

The Angel Appears to Alma the Younger

Mosiah 27:13-16, Alma 8:14-17

This story commences after introducing Alma the Younger as “a very wicked and an idolatrous man.” As he is going about with the sons of Mosiah to destroy the church they are interrupted by the angel.

Alma's first response, along with the sons of Mosiah, is to fall to the earth at the appearance of the angel.¹ However, the angel tells Alma that he is not going to get off that easily: “Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God?” Interestingly, the angel then points out the futility of Alma's mission: “This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.”²

As the angel continues speaking he points out that has come because of the prayers of Alma the Elder, that Alma the Younger might be “brought to the knowledge of the truth” and be convinced “of the power and authority of God.”³ I have seen many cases of wayward children (not among my own, fortunately) and have heard parents pray that their children may likewise be brought to a knowledge of the truth and be convinced of the power and authority of God, yet no divine messenger appears, and the children are not struck down. Why was there such forceful intervention in this case?

The most direct answer is to say that I do not know. However, there are a few points that are worthy of consideration. Alma the Elder prayed with much faith, and probably over the course of much time. The Lord recognizes out persistent efforts. Second, Alma the Younger had a key role to play in the dissemination of the gospel among the Nephite people, and perhaps part of the Lord's concern was to bring that mission to pass. In fact, many times the Lord does send angels to counsel wayward children, but these angels are of the terrestrial kind:

1 *In his 1962 preface to The Screwtape Letters C.S. Lewis spoke of Dante's angels: “In Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying ‘Fear not.’ The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, ‘There, there.’ The literary symbols are more dangerous [than sculptures and pictures] because they are not so easily recognized as symbolical. Those of Dante are best. Before his angels we sink in awe.”*

This quote is taken in its entirety from “The Great Divorce” by Kathryn Lindskoog [The Lewis Legacy-Issue 83, Winter 2000, The C.S. Lewis Foundation for Truth in Publishing, January 1, 2000] which I found at <http://www.discovery.org/a/775> .

2 Mosiah 27:13

3 Mosiah 27:14

inspired priesthood leaders, young men and young women instructors, a home teacher, or just a friend. Although their testimony may not be as magnificent as that of the angel Alma saw, their impact can be just as great over a longer period of time. And finally, we see only this mortal existence. We do not know what may happen once we have passed the veil; however, I have received a strong testimony that a person who died in wickedness was not necessarily doomed from then on, but that there were things that would happen in immortality that would help that person.

The angel next instructs Alma to “remember the captivity of thy fathers in the land of Helam, and in the land of Nephi; and remember how great things he has done for them”.⁴ So many times we can receive great benefit by remembering the things the Lord has already done for us. I think one implication of this instruction is that if Alma had remembered these things he would not have gotten into his mess in the first place.

The angel ends his visit by saying “Alma, go thy way, and seek to destroy the church no more, that their prayers may be answered, and this even if thou wilt of thyself be cast off.”⁵ Even after the miraculous manifestation Alma's agency was intact – he could choose to continue in wickedness, but the consequence was also clear – he would be destroyed. We don't always have angels reminding us of that, but the fact is still true. Our actions are always bringing us closer to God or dragging us further from him; there is no middle ground.

Thus ends this manifestation to Alma, but it is not the end of the relationship between Alma and this angel. Some ten or fifteen years later after Alma tried to preach to the people of Ammonihah, and after being driven out of the city he is feeling very downcast. Again a heavenly vision is opened to him, but under what different circumstances:

Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you.⁶

4 Mosiah 27:16

5 Ibid.

6 Alma 8:15

I do not believe that it was just coincidence that the same heavenly messenger visited Alma this second time. It is pointless to speculate on who the angel was in mortality, but I believe it was someone who had a close and personal interest in him. What joy must have filled the heart of that angel to be able to visit Alma on this occasion.

The angel's first words to Alma explain to him why it his responsibility to rejoice. He has been blessed of the Lord, and he should not allow others to afflict him, thus tempting him to move away from the Lord. We may not always be happy, but we are always to feel the joy of the gospel in our hearts.

The rest of the angel's message to Alma is similar to the first time he appeared – those who obey not the commandments of God risk destruction. The significant difference is that this time the warning is to be delivered by Alma to others, rather than being directed to him.

There is much to learn about righteousness and wickedness, reward and punishment, and actions and consequences in the interactions between Alma and the angel. However I think my favorite lesson is how intimately God is concerned about the courses of our lives, and how much he longs to bring us back safely into his presence.