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Abinadi: The Drama's Sacral Kingship is About Being a Child of God

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Abinadi: The Drama's Sacral Kingship is About Being a Child of God

The nature, qualifications, and promises of sacral kingship were the whole focus of Abinadi's argument before King Noah as he described to Alma what one must be to become a child of God. The coronation rites at the conclusion of the New Year festival temple drama not only represented the renewal of the king's earthly authority as an adopted son and heir of God, but they also represented the renewal of the ordinances and covenants of salvation for the king and every individual who participated in the ceremonies. Consequently, when Abinadi asked, "who shall be his [the Savior's] seed," then answered his own question, answering in terms of sacral kingship:

10b And who shall be his seed?

11 Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God (Mosiah 15:10b-11).

Because we know the end of the story of Abinadi and Alma, we can also know more about the beginning of the story: Abinadi had come to the city for the single purpose of becoming the mentor to the young prince Alma⁷⁵² —to teach him who he was and

⁷⁵² There are several indications that Alma was a young prince. Evidence of his age is found when his son Alma II spoke to the people of Zarahemla, saying:

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 (Alma 5:5).

So "they" were brought into bondage, and "we" came out. When Luke wrote "we" and "they" in Acts, it is taken as a key to knowing when he was and was not with Paul's party. If that same principle can be applied here, it says that when they were brought into bondage Alma II was not with them, but he was when they came out—indicating that he had been born while they were there.

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something about what his responsibilities would be. To do that, Abinadi subjected himself to arrest and trial at Noah's court—Alma would be there, and that would be the boy's only opportunity to hear the prophet. At the trial, Abinadi was interrogated by Noah's priests:

19 And they began to question him, that they might cross him, that thereby they might have wherewith to accuse him; but he answered them boldly, and withstood all their questions, yea, to their astonishment; for he did withstand them in all their questions, and did confound them in all their words.

20 And it came to pass that one of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying:

21 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth;

22 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion;

23 Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem;

24 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God?

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? (Mosiah 12:19-25).

It was customary that a boy be married by the age of 18 to 20, but if one were not a "young man," he could not sit in the councils of the Israelites, until he was 32, married, and had a child. If Alma II were his father's oldest child, or at least his oldest son, and born when his father was in his early twenties, then Alma I may have been only in his late teens when he heard Abinadi. That was too young to sit in the king's Council unless one was a prince.

Another indication of Alma's high rank (and probably of his popularity among the people) is that Noah did not arrest him, as he would have done a commoner, but rather sent someone to assassinate him.

Probably the strongest evidence is that after he got to Zarahemla and the king's sons refused to accept the throne, Alma was next in line for the throne. That could only be true if Zeniff, the king of the Nephites in the land of Nephi, were also a Nephite prince, and if Alma were his son and Noah's younger brother, and, therefore, a legal heir to both Nephite thrones.

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If the scripture with which Noah's priests challenged Abinadi was intended to evoke an answer that would justify their sentencing the prophet to death on charges of blasphemy and treason, then the answer they expected was probably something like this: "In Isaiah's acclamation, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,' he was calling attention to the fact that at the king's coronation he sat upon the throne in the temple with his feet 'established' upon a footstool that was a sacred box containing the symbols of priesthood and kingship. At that time the king had been given authority as Jehovah's 'son' and heir. Therefore, in consequence of those ordinances, King Noah is the legal earthly representative of Jehovah."

If Abinadi had given that answer, it would have been the technically correct one, but that is not what Abinadi said:

25 And now Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? (Mosiah 12:25).

That kind of retort is what one would expect from either someone who doesn't know the answer and is playing for time, or else from someone who is very sure of himself and is about to seize control of the situation—which is precisely what Abinadi was about to do. The king's priests who challenged Abinadi were probably the same officials who had presided over King Noah's coronation rites, so the prophet was about to challenge their authority as well as the king's. Abinadi's next statement confirms that he had just taken complete control of the conversation:

26 I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.

27 Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people? (Mosiah 12:26-27).

The word "wise" as spoken by Abinadi appears to be much stronger than it is in typical American English where it means something between prudent or clever. Anciently, "wisdom" was the knowledge of God—not knowledge about God, but God's

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knowledge.⁷⁵³ By saying they had not been wise—that is, that they had not acted in accordance with God's knowledge—Abinadi again challenged the very foundation of their ecclesiastical and political authority. When they responded, they ignored his challenge and did what people do who lean on tradition rather than revelation:

28 And they said: We teach the law of Moses.

29 And again he said unto them: If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin, that the Lord has cause to send me to prophesy against this people, yea, even a great evil against this people?

30 Know ye not that I speak the truth? Yea, ye know that I speak the truth; and you ought to tremble before God.

31 And it shall come to pass that ye shall be smitten for your iniquities, for ye have said that ye teach the law of Moses. And what know ye concerning the law of Moses? Doth salvation come by the law of Moses? What say ye?

32 And they answered and said that salvation did come by the law of Moses.

33 But now Abinadi said unto them: I know if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved; yea, if ye keep the commandments which the Lord delivered unto Moses in the mount of Sinai, saying:

34 I am the Lord thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

35 Thou shalt have no other God before me.

36 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above, or things which are in the earth beneath.

37 Now Abinadi said unto them, Have ye done all this? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not. And have ye taught this people that they should do all these things? I say unto you, Nay, ye have not (Mosiah 12:28-37).

Abinadi was a very difficult kind of person to deal with. The Savior was also that kind of person, as were Alma and the Prophet Joseph Smith. When discussing gospel

⁷⁵³ Proverbs 1-3 is an essay about Wisdom. There it is the very extension and expression of the knowledge and power of God. See also: Barker, *Older Testament* (1987), 81-99; Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 97-99.

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principles, prophets do not have the option of reverting to a position of compromise. So one must deal with them on their terms. One must accept them as a speaker of truth or else try to prove them to be frauds. If one knows but can't handle the fact that the prophet is saying the truth, then in order to justify disbelief, one tries to demonstrate that the prophet is a false prophet. To do that, people often resort to the simple expedient of demonstrating that the prophet is unable to enforce his truth or that he cannot be sustained by the truth he espouses. That may be done by throwing him in jail or by killing him. That approach is an extremely dangerous position to work from because, if one does that, one is likely to go to hell. That was precisely the bind King Noah was in. He had power over the life and death of his subjects, and he reacted exactly the way one might expect:

1 And now when the king had heard these words, he said unto his priests: Away with this fellow, and slay him; for what have we to do with him, for he is mad.

2 And they stood forth and attempted to lay their hands on him; but he withstood them, and said unto them:

3 Touch me not, for God shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell; therefore, God will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time (Mosiah 13:1-3).

If verse 3 was translated by the same criteria as the Old Testament, then the word "Elohim" is rendered as "God" and "Jehovah" as "Lord." So the statement would read:

3 Touch me not, for God [Elohim] shall smite you if ye lay your hands upon me, for I have not delivered the message which the Lord [Jehovah] sent me to deliver; neither have I told you that which ye requested that I should tell; therefore, God [Elohim] will not suffer that I shall be destroyed at this time.

4 But I must fulfill the commandments wherewith God [Elohim] has commanded me; and because I have told you the truth ye are angry with me. And again, because I have spoken the word of God [Elohim] ye have judged me that I am mad (Mosiah 13:3-4).

That statement is not a complete description of a *sode* experience, of course. It does not mention that God was sitting on his throne, and it does not mention other members of the Council being present. But this was hardly the kind of conversation where one would

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expect Abinadi to stop and explain the details of what had brought him to find and talk to Alma. Nevertheless, his argument was very important because it shows that Abinadi had a perfect understanding of the Godhead.

It also shows that Noah and the priests had a similar understanding—otherwise there would have been no reason for Abinadi to use his words with such care.

The temple drama of the New Year festival was a generic depiction of a *sode* experience. It clearly portrayed the relationship of Elohim, Jehovah, and the members of the Council who were to become the earthly prophets, kings, and sacral kings.⁷⁵⁴ During a *sode* experience the prophet sees God (Elohim) sitting on his throne. But he receives his assignment and instructions from Jehovah. For example: in Psalm 82 and Abraham 3 it was Elohim who made the covenant. Jehovah made the assignment, as in Abraham 3-5 and in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah reports, “The voice of the Lord [Jehovah], saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us [the Council]?” In 1 Nephi 1, Lehi saw God [Elohim] sitting on his throne, and one whose “luster was above the sun at noon-day” [Jehovah] gave him the book that contained instructions for his mission.

Therefore, when Abinadi carefully distinguished between which God did what, he was calling on his antagonists’ understanding of the festival drama to let them understand that he had received his instructions during a real *sode* experience. Abinadi was giving evidence in the strongest possible terms that he was a true prophet and that he had come to deliver an official message from God and the Council. Abinadi had just overridden Noah’s claim to sonship by asserting he had a *sode* experience, which made him, by definition, a true prophet, and he had put Noah and his priests on notice that they were speaking to a true prophet—with all of the attendant dangers of doing so!⁷⁵⁵

The king’s theoretical claim to authority rested on the belief that he was chosen at the Council, and his continued authority rested on his claim that his decisions represented the decisions of God. Now Abinadi was challenging those claims by asserting that his own authority was based on a covenant between Elohim and himself and that his instructions were from Jehovah. Abinadi was pitting his authority against the king’s, claiming that part of the assignment he had received during his *sode* experience was to call Noah’s subjects to repentance (something the king had failed to do) and to warn the king and his priests of

⁷⁵⁴ See chapters about Psalms 25 (525-44), 45 (255-304), 82 (227-44).

⁷⁵⁵ See Jeremiah 23:18-22. For a discussion of a *sode* experience being the criterion for a true prophet, see the chapter called, “Sode Experience—Return to the Council in Heaven.”

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an impending doom. It is little wonder that their fury was so intense that it required the powers of heaven to defend him from their immediate retaliation. Alma, who wrote the story, reported:

5 Now it came to pass after Abinadi had spoken these words that the people of king Noah durst not lay their hands on him, for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; and his face shone with exceeding luster, even as Moses' did while in the mount of Sinai, while speaking with the Lord.

6 And he spake with power and authority from God; and he continued his words, saying:

7 Ye see that ye have not power to slay me, therefore I finish my message. Yea, and I perceive that it cuts you to your hearts because I tell you the truth concerning your iniquities.

8 Yea, and my words fill you with wonder and amazement, and with anger (Mosiah 13:5-8).

One of the powers of a prophet is to know the thoughts of the persons with whom he is dealing. It is probably safe to assume that Abinadi's describing their "wonder, amazement, and anger" was more than just guessing by the looks on their faces. If he knew their thoughts, then he would also have known that his words were understood by them, and he knew that they knew he was a true prophet (as with Zeezrom in Alma 12:7). He warned:

9 But I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved.

10 But this much I tell you, what you do with me, after this, shall be as a type and a shadow of things which are to come (Mosiah 13:9-10).

As he stood there, it is possible but not likely, that his accusers would have given Abinadi a copy of the Law so he could use it in his defense. And there can be little doubt that the prophet could have quoted the Ten Commandments verbatim. Yet, the account says he "read" them to the king. It is likely that Noah was actually wearing an

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embroidered copy of the Ten Commandments as part of his royal clothing.⁷⁵⁶

The evidence that a visual copy of the Ten Commandments was a part of the royal regalia comes from an Old Testament story about an unworthy queen who was assassinated by temple priests. They then put a boy on the throne in her stead. The story reads:

12 And he [the priest] brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king (2 Kings 11:12; see 2 Chronicles 23:11).

Johnson explained, "the fact surely is that the king was made to wear, not merely the royal crown, but a document embodying the basic terms of Yahweh's covenant with the House of David."⁷⁵⁷ The document or "testimony" they gave the boy-king was probably a copy of the Ten Commandments which the king would then wear on his person. The evidence that it was the Ten Commandments is this: The stone tablets on which the Commandments were written were the testimony of the Lord's covenant with Israel and were often called the "testimony."⁷⁵⁸ For example, the account in Exodus reads:

28 And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him (Exodus 34:28-29).

⁷⁵⁶ For discussions of the king's wearing a copy of the Ten Commandments, see Widengren, "Early Hebrew Myths," 167-68; Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 25-26.

⁷⁵⁷ *Johnson, Sacral Kingship*, 23-24.

⁷⁵⁸ The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments are written are called the Testimony in Exodus 31:18, 32:15; 34:28-29. The "Testimony" was put in the Ark of the Covenant: Exodus 16:33-34; 25:16. The Ark of the Covenant is called the Ark of the Testimony: Exodus 30:26; Numbers 7:89. The "testimony" is in the Holy of Holies: Exodus 26:33-34; 27:21; 30:6.

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The significance of the king's actually wearing a copy of the Ten Commandments on his royal person would have been a reminder that, as Widengren wrote, "One fact after all remains primary: the king is always the ultimate authority so far as the *Torah* is concerned."⁷⁵⁹

That would add considerable tension to the exchange between the prophet and the king. We may envision Abinadi as a dignified old man—whose voice resounded with the quiet authority of a prophet—standing in front of King Noah, pointing to the copy of the Ten Commandments which the king wore—pointing directly at the king—and saying, in effect: "Obedience to *those* laws are the first conditions of being a legitimate son and heir of Jehovah—and you and your priests just don't qualify!"

There would have been another good reason for Abinadi beginning his rebuttal with a reference to the Ten Commandments. They represented the very foundation of the king's authority. Abinadi was not only challenging the ecclesiastical status of the king and his priests, he was also challenging their political right to rule. Their accusations against the prophet were about the most fundamental and sacred ordinances of Israelite temple worship—and that was where they were most vulnerable. After "reading" the Ten Commandments to his accusers, Abinadi continued:

27 And now ye have said that salvation cometh by the law of Moses. I say unto you that it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses (Mosiah 13:27).⁷⁶⁰

While the king and his priests were conducting their farcical courtroom trial, there was a powerful drama going on before their eyes which they neither saw nor heard. The safety of the prophet was no longer in question, so he could now focus his attention on teaching Alma. When a prophet speaks by the power of the Holy Ghost, and another person listens by that same power, both know what is happening. Alma was listening, so

⁷⁵⁹ Widengren, "King and Covenant," 17. For a discussion of the importance of the king having the Law, see Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*.

⁷⁶⁰ His argument looks forward to the Savior's Atonement just as Paul's looked back to it. Paul's explanation was that "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer" may purify one in this world, but only the blood of a God can cleanse the souls of men for eternity (Hebrews 9:13).

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Abinadi understood. In the development of Abinadi's speech, one hears the venerable prophet lecturing the king with defiance, almost belligerence, and then he changes his approach as he teaches the young prince what it really means to be a son of God.

Isaiah's words "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" can be understood in three different ways. Abinadi first dealt with the interpretation that was most obvious to the priests who had accosted him, that is, that the Isaiah passage was about the earthly king as a representative of Jehovah. In doing so, the prophet also addressed the second interpretation—the one what was probably most obvious to himself: that Isaiah's statement was a celebration of the Kingship of Jehovah. As he explained to Alma, the passage is, first of all, about Jehovah-Jesus-Messiah-Savior as Eternal King:

29 And now I say unto you that it was expedient that there should be a law given to the children of Israel, yea, even a very strict law; for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God;

30 Therefore there was a law given them, yea, a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him.

31 But behold, I say unto you, that all these things were types of things to come.

32 And now, did they understand the law? I say unto you, Nay, they did not all understand the law; and this because of the hardness of their hearts; for they understood not that there could not any man be saved except it were through the redemption of God.

33 For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things?

34 Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth?

35 Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted? (Mosiah 13:29-35).

Abinadi's discussion of the Savior's Atonement contained a subtext that was designed to

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help Alma begin to comprehend his own Self. Abinadi's next response to Alma's unspoken question was not just the next logical step in the young prince's education, it was the next necessary step. The question Abinadi must now address would be, "How does one become a son of God and an heir to the kingdom of heaven?"

The third interpretation of "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" (the one Abinadi expanded to teach and convert Alma) was about the priesthood and sacral kingship of every worthy individual. Abinadi defined for the young prince what constitutes a legitimate heir of God (Ether 3:14). To do that, Abinadi quoted Isaiah's statement in full context (See Mosiah 14.). It begins:

1 Yea, even doth not Isaiah say: Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Mosiah 14:1).

John the Beloved explained its meaning:

37 But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:

38 That the saying of Esaias (Isaiah) the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

39 Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. [He was quoting Isaiah 6.]

41 These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him (John 12:37-41).

John was asserting that until one can see (either truly see or symbolically see) the arm of God, one can not truly "understand with their heart, and be converted." Other scriptures suggest something of the same thing.⁷⁶¹

Abinadi's purpose was to help Alma understand the conflict between the Alma who had his own eternal nature and the Alma whose apparent present nature had been molded

⁷⁶¹ 1 Nephi 22:10-12; 2 Nephi 8:5-9; 3 Nephi 9:14-17, 16:17-20, 20:30-39; Psalm 20:6, 45:2-24, 48:9-10, 98:1-3; Job 40:3-14, 42:1-5. See also D&C 1:13-16, 109:23-24, 133:1-4.

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in the environment of this apostate King Noah. So after Abinadi quoted Isaiah 52, he brought the passage home to be incorporated into Alma's personal understanding of his Self. He did that by describing the same kinds of tensions that would be felt by the mortal Jesus with respect to the covenantal responsibilities of the premortal Jehovah.

When reading this passage, it is helpful to remember that Abinadi's perception of Jesus was quite different from our own. We have four accounts of his ministry in the New Testament and a fifth in the Book of Mormon. Abinadi had no such information. For him, details about the life and Atonement of the Savior were limited to what he learned from the scriptures and the festival temple drama and what he had learned from personal revelation. Abinadi lived in Old Testament times. The mortal Jesus was as distant from Abinadi in time and circumstance as our own understanding of the Savior's Second Coming and millennial reign may be distant from us. Abinadi was trying to explain that the man Jesus would be the same person as the God Jehovah.

The Feast of Tabernacles temple drama taught the relationship between Jehovah and the sacral kings of Israel. Like other prophets of the Old Testament, the God with whom Abinadi and Alma had most to do was named Jehovah, who is "the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth." The drama told how Jehovah had conducted the affairs of the Council, including its members' participation in the creation of the heavens and the earth.

The first eight verses of Mosiah 15 are considered by many to be some of the most difficult to understand in the Book of Mormon, but they become easy to follow when one realizes that Abinadi was talking about Jehovah and Jesus and the tensions they had to overcome so that Jesus could accomplish the Atonement and keep the covenants made by Jehovah—for they are the same God:

1 And now Abinadi said unto them: I would that ye should understand that God himself [Jehovah] shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. ["Redeem" in this context means to bring his people back into the presence of God—that is, to completely undo the effects of the Fall of Adam, so that we can return to the presence of God. (See Mormon 9:13; Ether3:13; 2 Nephi 1:15, 2:1-4; Alma 58:41).]

2 And because he [Jehovah] dwelleth in flesh [Jesus] he [Jesus] shall be called the Son of God [the Son of Elohim], and having subjected the flesh [Jesus] to the will of the Father [Jehovah], being the Father [Jehovah] and the Son [Jesus]—

3 The Father [Jehovah], because he [first as Jehovah and then again as Jesus] was conceived by the power of God [Elohim]; and the Son [Jesus], because of the

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flesh; thus becoming the Father [Jehovah] and Son [Jesus]—

4 And they [Jehovah-Jesus] are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

5 And thus the flesh [Jesus] becoming subject to the Spirit [Jehovah], or the Son [Jesus] to the Father [Jehovah], being one God [Jehovah-Jesus], suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself [Jesus] to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.

6 And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he [Jesus] shall be led, yea, even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he [Jesus] opened not his mouth.

7 Yea, even so he [Jesus] shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh [Jesus] becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son [Jesus] being swallowed up in the will of the Father [Jehovah] (Mosiah 15:1-7).

There are few scriptures which touch the soul more deeply than that last verse. It exposes all the tensions: Jesus the man—with his natural aversion to physical pain and his desire to remain with the people he loved. Jehovah the God—whose covenantal love for his friends was even more powerful—informed and inspired Jesus’s determination to perform the Atonement. They are, as Abinadi said, one God, but it was Jesus—not just Jehovah—who had to decide.

One of the reasons that scripture is so important to us—and the reason the words were so important to Alma—is that it throws a burning light on each one of us—but a light that only we ourselves can see. Perhaps the easiest way to describe that light is to try to conceptualize its effect on Alma. It was bringing into focus and personalizing the chiasmic balance of the cosmic myth.

Before he left his Heavenly Father’s presence, the premortal had made Alma covenants regarding his own mission here and what he would do to fulfill his mission. What Paul wrote to the Thessalonians was true of Alma and all of Heavenly Father’s other children also: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). But now on this earth as a young, wealthy, demonstrably popular prince, Alma could no longer remember who he really was. His memory was darkened by the light his physical eyes could see. On earth, the expanse of his mind was limited by earthly things and his body limited through its knowledge of how to feel happiness, hunger, passion, weariness, pain, and exhilaration.

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There was a time, before his memory fogged and his eyes and ears were closed, that Alma could look forward to this life and see his own purpose—when he could clearly understand his own desires. It was then, when he was fully cognizant, that he had made covenants about what he would do here. Then he was in the company of the premortal Jehovah. But now he could not remember that any more, and had come on this occasion to King Noah's court to sit in judgment against the prophet. Abinadi, for his part, had come to answer questions that young Alma may not yet have asked, and to give credence to the things the Spirit would teach him about himself. It was Abinadi's task to help the physical and cultural Alma, who sat in King Noah's council, to understand that he must seek to become subjugated to the Alma who once sat in the Council of the gods. Abinadi understood that if Alma could achieve that quality of understanding and freedom, then with the tutelage of the Holy Ghost he could acquire the power to fulfill the covenants he had made. In short, the will of Alma's present Self must be swallowed up in the will of his premortal, fully cognizant Self.

The author of the *Hymn of the Pearl* described that principle. In the poem this passage is about the boy's recalling his eternal covenants:

And even as it [the covenant] was engraven in my heart
Were the words of my letter written.
I remembered that I was a son of kings
And my noble birth asserted itself.⁷⁶²

That is what Abinadi was explaining about Jesus: “the will of the Son [Jesus] being swallowed up in the will of the Father [Jehovah].” Alma heard. His premortal “noble birth asserted itself”; he listened to the prophet and put his own life on the line when he spoke out to defend the good old man. In doing so, Alma began to sever the ties that bound his eternal Self to his earthly environment, and he began to become the prophet he had covenanted to become. The next question Abinadi addressed was, “How is it to be done?”

8 And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over
death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—
9 Having ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with
compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice;

⁷⁶² For a discussion of the *Hymn of the Pearl*, see that chapter.

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having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice.

10 And now I say unto you, who shall declare his generation? Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed?

11 Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God (Mosiah 15:8-11).

Abinadi was not negating the importance of the coronation ceremony, but he was saying that the ceremony alone was not enough. Those who become priests and sacral kings, whether of royal birth or not, believe the prophets, believe that the Lord will redeem his people, and live their lives to that end—“they are the heirs of the kingdom of God”:

12 For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?

13 Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed.

14 And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth!

15 And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet! (Mosiah 15:12-15).

For the young prince Alma, Abinadi had just symbolically removed the sacred emblems from under the feet of an unworthy monarch and made them the foundation of Alma’s own priesthood and sacral kingship. At this early stage, Alma could not have understood all about what his assignment was or what he must do to fulfill it. But given Alma’s response, there can be no question that he understood that he had once made sacred covenants and that Abinadi’s words were designed to teach him about the absolute authority by which he would ultimately act. (In time, Alma would become both king [chief judge] and priest to his people.)

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While Abinadi's words were addressed to Alma, Alma's writing them was for the sake of whoever could read them. Abinadi's words continue:

16 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!

17 And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever! (Mosiah 15:16-17).

Abinadi had now established that the real thrones—those of priesthood and sacral kingship—are the rights of all those who are children of Christ and are adopted heirs of Elohim through the Atonement of his Son. These are the rights that belong to the prophets as well as to those who heed the words of the prophets. Abinadi did not say that principle precluded the frightened King Noah, only that Noah was not exempt from the same standards as everyone else. Everything about the drama of the temple coronation rites insisted that the earthly king must not only meet those standards but that he must also be the epitome of their perfection. Abinadi's accusative reading of the Ten Commandments had shown that in the eyes of this prophet, King Noah and his priests had been weighed in the balance of that criterion and were found wanting.

In the order of things, no royal authority is autonomous: lesser kings report to greater kings; the Council reports to Jehovah; Jehovah to Elohim. As the Lord explained to Abraham:

19 These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all" (Abraham 3:19).

So it was not only appropriate but also necessary that Abinadi, who spoke on behalf of Jehovah and his council, should insist that this earthly king was subject to his Eternal King:

18 And behold, I say unto you, this is not all. For O how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that is the founder of peace, yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people;

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19 For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world [at the Council], I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.

20 But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead (Mosiah 15:18-20).

It is significant *here* that Abinadi referred to his God as “the Son” rather than as Jehovah. Abinadi’s whole sermon had been devoted to the clarification of the rights of sonship. And at this point, Abinadi’s purpose seems to have been to teach the young prince that he, as *a son*, must be entirely subservient to Jehovah, who is *the Son*:

21 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called.

22 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them [brought them into his presence]; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death (Mosiah 15:21-23).⁷⁶³

Abinadi’s next statement is a declaration of the eternal constancy of God’s criteria for the salvation of mankind and the hope extended to those who died in ignorance of the Savior and his Atonement. It is one of those quiet assurances in the ancient scriptures about the principle of salvation for the dead:

24 And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these;

⁷⁶³ In connection with these sacral kings, the Prophet Joseph wrote: “The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire (D&C 137:1-2).

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and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

25 And little children also have eternal life (Mosiah 15:24-25).

Unless Abinadi was speaking from personal revelation, there appears to be only one obvious way to account for his knowing that “these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them.” That is, Abinadi knew and understood the meaning of the last half of Psalm 22 and of Isaiah 61—both of which testify that the Savior would visit the dead and provide a way for those who had not heard the gospel to hear it then.

Apparently, this promise that salvation is available to those who repent after death brought Abinadi’s mind back to his original audience. Having established the criteria upon which all men and women will be judged, Abinadi unabashedly told Noah and his priests that if they and their people did not meet those criteria in this life, they would all go to hell:

26 But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection.

27 Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim (Mosiah 15:26-27).

After delivering that short message, Abinadi returned to the scripture with which they had first confronted him. He had answered their question about the meaning of the second part of the scripture which began, “How beautiful upon the mountain”; now he would address the most important meaning of all:

28 And now I say unto you that the time shall come that the salvation of the Lord shall be declared to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

29 Yea, Lord, thy watchmen shall lift up their voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.

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30 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

31 The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

1 And now, it came to pass that after Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hand and said: The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord; when every nation, kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just.

2 And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl, and weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth; and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord; therefore the Lord redeemeth them not.

3 For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

4 Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

5 But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.

6 And now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they had already come, there could have been no redemption.

7 And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection.

8 But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ (Mosiah 15:28–16:8).

In the New Year festival temple drama, the coronation rites are founded on the understanding that the king's claim to his earthly throne was based on the belief that Jehovah himself had descended into the Underworld, defeated death and hell, rescued the king, brought him back to the world of the living, and placed him on his temple throne. Abinadi asserted not only the reality of that restoration to life but also the reason for it:

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9 He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death.

10 Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil—

11 If they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness (Mosiah 16:9-11).

Then, striking an eternal contrast, Abinadi explained why neither King Noah, nor his priests, nor his people—unless they repented—can be legitimate heirs, for they could not be called the children of the God of Light:

11b and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation—

12 Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy were extended towards them; for the arms of mercy were extended towards them, and they would not; they being warned of their iniquities and yet they would not depart from them; and they were commanded to repent and yet they would not repent.

13 And now, ought ye not to tremble and repent of your sins, and remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved?

14 Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come—

15 Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. Amen.

1 And now it came to pass that when Abinadi had finished these sayings, that the king commanded that the priests should take him and cause that he should be put to death.

2 But there was one among them whose name was Alma, he also being a descendant of Nephi. And he was a young man, and he believed the words which Abinadi had spoken, for he knew concerning the iniquity which Abinadi had testified against them; therefore he began to plead with the king that he would not be angry with Abinadi, but suffer that he might depart in peace.

3 But the king was more wroth, and caused that Alma should be cast out from

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among them, and sent his servants after him that they might slay him.

4 But he fled from before them and hid himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken.

5 And it came to pass that the king caused that his guards should surround Abinadi and take him; and they bound him and cast him into prison.

6 And after three days, having counseled with his priests, he caused that he should again be brought before him.

7 And he said unto him: Abinadi, we have found an accusation against thee, and thou art worthy of death.

8 For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death unless thou wilt recall all the words which thou hast spoken evil concerning me and my people (Mosiah 16:11–17:8).

Abinadi had made his point. It took three days for King Noah and his priests to come up with “an accusation...worthy of death.” The accusation they “found” was inadequate and absurd. At the beginning of this trial, they had tried to entrap him by getting him to speak treason mingled with blasphemy, to demonstrate that he was a false prophet. He had spoken treason, all right, by declaring that the king was the usurper of his own throne, but he had couched his declaration in terms that were legally unchallengeable. If they were going to murder him under cover of the law, they would have to invent an accusation. And that, of course, is what they did. In the New Year festival, God himself did not actually appear, but his presence was represented by a sacred box which contained emblematic representations of his priesthood and kingship. However, Abinadi had said God himself would come among men. It was apparently on that technicality that they reasoned Abinadi was worthy to die:

9 Now Abinadi said unto him: I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you concerning this people, for they are true; and that ye may know of their surety I have suffered myself that I have fallen into your hands.

10 Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you. And if ye slay me ye will shed innocent blood, and this shall also stand as a testimony against you at the last day.

11 And now king Noah was about to release him, for he feared his word; for he

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feared that the judgments of God would come upon him.

12 But the priests lifted up their voices against him, and began to accuse him, saying: He has reviled the king. Therefore the king was stirred up in anger against him, and he delivered him up that he might be slain.

13 And it came to pass that they took him and bound him, and scourged his skin with faggots, yea, even unto death.

14 And now when the flames began to scorch him, he cried unto them, saying:

15 Behold, even as ye have done unto me, so shall it come to pass that thy seed shall cause that many shall suffer the pains that I do suffer, even the pains of death by fire; and this because they believe in the salvation of the Lord their God.

16 And it will come to pass that ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities.

17 Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro, even as a wild flock is driven by wild and ferocious beasts.

18 And in that day ye shall be hunted, and ye shall be taken by the hand of your enemies, and then ye shall suffer, as I suffer, the pains of death by fire.

19 Thus God executeth vengeance upon those that destroy his people. O God, receive my soul.

20 And now, when Abinadi had said these words, he fell, having suffered death by fire; yea, having been put to death because he would not deny the commandments of God, having sealed the truth of his words by his death (Mosiah 17:9-20)

A Meaning of “Redeem”— to “Come Unto Christ”

The entire message of the Book of Mormon revolves around a single concept. It is the same as the pivotal doctrine of the festival temple drama—the basic human need to return to the Garden and to the presence of God. All other discussions in those chapters are subsets of that most important doctrine. It is what Alma called “the plan of redemption” (Alma 12). In the Book of Mormon, the word “redeem” has a specific meaning rarely found in the Old Testament. The meaning is the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama which follows the pattern of the universal “cosmic myth—

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returning home triumphant.”⁷⁶⁴

For each person who participated, the entire ancient dramatic temple presentation was a review of one’s own eternal odyssey. Its purpose was, as Amulek assures us:

32 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors (Alma 34:32)

The operative word here is “prepare.” For some this life is the time to meet God, but even for such, there are necessary preparations to be made. For the rest of us, that meeting will come later, and this life truly is the time to prepare. Speaking of our time, Nephi wrote,

32...wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved (1 Nephi 15:14).

That was the entire point of the ancient temple drama: to teach one how to come. As we approach the great mountain, those familiar with it’s heights can tell us that there is only one way to get to the top. We must walk that path, and that path only, or we will never reach the Holy of Holies at the summit. The path is described in brief this way:

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am (D&C 93:1).

The way is described in much greater detail elsewhere. The following are examples:

26 And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who

⁷⁶⁴ As discussed above, the cosmic myth is the universal story that is always in the pattern of a chiasmus. In its simplest form it looks like this:

The hero is required to leave home.
He is given a seemingly impossible task.
He confronts overwhelming odds and certain failure
He succeeds in accomplishing the task.
He returns home, triumphant.

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is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved (Omni 1:26).

The “power of his redemption” is the power to bring us back to him. In much of the Book of Mormon the realization of the drama’s crescendo—to become a son and heir of God, and return to his presence—is encapsulated in the single word “redeem.”⁷⁶⁵ For that reason, an analysis of the way the Book of Mormon often uses the word seems very much in order.

“Redeem” has a number of different meanings in the scriptures, and its context determines what its meaning is. In both the New and the Old Testaments the words translated “redeem” or “redeemed” mean to purchase (as one would purchase something in the market place) or to ransom (as to pay to get another out of prison or out of bondage). The connotation is that through his Atonement, the Lord has ransomed or purchased us from the consequences and the bondage of sin and death.⁷⁶⁶

The primary difference between the meanings in the New and Old Testaments has to do with one’s relationship with the person who does the redeeming. In Hebrew thought, the debt is paid by a brother or other relative, and the family relationship is a necessary part of the word’s meaning. For example, when a man dies and leaves behind his widow and family, a “redeemer” might be a near kin who is obligated by law to care for the them. In the story of Ruth, Boaz married Ruth according to his family rights to redeem her in her widowhood because, as Naomi pointed out, he was their “kinsman.” It is significant that “kinsman” in that story, and “redeemer” in Job’s statement, “I know that my redeemer

⁷⁶⁵ The redemption was enacted in conjunction with Psalm 21, and is similarly referenced throughout the Book of Mormon. Examples are: Ether 3:6; 3 Nephi 27:28-29; 2 Nephi 9:41-42, Ether 112:27; Alma 5:9, 26; Moroni 7:19; D&C 18:23-25; Moroni 10:28-34; 1 Nephi 10:17-19.

For discussions on symbolically entering the presence of God, see Hamblin, “Temple Motifs,” 454-55; Hanks, “Christ Manifested to His People,” 3-28; Madsen, “The Temple and the Atonement,” *Temples of the Ancient World*, 63-79; Packer, *Holy Temple*, 131-42; Ricks and Sroka, “King, Coronation, and Temple” 246-48; Valletta, “Conflicting Orders,” 219-21.

⁷⁶⁶ See the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries at the back of Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Strong lists several Greek words that were translated redeem, redeemed, or redemption. They mean either to purchase or to ransom.

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liveth” are translated from the same Hebrew word.⁷⁶⁷

In the New Testament, the Greek meanings of the words that are translated “redeem” carry no connotation of family responsibility. Consequently, the word “Redeemer” is not found in the New Testament. Even though the Greek words do not convey the idea of a family relationship, almost all of the ways the words “redeem” and “redeemed” are used in the New Testament focus on the ideas of one’s being a child and an heir of God.⁷⁶⁸

The most important meaning of the word in the Old Testament, and the one used by most writers of the Book of Mormon, is in the Book of Job:⁷⁶⁹

23 Oh that my words were now written!
 oh that they were printed in a book!
24 That they were graven
 with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!
25 For I know that my Redeemer liveth,
 and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:
26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body,
 yet in my flesh shall I see God:
27 Whom I shall see for myself,
 and mine eyes shall behold, and not another;
 though my reins be consumed within me (Job 19:23-27).

Job’s testimony is that because his Redeemer lives, Job shall see God. That same meaning

⁷⁶⁷ Strong, Hebrew 1350. The definition reads: “to redeem (according to the Oriental law of kinship), i.e. to be the next of kin (and as such to buy back a relative’s property, marry his widow, etc) ... purchase, ransom, redeem (redeemer).” The word “Redeemer” is found 18 times in our Old Testament; all but five are in Isaiah. Of those five, two are in the psalms, and the other three are in various books. Isaiah 6 shows that he had a firsthand understanding of the word. Nephi cherished Isaiah’s words because he, like Nephi, had seen the Savior (2 Nephi 11:1-3).

⁷⁶⁸ The words Redeem and “redeemed” are only found in only a few places in the New Testament. They are: Luke 24:13-25; Galatians 3:1-16, 4:1-9; Titus 2:8-15; Revelation 5:1-12, 14:1-9.

⁷⁶⁹ The book of Job is believed by many scholars to be the oldest book in the Old Testament. Assuming that is true, the use of the word “Redeemer” in Job, referring to one’s being brought into the presence of God, would make that the oldest use of the word in the scriptures.

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is also found in the psalms. For example, in the 49th Psalm where to be redeemed is to be brought from the grave and into the presence of God:

- 14 Like sheep they are laid in the grave;
 death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have
 dominion over them in the morning;
 and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.
15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave:
 for he shall receive me.(Psalm 49:14-15).

Psalm 69 speaks of redemption before death comes. It reads:

- 16 Hear me, O Lord; for thy lovingkindness is good:
 turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.
17 And hide not thy face from thy servant;
 for I am in trouble: hear me speedily.
18 Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it:
 deliver me because of mine enemies (Psalm 69:16-18).

That meaning is found throughout the Book of Mormon, where the words “redeem,” “redeemed,” and “Redeemer” usually mean the same thing as in Job: “yet in my flesh shall I see God.” It is the opposite of “second death,” which is to be excluded from the presence of God.

In the Book of Mormon, the “Redeemer” is the One who makes that return possible, because he is the God to whom one first returns.

The definition of “redeem” is given by Samuel the Lamanite when he said, “the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.” The context in which he said that is as follows:

- 14 And behold, again, another sign I give unto you, yea, a sign of his death.
15 For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.
16 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of

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Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

18 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness [*zedek*] (Helaman 14:14-18).

If to be redeemed means to be brought into the presence of God, then the phrase “plan of redemption” means the plan whereby one can be brought back into God’s presence and has the same connotation as the frequently repeated invitation to “come unto Christ.”⁷⁷⁰

Nowhere is that more clearly explained than by the Savior when he introduced himself to the brother of Jared:

13 And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you.

14 Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters (Ether 3:13-14).

A beautiful example of the fruition of that invitation is the one spoken by Lehi:

15 But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell [past tense]; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love (2 Nephi 1:15).

That is one of the most important verses in the Book of Mormon because it identifies

⁷⁷⁰ See Jacob 1:7; Omni 1:26.

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a facet of the single most important doctrine of the gospel: by using the symbolism of an embrace it describes the Savior's personal relationship with the righteous and incorporates into that same verse a number of other key words in addition to "redeemed." The entire concept of this redemption is suspended on the past tense quality of the word "hath." For Lehi, his redemption had occurred in his own past, but through the embrace it also continues as the vitality of his present and is the projected hope of his future.

The final phrase in our verse, "and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love," is a reference to a physical embrace, a present and eternal token of friendship—a "hope" that brings the future fulfillment of the covenant into the reality of the present until it changes the very nature of one's eternal being. (That, by the way, is how the meaning of the word "hope" in Moroni 7 may be understood.)

The concept and the realization of "redemption" are together the most important doctrine of the gospel. It encompasses the power and meaning of the Atonement and of all our eternal relationships with the Savior—as a flower encompasses all of the promises of the seed that was planted, is the product of the stem and the hope of the nourishment from the roots and the leaves that grew from that seed – and that same flower is the promise of fruit which will produce other seeds, and thus the flower is both the glory of the past and the prefiguration of eternal lives in perpetuity. Redemption is the epitome of friendship, and the timeless light of all that is life. Another Book of Mormon example is Lehi's blessing to his son Jacob:

2 Nevertheless, Jacob, my first-born in the wilderness, thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.

3 Wherefore, thy soul shall be blessed, and thou shalt dwell safely with thy brother, Nephi; and thy days shall be spent in the service of thy God. Wherefore, I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fulness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men.

4 And thou hast beheld in thy youth his glory (2 Nephi 2:2-4a).

Here again, the power of the concept is in the verb: "I know that thou art [present tense] redeemed," for "thou hast [past tense] beheld" God. Another example is Nephi, writing about himself, his brother Jacob, and Isaiah:

2 And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in

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his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him.

3 And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses, and he proveth all his words (2 Nephi 11:2-3).

In another place Nephi wrote:

6 I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell [past tense].

7 I have charity for my people, and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls spotless at his judgment-seat (2 Nephi 33:6-7).

Alma left us with this testimony of being with God and thus being redeemed:

23 And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

24 For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord [past tense]; behold I am born of the Spirit.

25 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

26 And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

27 I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

28 Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God (Mosiah 27:23-28).

A favorite example is the conclusion of Helaman's letter to Moroni. It gives us a

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subtle insight into the foundation and fruition of the very intimate friendship shared by these two great prophets:

41 And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free [both past tense], keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma (Alma 58:41).⁷⁷¹

Abinadi's entire instructions to Alma rest upon the importance of one's becoming a child of God. In that context, one may assume that in his statement, "For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people?" Abinadi was using the word "redeem" to mean to be brought into the presence of God and also to teach Alma that one must become a child of Christ.

If the whole plan of salvation were reduced to a single sentence, the first part of that sentence would be about the Savior's Atonement, and the last part might read: "that one might return and remain in the presence of God." That was the promise from the beginning. After Adam and Eve left the Garden, they were taught the meaning of sacrifice:

9 And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will (Moses 5:9).

Adam understood the full impact of "thou mayest be redeemed" and he said:

10 Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God (Moses 5:10).

⁷⁷¹ More examples of "redeem" meaning to be brought into the presence of God are Jacob 6:8-9; Mosiah 26:21-28; Alma 13:1-6, 19:6-14, 36:22-26, 58:41; Helaman 8:22-23, 14:15-19; Mormon 9:12-14; Moroni 7:2-4; D&C 43:29-30, 88:14-32, 138:58-60, and even though the word is not there, one must also include the Lord's promise to Everyman in D&C 93:1-5.

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It is significant that the Savior emphasized that same relationship in the Beatitudes:

Blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God
(3 Nephi 12:8-9).

The prophet Abinadi's testimony to the young prince Alma uses different words, but carries the same message:

23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death (Mosiah 15:23).

In the 2007 October general conference, Elder David A. Bednar explained the importance of the phrase to "come unto Christ."

The risen Lord next explained the importance of coming unto Him. The multitude gathered together at the temple was invited literally to come forth unto the Savior "one by one" (3 Nephi 11:15) to feel the prints of the nails in the Master's hands and feet and to thrust their hands into His side. Each individual who had this experience "did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he" (v. 15), even Jesus Christ, who had come.

The Savior also taught the people to come unto Him through sacred covenants, and He reminded them that they were "the children of the covenant" (3 Nephi 20:26).

Repenting and coming unto Christ through the covenants and ordinances of salvation are prerequisite to and a preparation for being sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost and standing spotless before God at the last day.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷² Bednar, "Clean Hands and a Pure Heart," 80-83.