many pious people still have the custom of reviewing the whole portion of the Torah to be read that week together with the Aramaic translation known as the *Targum* and Rashi's commentary. A hasidic and Sephardi custom is to recite the whole Song of Songs just before Shabbat.” “The first real act of ushering in the Sabbath is when the housewife lights the Shabbat candles. This takes place slightly before sundown and marks the start of the holy day. Most women light two candles --- one corresponds to ‘Remember the Sabbath’ and the other to ‘Observe the Sabbath’ -- but some have the custom of adding a candle for each child or grandchild. The kindling of lights is of very ancient origin and was a special ritual so that it should not be dark in the

house on Shabbat. Even after other methods of lighting the house became common, the Shabbat candles continued to be the supreme sign in the home that the day is Shabbat. In many communities a special oil lamp, usually suspended from the ceiling was used for Shabbat. When she lights the candles, the mistress of the house recites a special blessing. Although lighting the candles has become the housewife's duty, if there is no lady of the house, the man is required to light them and recite the benediction." **"In the Home:** A delightful Talmudic sermon has it that two angels accompany a man on his way back from synagogue, one good and one bad. When they arrive home, if the table is laid nicely and all the Sabbath preparations have been made, the good angel says, 'May it be so next week' and the bad angel is forced to say, 'Amen!' If, however, the home is not Sabbath-like, the bad angel invokes: 'May it be so next week,' and the good angel has to answer 'Amen!' This *aggadah* is the basis of a special Sabbath hymn recited in the home on return from prayers. It was written by the kabbalists of Safed and welcomes the angels into the house. Many families also recite **Proverbs 31:10--31** which describe the perfect wife and mother as an appreciation of the lady of the house. In some homes the parents bless the children." **"At the table:** between courses, special Sabbath table songs, called *zemirot*, are recited. These were written throughout the ages (many by our old friends, the Safed kabbalists) and there are dozens of delightful melodies to them. Ideally, talk at the table should be about subjects fitting for the Sabbath. The weekly Torah reading is a favorite subject for discussion and the children often tell what they learned about it during the week. In the Grace after Meals a special

paragraph is added celebrating the Sabbath as a day of rest."

(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How have Shabbat customs evolved in modern times?

Carrying: One of the prohibitions of the Sabbath is carrying any object from one private domain to another, from a private domain into the public domain, or inside the public domain itself. This applies to any object, even a handkerchief. However, the rabbis instituted a method of making the whole town into one private domain by surrounding it with a sort of fence. This is known as *eruv*, a Hebrew word meaning 'mix,' because it mixes all the domains, public and private, into one. All cities and towns in Israel are surrounded by an *eruv* and thus one can carry freely in them. It is the function of each local religious council to maintain the *eruv* and make sure that it does not fall down." **Electricity:** Orthodox rabbis have ruled that it is forbidden to use electricity on Shabbat. Since a great deal of our comfort depends on electricity, automatic clocks have been developed which switch on the lights and electrical appliances at pre-set times. In Israel, many high-rise apartment houses have special Shabbat elevators which stop at each floor and do not require the passenger to operate them. Many Conservative rabbis have permitted the use of electricity on Shabbat on the grounds that it does not constitute work. Reform Judaism negated the halakhic aspects of Shabbat in keeping with its general policy." "The Conservative Rabbinic Assembly of America also permitted the use of automobiles on Shabbat for the purpose of attending synagogue and visiting the sick. The reasoning was that these two activities are *mitzvot* which overrule the Sabbath

laws. Orthodoxy very definitely opposed this on the grounds that only danger to life 'suspends' the Sabbath prohibitions and nothing else." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How can I get closer to my Father in Heaven?

As a closing comment to this lesson, I add the experience of Jews and Arabs getting to know each other. The amount of mistrust reduces in direct proportion to the amount of interest we have in each other.

In more than forty-years of living in Israel I see more Arabs and Jews getting along with each other than the ones who don't. The most important and successful projects are those that include listening to each other and focusing our resources to help the needy. It is a basic tenant of Judaism and Islam. It is a commandment from heaven. Assisting each other brings us a step closer to God. It transforms us to be in His hands rather than our own.