

COMPARISON OF ALMA 32 AND PSALM 1

“And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.” (Alma 32:37)

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:3)

Comments

Alma 32:37 (and verse 43) and Psalm 1:3 both contain a form of the expression “bring forth fruit.” This is not an uncommon expression in the scriptures. It is found in the Book of Mormon in 1 Nephi 8 and 11 (tree of life vision), Jacob 5:24 (allegory of the olive trees), and Alma 12:15, 13:13, and 32:43. It is found in the Bible in Leviticus 25:21, Deuteronomy 33:14, Psalm 92:14, Ezekiel 47:12, Matthew 13:3–8, Mark 4:20, and Luke 8:15.¹

Some of these passages are similar to Psalm 1 and appear to be borrowing from it (depending on which passage is older). Passages that are likely dependent on Psalm 1 are Psalm 92:14, Jeremiah 17:8, Ezekiel 47:12, and Revelation 22:2. Revelation borrows from Ezekiel and specifically labels the tree of this tradition as the tree of life. Since Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm, we should expect that the tree mentioned in Psalm 1:3 is the tree of life (see Proverbs 3:18; 11:30). The facts that the tree is planted “by the rivers of water” and that “his leaf also shall not wither” are further evidence to support the idea that this metaphorical tree is derived from the idea of the tree of life in Eden.

¹ There are a number of parallels between the parable of the sower in the New Testament and Alma 32.

A comparison of Alma 32 and Psalm 1 yields a few interesting similarities. Psalm 1 begins with “blessed is the man” (verse 1). Alma 32 uses similar language on several occasions, declaring “blessed are ye,” “blessed is he,” and other variations (Alma 32:8, 13–16). Alma 32:20, 24 mentions judging, and Psalm 1:5 has “judgment.” The idea of the sun coming and scorching the tree until it withers away in Alma 32:38 is the opposite of the idea in Psalm 1:3 of the tree whose leaf does not wither.² Both passages contain the idea of planting a tree. In Alma 32, the tree is inside the person. In Psalm 1, the tree is the person. In Alma 32, there is the goal of seeking faith and knowledge, and in Psalm 1 the man delights in the law of God (perhaps a reference to seeking wisdom?). It is also worth mentioning that Alma 33:23 specifically states that it is the word (of God) that is to be planted in the heart, which is a similar concept to that found in Psalm 1:2 of the man delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on it day and night.

Conclusions

It seems clear that Alma borrowed from multiple sources for what he shared in Alma 32. A lot of the tree of life imagery he used draws on the visions of Lehi and Nephi in 1 Nephi. Also, there are parallels between the language Alma used regarding the planting of the seed and its care and the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3–8. There are some significant similarities between some of Alma’s words and Psalm 1, including the idea of the tree’s being associated with the person who seeks knowledge and wisdom and the idea of the leaves of the tree either withering or not withering. It seems safe to conclude that either Alma had Psalm 1 in mind specifically, or he was utilizing the same underlying tradition that gave us Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17:8, Ezekiel 47:12, and other similar passages.

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² Compare Alma 32:38–39 also to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13.