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## Were we foreordained to the priesthood, or was the standard of worthiness foreordained? Alma 13 reconsidered

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## **Were We Foreordained to the Priesthood, or Was the Standard of Worthiness Foreordained? Alma 13 Reconsidered**

A. Keith Thompson

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**WERE WE FOREORDAINED TO THE  
PRIESTHOOD, OR WAS THE STANDARD OF  
WORTHINESS FOREORDAINED?  
ALMA 13 RECONSIDERED**

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**A. Keith Thompson**

*Abstract: Alma 13:3–4 is often interpreted as Book of Mormon confirmation of the doctrine that all those who are ordained to the Priesthood on the earth were foreordained to receive that Priesthood in the pre-existence as a result of their exceeding faith and good works. That interpretation is inconsistent with the 1978 revelation on Priesthood. A contextual reading of the account of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s ministry to the people of Ammonihah also suggests that Alma<sub>2</sub> was not telling the men of Ammonihah that they (or anyone else) had been foreordained to receive the Priesthood. Rather, Alma<sub>2</sub> was teaching that what we now call worthiness was ordained as the standard for ordination to the Priesthood before the foundations of this earth were laid. If the people of Ammonihah demonstrated their worthiness by repenting of their sins, they could qualify to receive the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood and enter into the rest of the Lord as many of the ancients had done. The manner in which men were ordained to the Priesthood and in which its ordinances were administered was intended to show the people how they should look to Christ for redemption.*

**I**n the second edition of *Mormon Doctrine*, under his heading “Foreordination,” Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

To carry forward his own purposes among men and nations, the Lord *foreordained* chosen spirit children in pre-existence and assigned them to come to earth at particular times and places so that they might aid in furthering the divine will. These pre-existence appointments, made “according to

the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2), simply designated certain individuals to perform missions which the Lord in his wisdom knew they had the talents and capacities to do (emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup>

Elder McConkie then elaborated the doctrine, citing Alma 13:3–9, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 365, and Abraham 3:22–23 among other scriptural references as his authorities for the doctrine.<sup>2</sup> He used his references from Alma to explain the doctrine of foreordination to the Priesthood as follows:

*Alma taught the great truth that every person who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood was foreordained to receive that high and holy order in the pre-existent councils of eternity.* “This is the manner after which they were ordained,” he says. They were “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works [while yet living in the pre-existence]; in the first place [that is, in pre-existence] being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.” Thus, he explains, Melchizedek Priesthood holders have been “prepared from the foundation of the world” for their high callings. The Lord has prepared them “from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things” (Alma 13:3–9) (emphasis and square brackets in original).<sup>3</sup>

In his 1992 entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entitled “Foreordination,” Brent L. Top wrote similarly of the doctrine of foreordination, interpreting verses from Alma 13 in this way:

Alma<sub>2</sub> taught that priests belonging to a “holy order” were foreordained “according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:1, 3).<sup>4</sup>

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1 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 290.

2 *Ibid.*, 290–292.

3 *Ibid.*, 290–291.

4 *Jesus Christ and His Gospel, Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 173.

In the same volume in an article entitled “Premortal Life,” Gayle Oblad Brown wrote:

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma<sub>2</sub> further explains the opportunities presented to the spirit children of God in the premortal existence: “In the *first place* being left to choose good or evil; therefore they have chosen good and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling ... on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren. Or, in fine, in the *first place*, they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for each as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son” (Alma 13:3–5; *emphasis added*). The “first place” here refers to one’s first estate or premortal existence.<sup>5</sup>

Again in the same volume, Jay E. Jensen also explained the foreordination doctrine using Alma 13 in a similar way:

Many were foreordained to perform certain tasks when upon the earth ... In the premortal state, spirits received their first lessons in the gospel and the work of God that they would do on the earth (D&C 138:55–56; cf Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:3–4; Titus 1:2). Many of these spirit beings were called and prepared from the foundation of the world because of their faith and good works, to bear the priesthood and teach the gospel and the commandments of God in mortality (Alma 13:1–6).<sup>6</sup>

Many more examples of this interpretation of verses from Alma 13 could be cited from respected church sources.<sup>7</sup> My purpose is not to deny the doctrine taught in those sources or even to suggest that previous

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5 Ibid., 399.

6 Ibid., 439.

7 The Church’s website says that the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* “is a comprehensive look at Church history, doctrine, scripture, and culture written at the educational level of a high school graduate or beginning college student. The work does not ... substitute for the scriptures ... [but i]n preparing the extensive work ... [editor-in-chief Daniel H. Ludlow] worked closely with members of [Brigham Young U]niversity’s board of trustees and Elders Neal A. Maxwell and

authors have misunderstood the doctrine. Rather, it is to suggest that Alma<sub>2</sub>'s statements in Alma 13 mean something other than these previous interpretations suggest. The doctrine of foreordination to the Priesthood has ample authority in the words of the prophets beginning with the Prophet Joseph Smith himself as all of these authors note with references from his *Teachings*. The clearest of those references can be found on page 365:

Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in the Grand Council.<sup>8</sup>

This author suggests that in examining both the context and text of Alma 13 without the preconception that it teaches foreordination to the Priesthood, a more nuanced and complete understanding will emerge. Additionally, by examining what we know of the doctrine of foreordination as well as the 1978 revelation on Priesthood, we will see that the idea that some were foreordained to the Priesthood on account of their exceeding faith and good works in the pre-existence while others were not is conceptually inconsistent with the affirmation that “every faithful, worthy man in the Church”<sup>9</sup> could “receive the holy priesthood ... without regard to their race or color.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek's Address to the Ammonihahites**

### **Alma 13: Context**

The opening words of Alma chapter 13, “And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children,”<sup>11</sup> is a clear indication that what we now have marked off as a separate chapter in our modern editions of

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Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve.” ([https://www.lds.org/ensign/1992/03/news-of-the-church/encyclopedia-of-mormonism-released?lang=eng&\\_r=1](https://www.lds.org/ensign/1992/03/news-of-the-church/encyclopedia-of-mormonism-released?lang=eng&_r=1)).

8 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 365. John Tvedtnes has observed that Joseph Smith may have only intended to suggest that those holding keys for the preaching of the gospel in the entire world (apostles and presidents of the latter-day Church and earlier dispensation heads like Abraham) were intended by this statement (<http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/publications/agency-vs-predestination>) at n23.

9 Doctrine and Covenants, Official Declaration – 2, Salt Lake City, September 30, 1978.

10 Ibid.

11 Alma 13:1.



the Book of Mormon, was always a part of a larger sermon that has been segmented for better understanding.<sup>12</sup>

It will be remembered that Alma<sub>2</sub> was rejected when he first visited the city of Ammonihah to preach the gospel<sup>13</sup> after he had resigned the judgment seat.<sup>14</sup> As he was reluctantly leaving the city on that earlier occasion in an apparent state of depression,<sup>15</sup> he was comforted by the same angel who had reproved him on the roadside years before<sup>16</sup> when, in company of the sons of Mosiah, he was “going about to destroy the church of God.”<sup>17</sup> On the occasion of this later visit, the angel’s instruction was that he was to “return to the city of Ammonihah”<sup>18</sup> and declare repentance lest the Ammonihahites “destroy the liberty of thy people”<sup>19</sup> as they were planning since that was “contrary to the statutes, and judgments, and commandments”<sup>20</sup> of the Lord.

Alma<sub>2</sub> immediately returned to the city by another way<sup>21</sup> and was resuscitated spiritually and physically by Amulek, who had been prepared by the angel to take care of him.<sup>22</sup> Alma<sub>2</sub> records that he spent “many days”<sup>23</sup> under Amulek’s roof before he received a command, not only to go forth and preach repentance,<sup>24</sup> but to extend a call to Amulek to do likewise.<sup>25</sup>

The record does not show whether what Alma<sub>2</sub> later recorded was a verbatim report taken down by someone else, a collection of sermons spoken during an extended period, or, as seems more likely, Mormon’s summary of Alma<sub>2</sub>’s subsequent synopsis of what transpired

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12 In the 1830 original edition of the Book of Mormon there are still chapter divisions, but Amulek’s entire sermon and following debate with the Ammonihahites (Alma 10:1–11:46), are recorded as Alma VIII. Alma’s follow-up of Amulek’s teaching is spread between Alma IX (Alma 12:1–13:9) and Alma X (Alma 13:10–15:19) in the 1830 edition.

13 Alma 8:6–13.

14 Alma 4:15–20.

15 Alma 8:13,14.

16 Alma 8:15.

17 Mosiah 27:10.

18 Alma 8:16.

19 Alma 8:17.

20 Ibid.

21 Alma 8:18.

22 Alma 8:19–22, 26–27.

23 Alma 8:27.

24 Alma 8:29.

25 Ibid.

as the companionship preached.<sup>26</sup> However, his recounting of the words Amulek preached<sup>27</sup> and that he himself preached<sup>28</sup> as they gave their separate witnesses of the Lord's message of repentance, suggest that the preaching recorded in Alma 9–13 was presented on a single occasion. That Alma and Amulek were imprisoned following Alma<sub>2</sub>'s address in Alma 13 also suggests this was a singular event.<sup>29</sup>

Alma<sub>2</sub>'s opening remarks are not recorded, but the contention that followed as well as his response is detailed in Alma 9:2–33. The burden of his message was that the people of Ammonihah needed to repent to save themselves from physical destruction.<sup>30</sup> Their rebuttals centered on Alma<sub>2</sub>'s authority and the fact that he appeared to be a single witness to their supposed sins, possibly in breach of their religious law.<sup>31</sup> When Amulek stood as a second witness to Alma<sub>2</sub>'s message, the second objection was answered,<sup>32</sup> though Alma<sub>2</sub>'s account makes clear the Ammonihahites did not accept that he had authority since he was preaching to them following the direction of an angel of God.<sup>33</sup>

Amulek presented his own credentials as a reputable local<sup>34</sup> before bearing witness to Alma<sub>2</sub>'s authority with his own firsthand experience

26 The bridging words between Alma chapters 8 and 9 indicate that these are “[t]he words of Alma ... according to the record of Alma,” and the use of the first person in the narrative confirms that when Mormon made his abridgement, he proceeded with that understanding. The first person style appears to have been retained to emphasize authenticity. The point being made is that Alma could not make an exact account of his own words at the same time as he was speaking. The record must therefore be a subjective summary of some kind.

27 Alma 9:34; 10:1, 12, 25; 11:21–23, 27, 36, 39, 46.

28 Alma 9:1, 7, 31, 32; 12:1–2, 7, 9, 19, 22; 13:22, 31.

29 Alma 14:2–3.

30 Alma 9:18,19.

31 Alma 9:1–6. The Book of Mormon text says that the people of Ammonihah “were of the profession of Nehor” (Alma 15:15), and also implies that the religious teachings of Nehor were a relatively recent innovation in Nephite society. This inference flows from the narrative of Nehor’s teaching, trial for the murder of Gideon, and condemnation in the opening year of the judicial republic about nine years earlier (about BC 91, see Alma 1). But it is also possible that Nehor’s teachings were not entirely new among the Nephites and had been derived from the Law of Moses, which included the law of witnesses known to us from Deuteronomy 17:6. See for example, Thompson, A.K., “Who was Sherem?”, *Interpreter, A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 14 (2015), 1–15.

32 Alma 10:12.

33 Alma 9:25, 29–32.

34 Alma 10:2–4.

of angelic ministry<sup>35</sup> and instruction.<sup>36</sup> Though the crowd's objections to this preaching (that authority was required to preach<sup>37</sup> and that two witnesses were required to authenticate religious ministry<sup>38</sup>) were answered, the crowd did not accept the answers provided and sought other ways to discredit these missionaries they chose to perceive as religious critics. It seems that the crowd perceived the less experienced man as a target and they immediately began to question him in ways designed to cross and contradict him.<sup>39</sup> Alma<sub>2</sub> records the bribes offered<sup>40</sup> but notes Amulek's resolute and strengthened response to the attacks,<sup>41</sup> and indeed, his exposure of their dishonest purpose.<sup>42</sup> Alma<sub>2</sub> then stood to teach the assembly since Amulek's words had silenced Zeezrom, the chief antagonist.<sup>43</sup> Chapter 12 recounts Alma<sub>2</sub>'s detailed exposition of the words of Amulek, expounded from scripture. In particular, he explained: the duty of missionaries not to speak of tenets,<sup>44</sup> the resurrection from the dead;<sup>45</sup> the judgments of God;<sup>46</sup> the plan of redemption and the creation of mortality as a probationary estate;<sup>47</sup> the place of commandments<sup>48</sup> and the consequent need for repentance<sup>49</sup> in

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35 Alma 10:7.

36 Alma 10:10.

37 Alma had been challenged on the basis that he lacked authority to preach in their city on his first visit (Alma 8:11–12).

38 Alma 9:2–6. Note that there seems to have been an element of a further criticism blended into the two which the author has identified. That is, that there was no need for a “foreign missionary” to come and teach this people because they were competent to teach themselves. This view is evident in the charge that Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek “had reviled against their law and ... their lawyers and judges” (Alma 14:2) and recalls the spirit of similar criticism of Abinadi in the court of King Noah (Mosiah 12:9–15(13–14)) where the people who accused him asserted that it was treasonous to cast aspersions on the integrity of the king or to suggest that they could not defend themselves against their enemies.

39 Alma 10:13–16.

40 Alma 11:22.

41 Alma 11:23–46.

42 Alma 10:17–23; 11:23–25, 36; 12:1.

43 Alma 12:1.

44 Alma 12:9,10. Compare also with 1 Corinthians 3:1,2; Hebrews 5:13,14; D&C 19:21–22,31.

45 Alma 12:12–15.

46 Alma 12:12–18.

47 Alma 12:22–27.

48 Alma 12:31–32.

49 Alma 12: 30, 33–37.

the plan of redemption; and the remission of sins through the name of the Only Begotten Son of God.<sup>50</sup>

Then he spoke of Priesthood. Why speak of Priesthood in the context of a missionary call to repentance, and particularly to a people who worshipped after the order of the Nehors and did not even believe in the need for repentance?<sup>51</sup> In the context of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s statement that missionaries were "laid under a strict command ... [to] impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him,"<sup>52</sup> and in the face of an argumentative and unbelieving crowd, it seems strange that he would discuss the doctrines of the Priesthood. What was his purpose in choosing that subject matter for this people?

Perhaps he spoke of foreordination to Priesthood office as some kind of historical prompt so that these listeners would reconsider their rejection of the doctrine of repentance.<sup>53</sup> If so, the Nephite scriptural record evidently provided material that enabled him to contrast repentant and unrepentant responses to prophetic calls to repentance. For the people of ancient Salem repented in response to King Melchizedek's leadership and preaching, but the children of Israel failed to qualify for equivalent blessings, though the Priesthood was also made available to them. Whatever Alma<sub>2</sub>'s reason for raising the doctrine of Priesthood qualification, the key to understanding this apparent digression seems to lie in the reference to Melchizedek, whose people Alma<sub>2</sub> said "had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination"<sup>54</sup> to the point where "they had all gone astray ... [and] were full of all manner of wickedness."<sup>55</sup> When it is remembered that Alma<sub>2</sub> had been personally commanded by an angel to preach to this people,<sup>56</sup> he may have felt there were similar repentance prospects for the people of Ammonihah. Preaching to a depraved people

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50 Alma 12:34.

51 The story of the originator of this order, Nehor, is told anecdotally in Alma 1. This man was sentenced to death for his murder of the patriot Gideon in the first year of the reign of the judges. Alma<sub>2</sub> characterized his religious practice as "priestcraft" (Alma 1:12) in evident reference to Nehor's introduction of the idea the priests and teachers "ought to be supported by the people" (Alma 1:3,5). Their doctrines included the idea that "all mankind should be saved ... and have eternal life" (Alma 1:4) without any need for repentance (Alma 15:15).

52 Alma 12:9.

53 Alma 15:15.

54 Alma 13:17.

55 Ibid.

56 Alma 8:14–18.

must have reminded him of Melchizedek, whose ministry among the people of Salem saw similarly depraved people repent.<sup>57</sup> It seems that the closing words of his prophetic call to the people of Ammonihah had exactly that spirit about them. He said

I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, even with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken to my words, and cast off your sins and not procrastinate the day of your repentance; But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be lead by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long suffering; Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest.<sup>58</sup>

This last hope — that they might be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest<sup>59</sup> — seems to focus and connect the references Alma<sub>2</sub> made to the people of Melchizedek; he said that Melchizedek’s people had repented, been called according to this holy order of Priesthood,<sup>60</sup> been sanctified,<sup>61</sup> and, having been made holy, pure, and spotless before God,<sup>62</sup> they had entered into this rest of the Lord their God.<sup>63</sup> Though “the more part” of the inhabitants of Ammonihah rejected the message,<sup>64</sup> the command to Alma to return and preach to the people<sup>65</sup> clearly bore fruit, as Zeezrom<sup>66</sup> and those who escaped with him to Sidon<sup>67</sup> as well as

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57 Alma 13:17.

58 Alma 13:27–29.

59 Alma 13:12, 29.

60 Alma 13:11.

61 Alma 13:11–12.

62 Alma 13:12.

63 Ibid. Note, in contrast, that the children of Israel who provoked the Lord in the matter of the golden calf had not been allowed to enter into their rest in their promised land. Alma<sub>2</sub> referred to them in Alma 12:35–36 with quotations from Psalms 95:8–11.

64 Alma 14:2.

65 Alma 8:16.

66 Alma 14:6,7; 15:3–12.

67 Alma 15:1.

those who remained and were martyred<sup>68</sup> can all be counted as examples of his success.

In context, the references in Alma 13:3, 4 to foreordination thus appear as part of an address designed to deepen Ammonihahite understanding of the doctrine and the blessings flowing from repentance. Though context may admit an oblique reference to the doctrine of foreordination to Priesthood office, what seems more likely, since it was the *manner* of that ordination to which Alma<sub>2</sub> repeatedly drew attention,<sup>69</sup> is that he was trying to focus their minds on the eternal principle that the receipt of all spiritual blessings is predicated upon obedience to spiritual law.<sup>70</sup>

### Alma 13: Text

The best way to advance our understanding is to examine the actual text of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s words as they have been translated in the Book of Mormon. To assist in this undertaking, the pertinent verses are organized in columns: the text in the first column, and likely meanings discussed in the second column. The meaning one takes from these verses depends upon whether one reads them as primary authority for the doctrine that individuals were foreordained to specific priesthood offices in the pre-existence or whether one thinks Alma<sub>2</sub> was using the worthiness requirement before priesthood ordination as a way to motivate the Ammonihahites to repent:

<p>1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.</p>	<p>Alma<sub>2</sub>'s reference is to the time the Lord God both gave commandments to his children and ordained priests. While God gave commandments to men from the beginning, the coupling here of the giving of commandments and the ordination of priests, together with the reference two verses previously in Alma 12:36 to "the first provocation," suggest Alma was referring to the ordination of Israelite priests in the wilderness — the time the Ten Commandments were given and Israel provoked God by worshipping the golden calf.</p>
<p>2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, <i>in a manner</i> that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.</p>	<p>Though the Israelite priests were Aaronic or Levitical priests, all Priesthood is Priesthood "after the order of his Son" (D&amp;C 107:5, 14). The <i>manner</i> in which these priests were ordained is Alma<sub>2</sub>'s focus. He reaffirms his focus on the manner of the ordination in verses 3, 8, and 16.</p>

68 Alma 14:1, 8, 10–11.

69 Alma 13:2, 3, 8, 16.

70 D&C 130:20–21.

<p>3 And this is <i>the manner after which they were ordained</i> — being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.</p>	<p>The conventional interpretation of Elder McConkie, above, is that all male spirits who showed “exceeding faith and good works” before the foundation of this world, were foreordained to receive the Priesthood on earth. However, this verse may also be interpreted to mean that it is the manner of ordination to the Priesthood on the earth that was foreordained in the pre-existence. This latter interpretation holds that it is “exceeding faith and good works” on earth that would qualify men for ordination to the Priesthood. Alma<sub>2</sub>’s use of the words “called and prepared” makes this interpretation problematic since it seems odd to suggest that the manner of ordination, rather than individual male spirits, was “called and prepared” in the pre-existence. However, Alma<sub>2</sub>’s use of the words <i>calling</i> and <i>called</i>, in verses 4, 5, 6, 8, and 11 to refer to an ordination in mortality seem to confirm that Alma<sub>2</sub> anticipated an ordination following exceeding faith and good works in mortality.</p>
<p>4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.</p>	<p>The conventional interpretation holds that those who did not exercise exceeding faith and good works in the pre-existence were not foreordained to receive the Priesthood on earth. This interpretation recalls LDS Church understanding and practice before 1978 which denied Priesthood ordination and temple ordinances to some on account of their race or color. The alternative interpretation here suggested is that Alma<sub>2</sub> intended to explain that those who do not exercise exceeding faith and good works in mortality will not be ordained to the Priesthood. In this verse, the “calling” was foreseen in the pre-existence but does not take place until earth life.</p>
<p>5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—</p>	<p>This verse is a parallel restatement of the thought in verse 4. The question is what Alma intended by the words “in the first place.” The conventional interpretation requires that male spirits who hardened their hearts in the pre-existence forewent the privilege of foreordination to the Priesthood. This verse may also be interpreted to mean that all male spirits who do not harden their hearts against the gospel on the earth will receive the Priesthood here. In this verse, while the “calling” was prepared in the pre-existence, it is extended only in earth life after faith and good works have been demonstrated.</p>

<p>6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—</p>	<p>The “calling” referred to is a calling to the high priesthood on earth.</p>
<p>7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—</p>	<p>In this verse it is clear that the eternal Priesthood already existed when this earth’s existence was planned. This insight makes likely that the manner by which male spirits would be ordained to the Priesthood on earth, rather than the foreordination of specific pre-mortally qualified individuals, was what Alma<sub>2</sub> was referring to throughout this passage in his sermon at Ammonihah.</p>
<p>8 Now <i>they were ordained after this manner</i> — being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end —</p>	<p>Joseph Smith could have used the word “foreordained” in place of “ordained” to make it clear that Alma<sub>2</sub> was referring to specific Priesthood ordinations in the pre-existence in this verse, but he did not. An interpretation of this verse which holds the ordination here referred to is an ordination on earth, is the simplest and most natural meaning of these words.</p>
<p>9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.</p>	<p>Those who “become high priests” ‘in the manner which Alma<sub>2</sub> has explained are made high priests forever. If they became high priests by foreordination in the pre-existence and were thus “high priests forever;” there would be no need for an ordination on earth. These words confirm again that the manner of ordination to which Alma<sub>2</sub> is referring is an ordination on earth.</p>



<p>10 Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;</p>	<p>Those who follow the conventional interpretation will interpret the repetition of the “exceeding faith” phrase as a recall of the pre-existence context they find in verse 3. But neither Alma<sub>2</sub> nor Joseph Smith license that interpretation with the words used in verse 10. The simplest interpretation of this verse is that it is the exceeding faith of righteous men on earth that leads to their ordination to the Priesthood and the office of high priest within that Priesthood.</p>
<p>11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.</p>	<p>The word “therefore” is used to justify or logically require an understanding that only righteous men who exercise exceeding faith will be ordained to the Priesthood on this earth. However, this verse is inconclusive as to where that exceeding faith must be exercised.</p>
<p>12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.</p>	<p>[S]anctification by the Holy Ghost is a doctrine that describes the way human beings qualify themselves to live with God during their mortal lives. Sanctification in mortality requires that the individual exercise exceeding faith and good works, and Alma<sub>2</sub> likely intended the word “sanctification” as a synonym for his phrase “exceeding faith and good works.” It stretches the context to imagine that Alma<sub>2</sub> was suggesting here that sanctification began in the pre-existence.</p>
<p>13 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.</p>	<p>Here Alma<sub>2</sub> is clearly admonishing the Ammonihahites to repent and exercise exceeding faith and good works so that they may also merit ordination to the Priesthood in mortality.</p>
<p>14 Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever.</p>	<p>Alma<sub>2</sub> restates that repentance and the exercise of exceeding faith and good works in mortality qualified the people of Melchizedek’s day for ordination to the Priesthood.</p>

<p>15 And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.</p>	<p>The payment of tithes to Melchizedek was one example of Abraham's exceeding faith and good works in mortality.</p>
<p>16 Now <i>these ordinances were given after this manner</i>, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.</p>	<p>Alma<sub>2</sub> says that the manner in which men are ordained to the Priesthood demonstrates, to those who observe their example, how to prepare for and benefit by the Son of God's atonement. It is submitted that Alma<sub>2</sub>'s repeated reference to the manner of ordination to the Priesthood would have been meaningless if Alma<sub>2</sub> intended to refer the people of Ammonihah to ordinations in the pre-existence, for those could not be seen or remembered. Rather, he intended them to contemplate how they could repent and live worthy mortal lives so that they could also qualify for the privilege of ordination to the Priesthood in mortality.</p>

Alma 13:1 and 2 are Alma<sub>2</sub>'s introduction to what he taught the Ammonihahites about Priesthood. He wrote:

I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.<sup>71</sup>

What were “these things” of which Alma<sub>2</sub> spoke? Surely, the things that he and Amulek had been preaching about before Alma<sub>2</sub> stopped to give this Priesthood ordination example. In essence, “these things” were the message that the people of Ammonihah must repent if the Lord were to be persuaded to turn away His fierce anger and make available the blessings of redemption from the effects of sin. Alma<sub>2</sub> continued:

And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.<sup>72</sup>

The “manner” was all-important — and at this point, he had not yet made reference to the foundation of the world or the foreknowledge of God.<sup>73</sup> In other words, Alma<sub>2</sub> was talking about the way Priesthood was conferred among the Nephites. Alma<sub>2</sub> did not explain Priesthood ordination in detail which would indicate that, although the

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71 Alma 13:1.

72 Alma 13:2.

73 Alma 13:3.

Ammonihahites followed the teachings of Nehor,<sup>74</sup> they were familiar with the manner in which the Priesthood was conferred in the Christian church among the Nephites.<sup>75</sup> If not, Alma<sub>2</sub>'s reference to the manner in which Nephite men were ordained to the Priesthood would not have been understood by his audience.

It is only after referring to the manner of priesthood ordination among mortals that Alma<sub>2</sub> made any mention of the foundation of the world or the foreknowledge of God.<sup>76</sup> Why then did Alma<sub>2</sub> refer to the foundation of the world and the foreknowledge of God? If these verses are viewed objectively and seen in their context as part of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s admonition that the people of Ammonihah should repent, then his reference to the foreknowledge of God at the foundation of the world is made to emphasize that the Father had approved the manner of ordination to the Priesthood to be observed in mortality even before the earth's existence.

Why then did Alma<sub>2</sub> use the words "called and prepared from the foundation of the world"? Did he intend the Ammonihahites to understand that individual men were ordained to the Priesthood in the pre-existence on account of the exceeding faith and good works they had manifest there? How would that contribute to his admonition to the Ammonihahites that they should repent now? Surely the suggestion that some individuals pre-qualified for the priesthood according to the foreknowledge of God would have been an unlikely and counter-productive message for Alma<sub>2</sub> to preach to these people. This message would seem to indicate not only that they were unworthy and in need of repentance on earth but that their state was the perpetuation of their unworthiness in the life they were said to have lived before mortality. It is submitted that it is much more likely that Alma<sub>2</sub> was explaining that the people of the city of Ammonihah could qualify for ordination to the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God as had the people of the city of Melchizedek before them. This privilege was available to them,

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74 Alma 15:5; 16:11. See also notes 31 and 51, above.

75 It is not clear when the term "Christian" was first used among the Nephites, though it is first used in connection with those who followed Captain Moroni's banners in 73 BC, approximately nine years after Alma's mission to the Zoramites. The term was first coined among followers of Christ in Palestine at Antioch (Acts 11:26) around 43 AD, approximately six years after the church was established there (Farrar, F.W., *Life of Paul*, [London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1901], p. 165–171).

76 Alma 13:3.

as to Melchizedek's people, if they would repent and thereafter exercise exceeding faith and good works.

It is further submitted that Alma<sub>2</sub> was using the standard of worthiness for priesthood ordination as a parable to teach the basis upon which anyone can receive blessings from God. For Alma<sub>2</sub>, the manner of ordination was a type, or pattern, of how anyone might qualify to receive blessings or privileges from God. But it does not appear that he was referring to the physical manner in which priesthood ordinations were done, as in the performance of the ordinance by the laying on of hands. Nor was Alma<sub>2</sub> referring to the requirement of a sacrificial sin offering beforehand in accordance with Mosaic law, for nowhere does Alma<sub>2</sub> mention such ordinances (though Amulek discussed sacrificial offerings in his mission with Alma<sub>2</sub> among the Zoramites<sup>77</sup>). Rather, what Alma<sub>2</sub> specifies as the "manner of ordination" is the way in which any man (including an Ammonihahite man) may qualify to receive the Priesthood. That method of qualification is what Alma<sub>2</sub> says was intended to provide a type, or teaching, as to how all people might "look forward to the Son of God for redemption." And what was that method?

It is that, "being left to choose good or evil,"<sup>78</sup> they exercise "exceedingly great faith"<sup>79</sup> and are called, "while others ... reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds"<sup>80</sup> when they might have received the same holy calling if they had also exercised exceedingly great faith.<sup>81</sup>

In this way, the reference to "the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God"<sup>82</sup> can be seen as a parenthetical observation that the worthiness qualification itself was foreordained "from the foundation of the world."<sup>83</sup> While God certainly foreknew which of His sons would qualify in mortality to receive the Priesthood, the standards He preset did not exclude any of them. All men would exercise their agency and choose for themselves. All were called, but fewer would be chosen, in exercise of their own free will and choice.

When the context of this day of preaching to the Ammonihahites is understood, we can see that Alma was identifying the foreordained

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77 Alma 34:8–14.

78 Alma 13:3.

79 Ibid.

80 Alma 13:4.

81 Ibid.

82 Alma 13:3.

83 Ibid.

worthiness standard as a second witness or proof that repentance and righteousness to a high priestly level was a completely legitimate expectation of all the children of God. The suggestion that the passage proves that there were trials of faith in the pre-existent first estate is misplaced for it is unlikely that Alma<sub>2</sub> intended to raise that idea in a missionary context.

When a man qualifies to receive the Priesthood, he may be said to have obtained a “preparatory redemption”<sup>84</sup> of sorts — a conditional seal of approval on his righteousness to that point. That seal might be made sure if he continued to be righteous and had “his . . . garments washed white through the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>85</sup> Thereafter the promise was, and remains, that such may be made pure to the point where they “c[an] not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence . . . and enter . . . into the rest of the Lord their God.”<sup>86</sup> The Melchizedek Priesthood was “prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts . . . through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son.”<sup>87</sup>

Alma<sub>2</sub>’s hope was that the inhabitants of Ammonihah might respond in the same favorable way as the previously wicked inhabitants of Salem had done after Melchizedek preached to them. If they did, it was foreordained that they might obtain the same blessings.

What then of the familiar teaching that anyone who holds a Priesthood office was foreordained to do so?

### **The Doctrine of Foreordination**

A better source for more complete understanding of this doctrine may be found in the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said:

1. I believe in the fall of man, as recorded in the Bible; I believe that God foreknew everything, but did not foreordain everything; I deny that foreordain and foreknow is the same thing. He foreordained the fall of man; but as merciful as He is, He foreordained at the same time, a plan of redemption for all mankind (HC 4:78),
2. Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose that I

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84 Ibid.

85 Alma 13:11.

86 Alma 13:12.

87 Alma 13:15.

was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council (HC 6:364), and

3. At the general and Grand Council of heaven, all those to whom a dispensation was to be committed were set apart and ordained at that time, to that calling (WJS, p. 371; standardized).<sup>88</sup>

The generality of the statement at 2 above may be considered to be inconsistent with the specificity of the statements made in quotes 1 and 3. Perhaps they may be reconciled if the second statement is understood as referring to the men called to minister to the whole world in a dispensational sense. This author, however, has not the liberty to reinterpret the prophet's meaning. Joseph Smith certainly did not believe that God foreordained everything. That would amount to predestination and would have undone the principle of agency over which the war in heaven had been fought.<sup>89</sup>

There are a number of scriptural passages that shed further light on the doctrine. They include:

- The revelation to Abraham that he and other noble and great ones were chosen before they were born to rule in mortality<sup>90</sup>
- Moses' teaching that "the bounds of the people" were set by the Most High "according to the number of the children of Israel" when He "divided to the nations their inheritance"<sup>91</sup>
- Paul's similarly spirited teaching in Greece that God had "determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of [man's] habitation"<sup>92</sup>

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88 As quoted in *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, Dahl, L.E. & Cannon, D.Q. Eds., (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), p 270.

89 Moses 4:1–4; Revelations 12:7–9.

90 Abraham 3:22–23.

91 Deuteronomy 32:7–9.

92 Acts 17:26. Note that Greg Boyd's interpretation of this passage is said to deny the conventional LDS view that this reference confirms the extent of God's foreordination and planning of human habitation on the earth. Boyd has written:

In this passage Paul is preaching to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18). His goal is to show them that, in contrast to their idols, God created and cares for all people (Acts 17:24–26). Paul says that the reason God gives "times" and "places" to nations is "so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him — though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). The statement certainly implies that God is sovereign over the nations, but it also implies that God does not

- The revelation to Jeremiah that he was both foreknown, and foreordained “a prophet unto the nations.”<sup>93</sup>

Nor were Abraham, Jeremiah, and Joseph Smith<sup>94</sup> the only individuals who are scripturally revealed to have been individually foreordained. There are many references to Christ’s foreordination as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”<sup>95</sup> Mary<sup>96</sup> and John the Baptist<sup>97</sup> and the Twelve who ministered with Christ in Time’s meridian<sup>98</sup> were similarly chosen beforehand, including particularly John later called Beloved.<sup>99</sup> Joseph sold into Egypt saw Moses,<sup>100</sup> Joseph Smith, and his father also named Joseph.<sup>101</sup> And then there are cases where the Lord revealed His foreknowledge of all things when He revealed the identity and missions of many people for prophetic faithful purposes. These included His knowledge that Pharaoh would harden his heart against Moses,<sup>102</sup> that Esau would serve Jacob,<sup>103</sup> that Cyrus would enable an Israelite return to Palestine,<sup>104</sup> and that Columbus would “bring the American nations to the knowledge of the old world.”<sup>105</sup>

But as Joseph Smith taught, He did not foreordain everything. The Calvinistic idea that God has already chosen who will respond to the gospel, from Paul’s statement that some men were “predestinate[d] to

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meticulously control people. God wants to be found and “now commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Yet many people from every nation refuse to do this. Indeed, most of the philosophers Paul was preaching to rejected his message (Acts 17:32–34). Although God controls the general parameters of human freedom ... he does not meticulously control humans and thus does not always get his way when it comes to the decisions they make. (Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* [IVP Academic, 2001]), 413.

93 Jeremiah 1:4–5.

94 2 Nephi 3:6–16.

95 For example, Moses 4:1–4; Abraham 3:27; 1 Peter 1:19–20; Revelations 13:8.

96 1 Nephi 11:18–20; Mosiah 3:8; Isaiah 7:14.

97 1 Nephi 10:7–10; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3.

98 1 Nephi 11:29, 34–36.

99 1 Nephi 14:18–27.

100 2 Nephi 3:9–10,17.

101 2 Nephi 3:6–16 (15).

102 For example Exodus 7:3 JST

103 Romans 9:10–12.

104 Isaiah 44:28; 45.

105 1 Nephi 13.

be conformed to the image of his Son”<sup>106</sup> in a passage that also uses the words “called,” “justified,” and “glorified,”<sup>107</sup> denies the essence of the doctrine of moral agency. That doctrine holds that all may “come to God through righteousness and diligence (exceeding faith and good works in Alma<sub>2</sub>’s words) and thus become numbered with those who are ‘sons [and daughters] of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.’”<sup>108</sup> Again, in Romans 8 as in Alma 13, Paul was teaching the foreordained principles upon which all could qualify for the blessings of the celestial kingdom of God, regardless of whether they were born Jew or Gentile. That message was the burden of his entire ministry after his conversion. The Calvinistic mistake originates in the idea that Paul had taught that God had already made His choices as to who would be saved and that mortals exercising faith and good works can not change decisions God has made in advance.

Alma<sub>2</sub>’s preaching on the principle of foreordained worthiness underlies modern LDS practice where Bishops and Stake Presidents interview those who seek to demonstrate their qualification to attend the temple and to be ordained to priesthood office. It is also the principle that underlies the so-called raised bar for missionary service.

### The 1978 Revelation on Priesthood

The preface to the 1978 revelation on priesthood provides further context. It states:

*The Book of Mormon teaches that “all are alike unto God,” including “black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33). Throughout the history of the Church, people of every race and ethnicity in many countries have been baptized and have lived as faithful members of the Church. During Joseph Smith’s lifetime, a few black male members of the Church were ordained to the priesthood. Early in its history, Church leaders stopped conferring the priesthood on black males of African descent. Church records offer no clear insights into the origins*

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106 Romans 8:29. Readers interested in more detail about this theology are referred to the work of John Tvedtnes and Richard Pratt — see <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/publications/agency-vs-predestination> and [http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/th.pratt.historical\\_contingencies.pdf](http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/th.pratt.historical_contingencies.pdf).

107 Romans 8:30.

108 Top, Brent L., “Foreordination,” *Jesus Christ and His Gospel, Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Ludlow, D.L., (Salt Lake City, 1994), 173–174, quoting in part D&C 84:34.



*of this practice. Church leaders believed that a revelation from God was needed to alter this practice and prayerfully sought guidance. The revelation came to Church President Spencer W. Kimball and was affirmed to other Church leaders in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1978. The revelation removed all restrictions with regard to race that once applied to the priesthood (emphasis in original).<sup>109</sup>*

The June 8, 1978, letter by which the revelation was announced, had been previously sustained by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, all other General Authorities, and it was unanimously approved by the membership of the Church in the 148<sup>th</sup> Semiannual conference on September 30, 1978 as part of the Church's scriptural canon.<sup>110</sup> The letter by which it was earlier announced reads in relevant part:

Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God's eternal plan, all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood, and witnessing the faithfulness of those from whom the priesthood has been withheld, we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

He has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple. Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color. Priesthood leaders are instructed to follow the policy of carefully interviewing all candidates for ordination to either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek

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109 Doctrine and Covenants OD2.

110 In the "Race and the Priesthood" essay on the Church's official website (<<https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>>), canonization of the revelation is confirmed in the following words:

The First Presidency statement regarding the revelation was canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants as Official Declaration 2.

Priesthood to insure that they meet the established standards for worthiness.<sup>111</sup>

While the text of the letter does not identify a lack of pre-existent valiance as one reason why some men were not entitled to the privilege of priesthood ordination in mortality, the essay on “Race and the Priesthood”<sup>112</sup> confirms that earlier view with the following statement:

Around the turn of the century, another explanation gained currency: blacks were said to have been less than fully valiant in the premortal battle against Lucifer and, as a consequence, were restricted from priesthood and temple blessings.<sup>113</sup>

That statement is supported with a footnote citing the statements in a letter by then Apostle Elder Joseph Fielding Smith to Alfred M. Nelson on January 31, 1907. The footnote quotes from the letter:

the belief was “quite general” among Mormons that “the Negro race has been cursed for taking a neutral position in that great contest.” Yet this belief, he admitted, “is not the official position of the Church, [and is] merely the opinion of men.”<sup>114</sup>

That Elder Smith himself accepted the validity of this view, is manifest in his book, *The Way to Perfection*, first published in 1931, though he did foresee the day when the negro race would receive the priesthood.<sup>115</sup> There he wrote:

It is a reasonable conclusion however, that there were many who did not stand valiantly with Michael in the great battle for the protection of the free agency and the plan for the merited exaltation of mankind, although they may not have

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111 Doctrine and Covenants OD2.

112 Essay on “Race and the Priesthood,” above n 110.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., footnote 14.

115 Quoting President Woodruff, who recorded the words of President Young, he noted:

Any man having one drop of the seed of Cain in him cannot receive the Priesthood; but the day will come when all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have (*The Way to Perfection*, Genealogical Society of Utah, Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1943, 106).

He concluded that discussion with an expression of hope: “Surely the Lord will remember their faithfulness and reward them accordingly” (ibid., 111).

openly rebelled ... We naturally conclude that others ... did not show the loyalty to their Redeemer that they should. Their sin was not one that merited the extreme punishment which was inflicted on the devil and his angels. They were not denied the privilege of receiving the second estate but were permitted to come to the earth-life with some restrictions placed upon them. That the negro race, for instance, have been placed under restrictions because of their attitude in the world of spirits, few will doubt. It cannot be looked upon as just that they should be deprived of the power of the Priesthood without it being a punishment for some act or acts performed before they were born.<sup>116</sup>

Those statements accord with entries made by his son-in-law, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in the first edition of his most famous work, *Mormon Doctrine: A Compendium of the Gospel* in 1958. Elder McConkie wrote:

In the pre-existent eternity various degrees of valiance and devotion to the truth were exhibited by different groups of our Father's spirit offspring. One-third of the spirit hosts of heaven came out in open rebellion and were cast out without bodies, becoming the devil and his angels. The other two-thirds stood affirmatively for Christ; there were no neutrals. To stand neutral in the midst of war is a philosophical impossibility ... Of the two-thirds who followed Christ, however, some were more valiant than others ... Those who were less valiant in pre-existence and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as the negroes ... Negroes in this life are denied the priesthood; under no circumstances can they hold this delegation of authority from the Almighty ... The present status of the negro rests purely and simply on the foundation of pre-existence. Along with all races and peoples he is receiving here what he merits as a result of the long pre-mortal probation in the presence of the Lord. The principle is the same as will apply when all men are judged according to

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116 Ibid., 43.

their mortal works and are awarded varying statuses in the life hereafter.<sup>117</sup>

However, President Joseph Fielding Smith had passed away before the revelation on priesthood was received. We expect that if he was alive at the time of that revelation, he would probably have responded as did his son-in-law Elder McConkie afterwards, when he acknowledged the error in what he had previously believed and written. Elder McConkie famously said:

There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren that we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. I have said the same things, and people write me letters and say, ‘You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?’ All I can say is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living, modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world ... It doesn’t make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June 1978. It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject. As to any slivers of light or any particles of darkness of the past, we forget about them. We now do what meridian Israel did when the Lord said the gospel should go to the Gentiles. We forget all the statements that limited the gospel to the house of Israel, and we start going to the Gentiles.<sup>118</sup>

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117 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine: A Compendium of the Gospel*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958). Note that the Committee assigned by The First Presidency to review the first edition of McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* identified more than 1000 corrections which were made before the second edition was issued in 1961 (Gregory Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*, [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005], 50–53).

118 “All are Alike unto God,” The Second Annual Church Education Religious Educators Symposium, 18 August 1978, Brigham Young University, <[https://si.lds.org/bc/seminary/content/library/talks/ces-symposium-addresses/all-are-alike-unto-god\\_eng.pdf](https://si.lds.org/bc/seminary/content/library/talks/ces-symposium-addresses/all-are-alike-unto-god_eng.pdf)>. Note that Joseph Fielding Smith similarly acknowledged his

How then does what I have called the conventional understanding of the reference to foreordination in Alma 13:3–4, referenced in *Mormon Doctrine* and *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, square with the revelation on priesthood? To the extent that these statements reflect the view that some male spirits came to earth unable to qualify to receive the priesthood here, these views must be rejected. While it is conceded that some Book of Mormon readers still find it difficult to reconcile Nephi<sub>1</sub>'s variable views about race in 2 Nephi 5 and 26, there is no need to interpret Alma 13 in a manner that suggests Alma<sub>2</sub> believed any of God's mortal sons could not qualify themselves to receive the priesthood according to the foreordained worthiness requirement.

### Conclusion

The conventional interpretation of the opening verses of Alma 13 holds that Alma<sub>2</sub> understood and taught the people of Ammonihah that all who receive the priesthood in mortality were foreordained to receive it on account of their exceeding faith and good works in the pre-existence. That interpretation includes the idea that others were not foreordained to receive the priesthood in mortality because they were not as faithful or valiant in the pre-existence. In this article, I suggested three reasons as to why that interpretation cannot be correct.

First, it is unlikely that such an idea would have served Alma<sub>2</sub>'s missionary purpose among the Ammonihahites. Such instruction would likely have been interpreted to mean that God is a respecter of persons and that the unbelieving Ammonihahites were unworthy to receive the priesthood from before the foundation of the world.

Second, when Alma<sub>2</sub>'s emphasis on the manner of ordination is identified as the burden of his teaching, rather than the actions of some few individuals before the foundation of the world, it becomes

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own human fallibility. In *Doctrines of Salvation*, a work edited by Elder McConkie before the 1978 Revelation on Priesthood, he said:

It makes no difference what is written or what anyone has said, if what has been said is in conflict with what the Lord has revealed, we can set it aside. My words, and the teachings of any other member of the Church, high or low, if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them. Let us have this matter clear. We have accepted the four standard works as the measuring yardsticks, or balances, by which we measure every man's doctrine. You cannot accept the books written by the authorities of the Church as standards in doctrine, only in so far as they accord with the revealed word in the standard works (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Vol. 3, 203).

clear that Alma<sub>2</sub> intended to offer an example of how those on earth should live to qualify for redemption by the Son of God. This focus of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s instruction in its turn leads to an understanding that it was the worthiness standard itself that was foreordained in the pre-existence.

And finally, to interpret this passage any other way is to return to the ideology that underlay LDS practice before 1978 that denied the priesthood to some men on account of their race or ethnic origin.

A more careful understanding of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s insights about the qualifications for priesthood ordination can also improve our teaching. For example, his teachings show that God is no respecter of persons and that He intended to provide all His children with the opportunity to qualify for eternal life from the foundation of the world. They also suggest that the requirement that we demonstrate our worthiness, both before we are ordained to the priesthood and before we enter the temple, is intimately connected with the principle that advantage in the world to come is predicated upon our diligence and obedience to commandments in this life.<sup>119</sup> But it does so without undermining Nephi<sub>1</sub>'s insight that it is by grace we are saved after all we can do.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, the whole plan is dependent upon the work of redemption to be accomplished by the Son of God.<sup>121</sup>

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119 D&C 130:18–19.

120 2 Nephi 25:23.

121 Alma 13:2.









