

Alma 5

Alma 5: Header

The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.

Comments

Mormon wrote this chapter header. Our current scripture formatting places it before the chapter designation, perhaps to separate it from the more modern synopses that appear in italics, but which were not part of the original text.

Mormon uses chapter headers to indicate that he has changed his source from the large plates of Nephi to some other record. This header, itself, does not declare what the source is, but we find it in verse 2. It is “according to his own record.”

When Alma₂ abdicated as chief judge, he kept the portion of the large plates upon which he was recording official history. In addition, he kept a personal record of his missionary journey. Mormon uses this personal record heavily in the first part of the book of Alma, as it contains powerful sermons. When he returns to the large plate record that Alma₂ kept, it will be to descriptions of wars and contentions. As a simple division, the great sermons in the book of Alma come from Alma₂’s personal record and the war chapters come from the large plates of Nephi, as kept by Alma₂ as the official Nephite recordkeeper.

Alma₂ Preaches in the Land of Zarahemla

Alma 5:1–2

1 Now it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land.

2 And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record, saying:

Comments

As clarified in verse 2, Mormon is using Alma₂'s personal record for this chapter. This personal record will be the source of all but one chapter, from here to our chapter 43, which returns to the large plate record.

Mormon will typically quote heavily from Alma₂, where he typically summarized material from the large plates. To set up the quoted material, he gives this short introduction. Alma₂ intends to heal his people through repentance and a refreshed commitment to following Yahweh's gospel. He will do this by preaching, and he begins in the main city, Zarahemla.

Alma₂ Exhorts the People to Remembrance

Alma 5:3–5

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things, behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi; yea, the land which was called the land of Mormon; yea, and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon.

4 And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God.

5 And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

Comments

It is obvious that Mormon is quoting when the text begins with "I, Alma." In general, Mormon typically summarizes, but there are some texts where he felt it important to provide a full quotation. Typically, the quoted passages are important sermons. Thus, the very fact that we see "I, Alma" should warn the modern reader that Mormon felt that this was particularly important material.

As with many lessons in antiquity, Alma₂ begins with a lesson from the past. He reminds his listeners that he is related to Alma₁, who established a church in the land of Nephi and whose people that Yahweh delivered from bondage. There are two reasons for this introduction. The first is that it establishes Alma₂'s credentials in connection to the church. Secondly, and more importantly, it is a story of deliverance from bondage. While the current church members in Zarahemla are not in bondage to the Lamanites, they are still in need of Yahweh's deliverance.

Alma 5:6–8

6 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?

7 Behold, he changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.

8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not.

Comments

It is almost certain that not all of the congregation had been part of Alma₁'s group. We will see Alma₂ visit the descendants of the people of Limhi who had also been in bondage. Therefore, this is a generic call to remembrance of bondage. It is not that all had relatives who had been in bondage, but rather that, as members of the church, their spiritual father (who had created the concept of the church), had been in bondage.

Why should they remember that they had been in bondage? The intended parallel is between physical and spiritual bondage. While the current congregation might not be in physical bondage, Alma₂ is declaring that they are at least in danger of spiritual bondage. For their fathers in the land of Helam (see Mosiah 23:20), and now for them, the secret to salvation was in a change of heart.

The people of Limhi, more than the people of Alma₁, were in bondage due to their own sins that had removed them from the protection of the covenant of the land. The return required that they turn from that darkness to light, and when they did, Yahweh delivered them.

Alma 5:9–12

9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell?

11 Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them?

12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true.

Comments

The two important questions that Alma₂ asks about those who were in bondage and repented are: “were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed?” The reason those questions are important is because they are part of the specific Nephite understanding of the law of Moses. These are not questions rooted in the law of Moses, but rather in the gospel of the coming Messiah. One of the major aspects of Nephite apostasy was to reject the coming Messiah and propose a return to living the law of Moses exclusively, even though that was likely altered somewhat as well.

This becomes very clear in verse 11 when Alma₂ mentions his father’s conversion upon hearing Abinadi. Abinadi’s discourse before Noah’s priests was heavily weighted to teaching about the coming Messiah, which had fallen out of favor in the religion practiced by Noah’s priests.

This suggests that one of the aspects of the general social move to inequality was accompanied by a rejection of the uniquely Nephite belief in the coming Messiah. For that reason, it was important for Alma₂ to emphasize it.

Alma₂ Asks a Series of Piercing Questions

Alma 5:13–14

13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Comments

Alma sets up some important parallels. The people of Alma₁ and Limhi had been in bondage. They had to undergo a significant change of heart, from their past behavior to a new acceptance of the coming Messiah. Then they were saved. Alma₂ intentionally uses the word “saved,” rather than “freed from bondage,” because he is turning that past physical bondage into a metaphor for a current spiritual bondage.

The people of Alma₂ are in spiritual bondage because they have moved away from true principles, and perhaps have moved away from faith in the coming Messiah. They, too, must undergo a significant change of heart to leave behind their previous actions and turn to Yahweh, particularly to Yahweh’s early redemptive mission.

This mighty change alters our nature and even the way we present ourselves to others. To be spiritually born signifies a change. This isn’t the typical Christian born again experience, but rather a conversion of soul that should alter our behavior and our understanding. This question is asked of those who were believers and should be believers still. It is an invitation to a continual conversion.

Alma 5:15

15 Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

Comments

Doubtless there were those listening to Alma₂ who thought to themselves that Alma₂ was speaking to someone else, not them. Therefore, Alma₂ sets up questions designed to allow each person to measure themselves against what it might mean to have had a mighty change of heart.

First, and foremost, is “do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?” This is a critical question. How does one exercise faith? There are two problems in discussing faith. The first is that it is a term that comes to us through the New Testament, more than the Old Testament. It isn’t that the concept is different so much as it is a translation coming from Greek that wasn’t used to translate the correlated Hebrew terms. The second problem is that in English, the word faith is grammatically deficient in that it doesn’t have the full range of meaning in regard to parts of speech.

As a simple example, we can say “I am going for a run.” We can also say: “I run.” The word “run” can exist as both a noun and a verb. Of faith, however, we can say: “I have faith.” We cannot say: “I faith.” In Greek, the underlying verb did have a verb form. Thus, we need to have auxiliary words to help with that meaning. We “exercise faith.” Other times, the translators used “believe,” which had a similar meaning, but had the advantage of having both noun and verb forms.

For Alma₂ the question is “do ye exercise faith?” because it is the action that is important. This is not a passive belief. A change of heart does not require the simple belief in “the redemption of him who created” us, but in the living of the covenants that we have made with him who created us.

The next important aspect of this question is that it asks about redemption. This clearly points to the mortal atoning mission of the Messiah. It is the essential Nephite teaching to which a true change of heart will lead them.

Alma 5:16–18

16 I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?

17 Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?

18 Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God?

Comments

Alma₂ brings the questions to a very individual level. Rather than passing judgment on how we think someone else might be living the gospel, Alma₂ invites all to “imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord.” What will we be able to say in that day?

Alma₂ warns us that we will not be able to lie. We cannot say that we have done righteous work, but not have actually done what was needed. This brings up the question of what those works might be. For Alma₂, it is a return to the question of exercising faith as noted in the discussion of verse 15. What matters is what we do, where our actions are a reflection of the type of person we have become.

The reason that we cannot be saved by claiming righteous works in the last day may be because we have not done them, or we have not allowed a mighty change of heart to change us and inform us of the reasons for doing righteous works. We can have a good relationship with a neighbor, either because we ignore them or truly love them. Both might avoid a bad relationship, but only truly loving the neighbor is the result of the mighty change.

Alma 5:19

19 I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

Comments

In verse 14 Alma₂ had asked: “Have ye received his image in your countenances?” In this verse he asks: “can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?” These are clearly intentionally repeated phrases. This repetition has a superficial resemblance to repetitive resumption only because of the repeated phrase. However, the intervening material is an essential part of the sermon, and not an insertion.

This means that the repetition has a different function. This function is to emphasize aspects of how one might have the image of God on our countenances. The previous verses began with the general statement that one must exercise faith in the true God of redemption, and then spoke of the problem one would have coming before that God and not having lived according to the covenants.

This repeated phrase will set off a second set of conditions that similarly defines the conditions of those who do not fulfill their covenants. The two parallel phrases mark parallel arguments that are intended to intensify the emphasis on those traits.

There is an interesting possible cultural image in engraving the image of God on one’s countenance. In Mesoamerican non-Nephite religion, there were deity impersonators who would be the symbolic embodiment of a god by wearing that god’s mask. Thus, an available image to those familiar with Mesoamerican culture would be the image on the countenance as a representation of becoming like that deity. It would

create a very powerful metaphor to a known practice for how people might become like, or appear to have the qualities of, God.

Alma 5:20–21

20 I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?

21 I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins.

Comments

The parallel sections continue. These verses parallel verses 16 and 17 in their intent. In the previous verses, as well as in these, the subject is each individual being presented to God in the final judgment, but without having experienced the mighty change of heart that leads to exercising faith.

Alma₂ declares that those who actively reject the covenants of God are effectively yielding themselves to become subjects of the Devil. The reason for this dramatic statement is that scriptures typically paint pictures in only black and white. Thus, there are two churches, the church of God or the church of the Devil (see 1 Nephi 14:10). Therefore, if one does not exercise faith in God's covenants, they must therefore belong to the opposite possibility. Of course, there is an earth-life full of the possibility of repentance before such a dramatic choice is applicable, and degrees of glory after that. Those nuances are not important to this sermon.

Alma₂ emphasizes that there is only one way to salvation and reiterates that it is “through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers.” The emphasis is on the coming Messiah. This continues to suggest that this congregation, at least, has members who have rejected the belief in the coming Messiah.

Alma 5:22–25

22 And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you?

23 Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness?

24 Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?

25 I say unto you, Nay; except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.

Comments

These verses parallel the ideas in verses 18 through 21. The imagery depicts standing before God in the final judgment without having become clean. The reason for this emphasis is that becoming clean requires the atoning sacrifice of the coming Messiah. Alma₂ is declaring that they will not be able to stand clean before God in the final judgment, save it is through the atoning mission of the Messiah. The implication is that at least some of them have rejected that belief.

It is not clear why Alma₂ declares that some of the congregation might be considered murderers or “guilty of all manner of wickedness.” Under Nephite law, they would have been brought to justice had they actually committed murder. However, if Alma₂ is speaking of tendencies, then the tendency of those who rejected the understanding of the coming Messiah also typically followed the trends of the greater society. One of the ways that the large Mesoamerican society became richer was through conquest, and such conquests are often characterized as murders and robberies in the Book of Mormon.

Alma 5:26

26 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?

Comments

This may be the greatest question Alma₂ asks of any audience. If you once felt the change of heart, “can ye feel so now?” Alma₂ does not assume that the change of heart is permanent, or that it need only occur once. We can experience the change of heart and then allow that feeling or desire to fade. In Lehi₁’s dream of the tree of life, there were those who reached the tree and partook of the desirable fruit, and yet still were affected by the world around them (see 1 Nephi 8:25, where it says that they were ashamed).

Therefore, the important question is not whether we have felt the change in the past, but whether we currently feel it, whether we endure to the end.

Alma 5:27–28

27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments

have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins?

28 Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life.

Comments

How would one know if they continue to feel the change of heart? It is not in the feeling, but in the doing. Firstly, one must keep oneself blameless before God. That is one way of saying that we would need to continue to obey God's covenants and laws. Importantly for the Nephites, Alma₂ also declares that it is required that they have faith in the "blood of Christ." Alma₂ continues to remind the Nephites that having faith in the atoning mission of the coming Messiah is essential. King Benjamin had established a new covenant surrounding that belief: "And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives" (Mosiah 5:8).

Also important is that they be "stripped of pride." It was pride that created social divisions among the Nephites. It was antithetical to Nephite understanding of how one should be and act. Thus, this was a call to return to the desire to treat others as oneself, and to help those in need, and not to place oneself above another.

Alma 5:29–32

29 Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless.

30 And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

31 Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!

32 Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!

Comments

Alma₂ does not allow the congregation to pretend that he is speaking to some other person. Alma₂ pointedly asks them: "Is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? . . . Is there one among you that doth

make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?” Alma₂ points out that that person is not prepared to stand before his or her God.

Verse 29 requires reading the first two sentences together to get the proper meaning. Were a reader to stop after only “is there one among you who is not stripped of envy?” it might appear that all were already stripped of envy, which would be a good thing. However, the second sentence makes it clear that it is the one who is not stripped of envy that is in danger.

The Two Shepherds

Alma 5:33–36

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

Comments

Alma₂ has pronounced dire consequences upon those who cannot currently feel the mighty change of heart. In these verses he presents the way of redemption for those who are to be judged of God. The Atonement invites all humankind to repent and partake of the fruit of the tree of life.

The promise is that those who truly repent and accept the opportunity to change will be able to stand clean before their God, while those who do not will be hewn down and cast into the fire.

The idea that there might be some who would have felt the mighty change and then wandered from the path of righteousness suggested a possible tie to Lehi₁'s Tree of Life dream. In these verses we see the tree of life explicitly mentioned. The idea of partaking of the fruit and the waters could easily be references to the tree in the Garden and the symbolism that surrounded that tree, but the idea that those who reject the tree, or those that did not bring forth good fruit, would be cast into the fire appears to invoke imagery from Zenos's olive tree allegory.

It is tempting to see all three images continuing in Nephite society, and meeting here through implication and reference.

Alma 5:37–39

37 O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice!

38 Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

39 And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil.

Comments

Alma₂ did not come to preach to those who were living according to the covenants of the church, but to those who were in violation of the principles of Nephite religion. Therefore, he continues to emphasize those who are not doing as they should. In this case, he reminds them that their departure from the true way is due to their own choices. Their “good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ.” The problem is that they are denying the atoning Messiah.

Earlier, in verses 19 and 20, Alma₂ contrasted those who had God’s image on their countenances with those who became subjects of the Devil. That division is reiterated here. There are those who are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, and if one is not of the fold of the Good Shepherd, they are of the fold of the Devil. In the ultimate judgment, there are only two options, each diametrically opposed to the other.

Alma 5:40–42

40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.

42 And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.

Comments

The dichotomy between Christ as the Good Shepherd and the opposite choice, the Devil, is further clarified. The difference is by definition: “whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh

from the devil.” As verse 41 points out, that dichotomy holds for humankind’s actions. If we do good, it comes from Christ. If we do not good, it comes from the Devil. Our choices are manifest through the nature of our actions.

It is important to remember that Alma₂ is speaking of the final judgment. There is no discussion of repentance precisely because it is a discussion of the final times—times after which the judgment of our actions comes—times after opportunities for repentance have passed.

What we become will depend upon the master we have chosen, Christ or the Devil. The reward reflects the choice of master; life everlasting, or death “as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.”

Alma₂ Testifies That His Teachings Come from God

Alma 5:43–45

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God.

44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

45 And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Comments

Alma₂ declares his authority for these statements. It was important that he do so, for he was condemning nearly all in his audience. With such a potentially condemnatory sermon, who was he to pronounce it? Alma₂ declared that he did so under his authority in the Church. In the broad sense, we would call it the priesthood, for he invoked the holy order of God. It is possible, however, that he intended it to be more than simply the priesthood. There were ordained priests, but they did not have the authority to judge the congregation. Alma₂ did through his ordination to be the high priest and head authority over the church.

The next unasked, but important, question is how Alma₂ knew this information. Therefore, he asks: “do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?” The similarly unstated answer had to be that they believed that he did. Then the logical question was: “and how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?” He tells them in the next verses.

Alma 5:46–47

46 Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.

47 And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God.

Comments

The ultimate source of Alma₂'s knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit. However, Alma₂ makes certain to note that it was not a simple endowment of knowledge, but one he had to struggle for. He “fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself.” He does not reference his particular conversion. It would appear that this need to know for himself grew from that experience, but he considered it separate from at least the visitation from the angel.

Equally as important to knowing that he spoke the truth is that he could testify that the fathers had spoken the truth. He had said, in verse 44, that “I am called to speak . . . and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.” Alma₂ declares that he not only so testifies, but that he has that testimony through the Spirit of God as well. He speaks of the spirit of prophecy because he is testifying of what verse 44 called “the things which are to come.” That is a phrase that points directly to the coming atoning Messiah.

Alma₂ Testifies of the Coming of Christ

Alma 5:48–49

48 I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.

49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea, and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

Comments

The demonstration that things which are to come points to the mission of Christ appears in verse 48. Alma₂ declares: “I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come.” There should be no doubt in the mind of the modern reader as to what he meant. There also would have been no doubt for his ancient audience.

Alma again states his authority for his pronouncements. It is “the order after which I am called.” That order must be his authority of his position as high priest for the church. Even though others who were ordained priests might have the responsibility to preach, it is particularly his responsibility to guide the whole church and to attempt to bring them to unity in Yahweh’s covenants and in their understanding of the coming atoning Messiah.

Alma₂ Exhorts Repentance

Alma 5:50–51

50 Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men.

51 And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying: Go forth and say unto this people—Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Comments

There is a slight difference in the calls to repentance in verses 50 and 51. In verse 50 it is the Spirit calling all to repentance. That is one of the functions of the Spirit, to testify of truth. That truth is that all should come unto Yahweh, the king of heaven and earth. The combination of “heaven and earth” is a common adjective for Yahweh. Alma₂ provides that expression in an expanded form, and it is the only time we see it in association with Yahweh as king. This may have two reasons. The first is the implication that only Yahweh is now their king, since the Nephites are now under the reign of the judges. The other is that there is a triumphal Messiah expected who is to be king of heaven and of earth. Alma₂ is declaring that the atoning Messiah is also the one who will be that triumphal Messiah. Yahweh will perform both Messianic functions. They will come at different times.

Verse 51’s call to repentance comes through Alma₂ at the Spirit’s invitation. It comes as divine support behind Alma₂’s call to this congregation. The fact that they must repent to inherit the kingdom of heaven emphasizes the realm where the king of heaven dwells, and ties to verse 50.

Alma 5:52–56

52 And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.

53 And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?

54 Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance—

55 Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?

56 And finally, all ye that will persist in your wickedness, I say unto you that these are they who shall be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

Comments

Alma₂ is wrapping up his sermon by reiterating the main points. At the final day, there will come a time when “every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire.” That theme was first stated in verse 35.

Alma₂ tells them that they cannot continue being puffed up in pride or wear costly apparel. Those themes were first suggested in verses 28 and 29, where Alma₂ used the need to be stripped of envy and pride. The theme of persecution was found in verse 30.

The themes of elevating oneself over another and turning one’s back to the poor and needy were not explicitly mentioned, but those are common themes indicating Nephite apostasy from truth. As Alma₂ ends, he reiterates the nature of the congregation’s sins from which they are called to repentance.

Alma₂ Invites the People to Follow the Good Shepherd

Alma 5:57–60

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous,

that the word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

58 For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.

59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.

60 And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.

Comments

Much of Alma₂'s sermon has focused on the unrepentant and the eternal consequences of arriving at the final judgment unrepentant. Now, Alma₂ ends with hope. There is a call to repent, and there are blessings that flow from repentance, through the atonement of the coming Messiah:

The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous, implying that they will not share their fate.

The names of the righteous are written in the book of life, meaning they will have eternal life. Eternal life signifies the quality of life in the kingdom of heaven.

The righteous have the protection of the promise of the land, here stated as protection from the wolf that would devour the sheep.

All of these blessings come if those in the congregation heed the call of the Spirit and the Good Shepherd, who is the coming Messiah.

A subtle point in this important sermon is that the imagery of the Good Shepherd, the sheep, and the wolves, are probably present due to the translation rather than the Nephite original. Particularly, if the setting is Mesoamerica, there were no sheep, therefore, no shepherds. Even if the location were anywhere else, there was no sheep husbandry. The original plates must have had an image that invoked the same thoughts, but the specifics of this language come from the New Testament's Old World heritage.

Alma 5:61–62

61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you.

62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.

Comments

Alma₂ closes by reiterating his authority. In verse 44 Alma₂ had declared his authority through the Holy Order to which he had been called. Now he declares unequivocally that he speaks under Yahweh's authority and direction. As head of the church, he speaks to those who are in the church. The closing is the invitation to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which he had referenced in verse 34.

