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Alma 5: The Song of Redeeming Love

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Alma 5: The Song of Redeeming Love

When Alma spoke to the people in Zarahemla, he was aware that there were those in the audience who were not members of the church (v. 62), but Mormon made a point of telling us that he addressed himself specifically to the members (v. 2, 6) and to the reader. It becomes immediately apparent that Alma's intent was to bring to bear upon his audience his most relevant and powerful arguments—their own covenants and the meaning of their most sacred rites as those rites related to both their cultural and personal histories.

In his narrative, he did not recite the ancient Israelite history as it was told in the festival drama. Rather, he reminded them of their own history, beginning with God's giving his father Alma sufficient authority to create and manage the church:

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 (Alma 5:3).

In the implications of that brief statement, he summed up the whole first parts of the festival drama—but in terms of their own immediate history. His audience knew of his own *sode* experience, so, implicitly at least, he had referred to foreordination, creation (establishment of the church), and Garden (the waters of Mormon), and even the first ordinance after Adam left the Garden (baptism). Then he focused on the battle. He did not describe to them the ritual battle of the drama, but rather he reminded them of their fathers' own struggles for survival:

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 (Alma 5:4-5).

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Having done that, Alma turned to the consequences of the ritual battle—not the death of the king but the intercession of Jehovah and their deliverance from death and hell:

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? (Alma 5:6).

Like every other human whose eyes do not see beyond death, the members of his audience had no sure evidence that the souls of their fathers had been delivered from hell. Consequently, that last question “have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell?” had no better contextual meaning than their understanding of the promises presented in the festival temple drama. While one may read his next statement as an emblematic description of their conversion, it reads more convincingly as a vivid description of their participation in the events of salvation represented in the temple drama:

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.

9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? (Alma 5:7-9).

In the drama, the king represented everyone in the audience. Symbolically, all had died. All had experienced the darkness of the Underworld. All had accepted the miracle of the Atonement, and all had entered the New Jerusalem and experienced the quintessential hope of the world of the future:

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 (Alma 5:9b).

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In those words, one can visualize the exuberance of the procession around the city. The king and the people have been saved from death. Now, in the drama, they ask and respond:

- 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
or who shall stand in his holy place?
4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;
who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.
5 He shall receive the blessing from the Lord,
and righteousness from the God of his salvation (Psalm 24:3-5).

Alma reminded his audience, “they did sing redeeming love,” but later he will be more specific. He will refer again to “the song of redeeming love,” which was probably a reference to a specific psalm that invited them to come into the presence of God.

In this very short introduction, Alma had carried their minds through the entire sequence of the festival temple drama. Now he focuses on the pivotal message of the drama—the Atonement of the Savior:

- 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.
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 (Alma 5:10-13).

When he asks the most important question in the Book of Mormon, Alma defines that salvation by calling their attention to the coronation ordinances and the royal new name. The question is found again and again. It is among the last words of Lehi and Nephi and in the conclusion of the temple drama conducted by King Benjamin, and in the entirety of the

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message of Abinadi to Alma:

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? (Alma 5:14).

The answer to that question is found at the very epitome of the Savior's Beatitudes:

And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be *called* the children of God (3 Nephi 12:9).

And it is the concluding promise of Mormon's greatest sermon:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen (Moroni 7:48).

Alma then gave the criteria for the correct answer when he asked two other questions, the first of which is not asked anywhere else in the canonical scriptures:

Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? (Alma 5:14b).

So our question now becomes, "What does it mean to receive his image in your countenances?" As a partial answer, we find the Lord giving these instructions to the prophet Samuel:

But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

And later, this description of David:

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And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance (1 Samuel 17:42).

In the Doctrine and Covenants we find a usage that more closely approaches Alma's meaning:

14 Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer.

15 And inasmuch as ye do these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances, not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance (D&C 59:14-15).

We find a similar meaning in a famous prayer in the writings of Moses:

24 The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:

25 The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

26 The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace (Numbers 6:24-26).

That was said even more clearly in President Joseph F. Smith's vision of the redemption of the dead, where its usage fits perfectly into the sequence of Alma's sermon:

23 And the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell.

24 Their countenances shone, and the radiance from the presence of the Lord rested upon them, and they sang praises unto his holy name (D&C 138:23-24).

President McKay, like Alma, brought that principle home to our everyday experiences in our everyday lives:

Every man and every person who lives in this world wields an influence, whether for good or for evil. It is not what he says alone; it is not alone what he does. It is what he is. Every man, every person radiates what he or she really is. Every person is a recipient of radiation. The Savior was conscious of that. Whenever He came into the presence of an individual, He sensed that radiation—whether it

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was the woman of Samaria with her past life; whether it was the woman who was to be stoned, or the men who were to stone her; whether it was the statesman, Nicodemus, or one of the lepers. He was conscious of the radiation from the individual. And to a degree so are you, and so am I. It is what we are and what we *radiate* that affects the people around us.⁷⁷³

Alma's sermon continues, but his questions now suggest that his earlier question, "Have ye received his image in your countenances?" may have as much to do with a formal ordinance—with the coronation ceremony—and with way they are dressed at the conclusion of that ceremony, as with the light that shines from their persons. In these verses Alma gives us sure evidence that he was referencing the festival drama when he cites Psalm 24, inviting them into the temple and asking, "Can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands?"⁷⁷⁴ (v. 19). In the festival drama, after they had entered the temple and received the coronation ordinances, the king stood before the temple veil and (in Psalm 21) requested that he might come into the Lord's presence. Thus, Alma asks:

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?

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?

⁷⁷³ David O. McKay, "Radiation of the Individual," *The Instructor* (October 1964): 373-74. Reprinted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 227.

⁷⁷⁴ 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
or who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He that hath clean hands,
and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3-4).

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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?

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? (Alma 5:15-19).

With this question, Alma suggests that the image of God was not only on their countenances but was “engraven upon” their countenances, suggesting it was the sacred clothing they were wearing. In the ceremony, that was the same kind of clothing that the psalms say is worn by God himself:

1 The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty;
the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself:
the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

2 Thy throne is established of old:
thou art from everlasting (Psalm 93:1-2).

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great;
thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

2 Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment:
who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain
(Psalm 104:1-2).

Jacob understood that principle, and in his sermon at the temple⁷⁷⁵ he taught it:

⁷⁷⁵ The importance of Jacob's sermon at the temple is explained by John Thompson:

“Isaiah 40-55, from which Jacob quotes his Isaiah passages, have often been analyzed with form-critical methods; but because many units or forms within the text have little or no comparative material (for instance, the Servant Songs), solid conclusions have been difficult to achieve. However, J. H. Eaton feels that there is enough evidence ‘to guide us to the decisive factors of tradition behind Isa. 40-55.’ J. Begrich points out as early as 1938 that many of the forms in this section resemble materials from earlier services in the temple, such as hymns, laments, and prophetic oracles of assurance. Mowinckel took this connection a step further, noting that there seems to be an association between the second division of Isaiah and the preexilic autumn festivals—namely the Feast of Tabernacles. However, Mowinckel, who does not understand how the Servant

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Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness (2 Nephi 9:14).

While the principle is found throughout the scriptures, the actual phrase, “having the image of God engraven upon your countenances,” is found nowhere else in the canon. To discover it in the ancient noncanonical writings, one must go to the *Hymn of the Pearl*.

Even though many scholars place the writing of the *Hymn of the Pearl* as early as the time of the Patriarchs, there is no sure evidence that there was a copy of it on the brass plates. Neither is there any evidence that Alma was actually referring to that ancient poem. However, there is a great deal of evidence that he was using the same imagery as is found in the *Pearl*. That leads one to conclude that either he was actually referring to the *Pearl* itself or else he was citing either its original source or else a parallel version of the poem that also reflected that original source. In the *Pearl*, when the boy rediscovers his robe, he rejoices:

82 My splendid robe adorned
 Gleaming in glorious colours. ...
86 And the likeness of the king of kings
 Was completely embroidered all over it.⁷⁷⁶

Songs fit into the picture, stopped short of completely relating chapters 40-55 to *Sukkot*. It was I. Engnell and Eaton who completed the correspondence between the second division of Isaiah, including the Servant Songs, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Engnell concluded that Isaiah 40-55 ‘is a prophetic collection of traditions’ that may be called ‘*liturgy*, ...not a cult liturgy but a prophetic imitation thereof.’

“The conclusions of these scholars are significant in light of the possible setting of Jacob's sermon, for if the second division of Isaiah, from which Jacob obtained his quotes, is a prophetic imitation of *Sukkot* liturgy, then it is possible that Nephi instructed Jacob to use Isaiah not only for the prophetic teachings and elevated language, but because Isaiah's words reflect the very festival in which they, the Nephites, were participating” (Thompson, “Isaiah 50-51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6-10,” 137-38). See, Donald W. Parry and Janet L. Garrard Willis, “Notes on Vocabulary in Isaiah 2-11, 13-14, 29, 48-54,” *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 409-22.

⁷⁷⁶ Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:502-3.

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About that, Nibley observed, “And the image of the King of Kings covered the whole thing.” Then he added this note: “If the whole rest of the poem is applied to the garment only, it is full of strange anomalies, which become perfectly clear in terms of the well-known Veil of the Temple.”⁷⁷⁷ So Alma’s questions have brought his audience to the same place that is the destination of the temple drama—to stand before the veil. Then he asks:

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.

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 (Alma 5:20-25).

Once again, he refers to the “song of redeeming love.” He does not identify the song, but in the temple drama it was probably the 21st Psalm when the chorus, or the perhaps the entire audience, sang:⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁷ Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 271 .

⁷⁷⁸ The psalm is only quoted here with suggested stage directions. For a full explanation of the psalm and its context, see the chapter called, “Act 2, Scene 10: The King at the Veil.”

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- 1 The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord;
and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!
- 2 Thou hast given him his heart's desire,
and hast not withholden the request of his lips.
- 3 For thou *wilt meet him*⁷⁷⁹ With the blessings of goodness:
thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.
- 4 He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him,
even length of days for ever and ever.5 His glory is great in thy salvation:
honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.
- 6 For thou hast made him most blessed for ever:
thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance.
- 7 For the king trusteth in the Lord, and through the mercy of the most High
he shall not be moved (Psalm 21:1-7).

The psalm concludes with the Lord blessing the king with the promise of personal invulnerability.⁷⁸⁰ It was apparently in that context, that Alma asks:

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? (Alma 5:26).

Alma then used a code word that is found throughout Isaiah and the Psalms. As the mountain is code for the temple, so “walk,” “path,” and “way” are codes meaning the ordinances and covenants by which one ascends that holy mountain to come to its heights where one may meet God. Similarly, those same code words are used to describe the way one lives one's life after he has come down from the mountain to fulfill the mission he received from God. It was in that context that Alma asked:

⁷⁷⁹ The king has asked the Lord for something, and the Lord has granted that request. In this verse there is an unusual word, “preventest.” The footnote in the LDS Bible helps with that. It says that the words “thou preventest him” might be translated “thou wilt meet him.”

⁷⁸⁰ For a more complete discussion of this psalm and its context, see the chapter called, “The King at the Veil.”

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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 s have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins? (Alma 5:27).

As in the *Hymn of the Pearl* and other places in the Book of Mormon, one cannot be clothed in the robes of righteousness until one first removes the filthy clothing by which one is defined in and by this world, thus becoming “naked” before God.⁷⁸¹ “Naked” does not necessarily mean nude. To be naked is to be stripped of the insignia by which one is defined, as when a court-martialed general is cashiered. He is stripped of medals that denoted his honors and rank, but he is not disrobed. He stands naked, but not nude. So Alma asked:

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.

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 (Alma 5:28-29).

Now Alma has taught his audience how to define their Selves as they stand, symbolically, in one of the final and most glorious scenes of the festival temple drama. He reminded his listeners:

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;

⁷⁸¹ An apocryphal writing reports that Jesus’s disciples asked, “‘When will you become revealed to us and when shall we see you?’ Jesus said, ‘When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your [clothes] and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then will you see the son of the living one, and you will not be afraid’” (*Gospel of Thomas* in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1988], 130 37).

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35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire (Alma 5:33-36).

Alma had reviewed for the members of the church the full eternal scope of their most sacred ordinances and covenants. As he concluded that portion of his speech, he brought them to the final act of the play, to the time of peace and security where they were invited to return to the Garden, return to God's presence where they would "partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely."

He does not leave the Garden scene, but remains there with his audience, turning their attention to the psalm that was sung on the day of that great feast. It sums up all of the three acts of the drama in only six verses. We can know he is referring to the 23rd Psalm because in verses 38 to 41 he refers to the "good shepherd first," and the 23rd Psalm is (in our canon at least) the most ancient source of that idea:⁷⁸²

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
 he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3).⁷⁸³

The phrase "Good Shepherd" is not found in the Old Testament. Psalm 88 refers to Jehovah as the "Shepherd of Israel" (v.1), and Isaiah prophesied:

10 Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.
11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40:10-11).

⁷⁸² The nearest earlier statement that suggests something like that is Numbers 27:18. "That the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd." Other references to the "Good Shepherd" are in the New Testament, so they did not influence the Book of Mormon authors.

⁷⁸³ The psalm is only quoted here. For a full explanation of the psalm and its context, see the chapter called, "Act 3: The Day of the Great Feast – Prelude to Eternal Peace and Prosperity."

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Isaiah wrote about 250 years after the psalms were composed, so it is likely that his prophecy was also an echo of the 23rd Psalm.⁷⁸⁴

Alma's sermon to the people of Zarahemla was not a warm and fuzzy invitation to repent. It was a vigorous reminder that they were losing their sense of direction, and that they must repent and return to "the ways of righteousness." His first reference to the psalm that invited them to peace was a stern warning that they might never arrive there:

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.

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 (Alma 5:37-41).

That was no idle referent. The royal king-name that had been given to each of them was "son," as in Psalm 2. They were, by definition, the children of God.⁷⁸⁵ His implication

⁷⁸⁴ The phrase is found in Helaman 7:18, and the Savior, described himself as the good shepherd in John 10:11-15 and D&C 50:41-46.

⁷⁸⁵ In Psalm 2 and elsewhere, the generic name "son" is given, but in the Beatitudes, the Savior removed the gender-specific language and made it more clear when he said, "they shall be called the children of God." (v.9).

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was, if one rejects his sonship relationship with Jehovah, then that covenant of sonship is somehow transferred to a relationship with the devil. Alma explains:

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 (Alma 5:42).

Alma was very clear about this. Here, as in chapter 12 and elsewhere, Alma defined the second death he was talking about, not as the fate of a son of perdition but as one's being denied the sealing blessings of the Israelite temple: "as to things pertaining unto righteousness"—*zedek*, temple and priesthood correctness.⁷⁸⁶ Alma continued not by just calling them to repentance, but by doing it officially—legally, if you will—by evoking his authority as President of the Church:

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

⁷⁸⁶ Examples are:

16 And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness (Alma 12:16).

30 And thus we can plainly discern, that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things (Alma 24:30).

26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup (Alma 40:26).

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are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

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 (Alma 5:43-46).

Neither was Alma's testimony spoken casually. In his call to repentance, he not only evoked his priesthood authority but he sealed that call with his testimony as a prophet and living witness:

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.

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 (Alma 5:47-49).

To be born again meant to become a child of God. To become a child of God meant to take upon one's Self his name. The meaning of that stretched to the eternities, as Alma explained when he described the kingship of Jehovah-Jesus:

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

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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 (Alma 5:50-51).

He returned to the symbolism of the garden, only this time the garden was not paradise:

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 (Alma 5:2-56).

In his conclusion to this sermon, Alma brought his audience back to the final day of the festival drama, and invited them to reconsider the symbolic choices they made there:

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:

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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 (Alma 5:57-58a).

Here Alma was quoting God in a scripture that we do not otherwise have, for the phrase “book of life” is not found in our Old Testament.⁷⁸⁷ Alma continued:

⁷⁸⁷ However the phrase is found in the New Testament, and one that is very similar is found in the *Hymn of the Pearl*., where the prince is promised:

46 Remember thy splendid robe,
And think of thy glorious toga,
47 That thou mayest put them on and deck thyself therewith,
That thy name may be read in the book of the heroes
48 And thou with thy brother, our crown prince,
Be heir in our kingdom.
(Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 500-1)

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58 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. The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people;

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.

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 (Alma 5:58-62).
