

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 1, Lecture 16

2 Nephi 1–4

**“Encircled . . . in the Arms of His Love”:
Oneness with God and the Atonement**

It’s a coincidence that the Sunday School lesson yesterday was on the fifth chapter of Alma, which is identical—has the same subject exactly—with the beginning of 2 Nephi. So we start out with 2 Nephi, and we really get into some pretty deep stuff. It begins with Lehi [he quotes from *The Odyssey* in Greek]. Remember, how *The Odyssey* begins with all of them going home. Well, we won’t go into that, but this is the way *The Odyssey* opens. Jerusalem was destroyed, and Troy was destroyed. We’re beginning a new story—a new epic, so to speak. We’re starting in the New World now. We’ve shifted the whole scene, and it’s a new act. Notice the fourth verse. Jerusalem is destroyed, so we can wipe that out and take that as finished now. And, on the other hand, “we have obtained a land of promise [now there is a fresh beginning] . . . which is choice above all other lands [now, no map is given here]; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of the other countries by the hand of the Lord .” They’re not the only people that are going to come here, obviously. There’s only one condition to people being here, it tells us in verse 7: “Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring.” And this is the only restriction of people coming here is that God is aware of their coming. You didn’t have to be a Nephite or a Lamanite to come here now [in Lehi’s time] or in ancient times. Every time we’d find something—anything you’d find out lying around that was pre-Columbian—always had to be Nephite or Lamanite. Well, that isn’t so at all. All sorts of people were coming before and after—the only condition being that the Lord knew that they were coming, and he brought them here.

Verse 7: “This land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him . . . they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity [see, but there is always a condition there—unless it’s because of iniquity]; for if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever. The blessing and the curse, the *berākāh* and the *qelālāh*, always go together. You never get the blessing without the curse. You might just as well say this promised land is a cursed land. The promise is a curse on the land. It says so here, and many times. It can be both at once, a blessed and a cursed—to the righteous, blessed; to the wicked, cursed. It’s the same land, same place, and he says it was the same thing with the former inhabitants of the land. Remember, if they had been righteous, would our fathers have pushed them out? No, not at all, he says [paraphrased]. And so it’s both at once. You don’t have it made just because this is the promised land.

And then he talks about kings here, and this is an interesting thing, this next one. “And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations [because otherwise kings would take it over]; for behold, many nations would overrun the land [if they wanted it], that there would be no place for an inheritance.” He

is going to tell us after this that it is going to be free of kings, and this is a very important thing. But remember, it was kings that claimed it, right from the first, as soon as they knew it was there. There's the Donation of Constantine in 324, the year before the Nicene Council. It was a forgery. It came out of Rheims which [had been] a forgery factory in the eighth and ninth centuries, and all of these forgeries came out. Well the Donation of Constantine was given after Columbus, of course. A line was drawn down the middle of the Atlantic, and everything west of that line belonged to the Holy Roman Emperor or the king of Franks. See, this fictitious document was granted by the pope. But the Donation of Constantine was used a lot later on—that everything in the New World belonged to the Frankish king or to the Holy Roman Emperor. Charlemagne was the ruler of the Franks—not at that time though.

Kings claimed it first right from the beginning. There were claims for the king of Spain, claims for the king of England, claims for the king of France. It was always the king that claimed it here. It was claimed for the Russians on the West Coast, and later claimed for the Japanese emperor. Everybody claimed it, always in the name of kings. This is an important thing, that they want to displace it that way. Of course, with the Dutch and the Portuguese it's the same thing. It was all in the name of the king. But the Lord said, no, that would not happen. It's the land of promise, that inasmuch as they behaved themselves, "they shall prosper . . . that they may possess this land unto themselves." Now again, is this selfish? Now they have it all to themselves (oh, goodie, goodie, it's just for us). No, not at all. He says, inasmuch as they keep the commandments, and you'll soon find out what the commandments mean—sharing and sharing equally. This is very important in the Book of Mormon. It brings that out all the time. That's the basic commandment, the one that Alma emphasizes so much.

Now notice in the tenth verse: "But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief [it doesn't say *if*, it says *when*; the Lord knew it was going to happen, and it did happen, of course], after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord." This is the whole thing, you see; then they have to pay a heavier price than they ever would otherwise. Already in the second century, they were saying (the seven apostolic fathers all deal with this question), "God has invested so heavily in the church so far that he won't allow it to be taken away. The gospel can never be taken away because God has already started us out and given us his blessing. It's going to be eternal." But Clement, second Clement, Polycarp, and especially Ignatius of Antioch in his seven letters, say, "That's all the more dangerous. The more blessing we've received, the greater danger we're in." As Ignatius said, quoting the scripture, "For if the angels that kept not the first estate were cast down, how do you expect to be supported no matter what you do, after the blessings you have received?" You're under stricter obligation to behave than anybody else. And if you don't, you're in greater danger. And so all the apostolic fathers looked upon the future of the church as very bleak indeed. In fact, the curtain had rung down.

Verse 10: "Having all the commandments from the beginning, and having been brought by his infinite goodness into this precious land of promise—behold, I say if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them. Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, . . . and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten." How true that was. He's talking about the Nephites now, you see, and the Lamanites. The Lamanites are still losing. They're still losing ground, and astonishing things are happening now. Well, I

won't go into that. Where have people ever been scattered and smitten as much and as long as the Indians? There have been other scatterings and smittings, of course, the Jewish being the classical one. But as a whole people being constantly pressed down, never given a chance, just ground down to nothing. As it tells us later in the Book of Mormon, scattered and smitten—this is what happened. Believe me, they have been scattered, and they still are. They [business enterprises] are still trying to get the Hopis and Navajos fighting each other so they can get the very last of their lands. The oil companies and the uranium and timber people, and especially the coal [companies] want the Navajo mountain, their last possession. And the Book of Mormon is going to talk about that too later on. So it's "awake, rise from the dust."

Verse 13: "O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep." Those he is addressing are already in a deep, deep sleep, and they remain there. This is like a voice in a dream. Here in verse 14 is the hardest criticism against the Book of Mormon. They thought this just wiped it out because of this passage here: "Hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return." You see, that's taken right out of *Hamlet*, nothing else. That isn't what Hamlet says at all. And, of course, the ordinary epithet for the world of the dead, both the Greek and Babylonian term, is *irsit la tari*, the land of no return. They always called it the land of no return. That was the regular title for it. We talk about that in the book, *Lehi in the Desert*, I think, or *Since Cumorah*. Shakespeare says,

who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 That undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action.

You see, he mixes all sorts of metaphors there starting right at the beginning:

To be or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them? [But what he says here, you see, is]
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveler returns [that's the way he puts it].

Here [in verse 14] it doesn't say anything about a land. It says, "the cold and silent grave from whence no traveler can return. And this is the classic statement, as I said. The Babylonian name for it is the *irsit la tari*, the land of no return. He doesn't even call it the land; he just says it's "the grave from whence no traveler can return." You'd expect him to

say that, but you'd be surprised how that has been exploited. This absolutely proves the Book of Mormon is a fraud, that Joseph Smith got it out of *Hamlet* [people claim]. But it is not the quotation from *Hamlet* at all.

And now we come to a very interesting thing. The point of these chapters in 2 Nephi is that he's dealing with the Atonement, and this is a very important thing. I don't know whether to talk about it now or a little later, because he's going to get into it quite deeply here. But he says, "I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love." Now, this is an extremely common figure in Egyptian. If it sounds evangelic or something like that, don't fool yourself. This is standard. He says "And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and judgments of the Lord." Note the formula of the Dead Sea Scrolls, always *mishpāṭîm* and *ḥuqqîm*, the statutes and judgments. That's a pair that always goes together, especially in the Dead Sea Scrolls—"the statutes and judgments of the Lord." You'll find them elsewhere. "This hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning." Nephi is worried, and he ends up in deep despair. And Jacob picks it up in even deeper despair, so things go down all the time. Notice what he says in verse 17: "I have feared . . . that ye be cut off and destroyed forever." Well, already we're getting the idea of the Atonement. "Encircled eternally in the arms of love," and the alternative is to be "cut off and destroyed forever."

As you should all know by now, the Atonement is *At-one-ment*. It is one of the few English words, like *forgiveness* and *righteousness*, that are theological, technical words—one of the very few that are used. It's only used once in the New Testament, which is in Romans 5:11, and, in the new Revised Standard Version of the Bible, used by most churches, it doesn't appear at all. They've changed it everywhere to *reconciliation*. So what is meant by *atonement*? It's a very important thing. Now, as I said, this happened to be the lesson yesterday [in the Gospel Doctrine class]. W. J. Wolf, in the most recent writing on the Atonement, says, "There's not a single New Testament document on the Atonement." Well, I'm not going to give you the Hebrew background. You'll find in the Hebrew background in the tenth chapter of the book of Hebrews, where the whole thing as carried out in the temple by the Jews is regarded as a similitude of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's the way Paul interpreted it, but that's not the way most people interpret it. There are other interpretations. As Wolf says here, "There is not a single New Testament document on the Atonement. There is simply a collection of images and metaphors from which subsequent tradition built. Tradition has tried to decide what parts of this picture should be taken literally and what parts metaphorically."

We have all sorts of things here. There are various words that are used for it, translated with it in the Bible and theological writings. There are half a dozen of them here; I'll refer to them presently. But he goes on and says, "Which parts are to be taken literally and which metaphorically?" What are we talking about, "the atoning blood of Christ"? To what degree does it atone and what do you mean by *atonement*? How can it *at-one* a thing? And this has developed extended rationale. It's personalized in Isaiah 53. "Images include the ransom, the buying free of the slave with emphasis on the costliness. This is called the commercial interpretation [you hear that too; you've sinned, and Christ will pay the price]. There is emphasis on forgiveness of sin as in Mark 14 and Matthew, and the image of the lamb developed by John. The main issue is whether the Atonement is the completion of the Old Testament sacrifice or if it's something independent and standing alone, which the Old Testament simply foreshadows," which, of course, is what we believe.

In 1930, there was quite a revolution caused by Aulen's book called *Christus Victor*. This caused a stir. "There are three main interpretations of atonement. One is the classical interpretation of the Greek fathers, which integrates incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. It uses the image of a military contest—onward Christian soldiers—the inevitable victory of Christ. We march behind and we are automatically saved." We win because we're the good guys, etc. And then there's Anselm's interpretation which is being renewed today in a famous work of his called *Cur Deus Homo, Why God Became Man*. This is satisfaction. This is medieval. The Lord's honor has been damaged, so the gallant knight has to go out and avenge the honor to the person above him, to his lord, of course. Sin has damaged the honor to God, and it has to be avenged. And Christ pays the satisfaction. There must be satisfaction—I mean the casting down of the gauntlet. There is the jousting in the field of honor, the trial—well, they used various trials and tests—the trial by ordeal to see who's guilty and who isn't. All these things are medieval. Anselm refers to all of them. It's Christ who pays the price, he fights the fight, he vindicates his Father's honor, etc. This is the part he adds to it, that Christ's death is undeserved, unnecessary, and superfluous; therefore, all that spare blood is to our advantage. You remember in Marlowe's *Faustus* he says, "See how Christ's blood streams through the firmament. One drop of it will save me, just one drop, O my Christ." The idea here is that one drop of Christ's blood is so precious that it will save all of us—we don't have to do a thing. That is Anselm, [interpretation that Christ's blood is] left over, along with the idea of satisfaction to be paid for God's honor, which is damaged by sin. The Roman Catholic catechism today defines sin as "any damage done to the glory of God." I wonder who can damage God's glory? You must be something if you can damage God's glory. You can't do it at all, detract from it in any way. Well, what is the sin then? As I said, there are these various interpretations. We've damaged ourselves; that's what it has done. Notice that what it's done is "cut off the destroyed forever." That's the alternative here.

But, what are the other interpretations? There is Calvin's interpretation, the Reformation theory, that Christ as a substitute endured God's punishment so we wouldn't have to endure it again. There's something to be said for all of these, you'll notice. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, remember there was a ram caught in the thicket, and the angel said, "Nay, lay not thy hand upon the lad—here is a substitute." You don't have to sacrifice Isaac; you have to sacrifice the ram. The rabbis tell us, the Talmud tells us, that the name of the ram was "Isaac." So this was Isaac, because in the rites of the tabernacle, later the temple, Aaron and his sons would place their hands upon the head of the ram, or the bullock, and transfer not only their guilt but their personalities to it, so to speak. Then when it was killed, they were killed. It was the equivalent or substitute sacrifice. Rosenberg has recently written a very interesting book on that. It's the idea of the substitute sacrifice, and Christ is substituted that way. This was the theory, and there is something to be said for it because the work of the temple is proxy all the way through—and we can't pay the price, certainly. You can't pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Well, the Reformation theory includes that and the Protestants' "justification by faith." It's faith that will do it [according to them]. This dispenses with the Anselm's apparatus. Thousands of times I used to hear in Germany, "*Nur Glaube* (only faith). Faith alone will do it all." We are told, as James says, "Faith without works is dead." But faith dispenses with Anselm's rather elaborate medieval apparatus, and the Roman Catholics call the atonement "the apparatus that mediated salvation," just as they call the church "the factory which produces salvation." It's a great machine that does the work, and the institution is the impressive thing.

Then there are Hugo Grotius, the Dutchman, and Jonathan Edwards and the Puritans later on. That is the rectorial or governmental theory. It's all done in the public interest. Christ's death has a deterrent effect on sinners. So we have these various things. I think we have an interesting lesson in philology here. We may well refer to that—what the meaning of the word is. Strangely, the Book of Mormon gives us the most clear-cut connection between the ancient word *kappōret* and our Old English *at-one-ment* (atonement). The first thing to notice is that the word *atonement* is unique in touching all bases. The other words will cover part of it. For example, *reconciliation* is the commonest rendering of the word, which is *katallagē*. That means “changing back again to where you were.” It's the same thing as *teshûvah* in Hebrew. It means “a return,”—you return to where you were. But you can never come back; you can't go home again after you have sinned. That has to be washed away, so there is baptism. The idea is to return, but how can you return to a place if you never were there before? All throughout the doctrine of atonement, a pre-existence is assumed—returning to the presence of the Father, coming home again. *The Pearl*, the earliest Christian hymn, is beautiful on that particular subject. But the Greek word they used in Romans 5:11 is *katallagē*. There it is called *atonement*, meaning “made one of the Father again.” This is “made one” in a very special sense. In *reconciliation* you have a settlement or an understanding, but that doesn't make you *one*, you see. Then *redemption* is another common one. The price is paid (that's right) and it's got you off, but you don't even have to know the person who paid the price, let alone be one with him. The idea of *being one* goes beyond having the price paid. Then *salvation* means “you are safe home again,” but you are not one with anybody in particular. There is no specification of what sense this is to be taken. Then *teshûvah*, the Hebrew “returning, repentance.” But where is the oneness again?

Then there's the *kpr*. *Kippūr* is the Hebrew word. You all know about *Yom Kippur*. The root is *kpr*, and *kippūr* is the “act of atoning.” That's *hilaskesthai*, and it refers literally to the “covering of the Ark, covering of the mercy seat.” The *kappōret*, the thing that covers, is the *hilasterion*, where God appeared to forgive the sins of the people. It was the front curtain or the veil of the tabernacle. After the people had completed all the rites and ordinances of atonement, then the veil was parted and God (the Savior) was supposed to speak from the tabernacle and tell the people that their sins were forgiven and they were welcomed to his presence. That's this idea of being taken back into his embrace again, “encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 15).

As I said, the word *kpr* is very interesting, “to atone for.” The word is *kpr*, *kippūr*. We have had this before, of course. It's cognate with our word *cover*; it's pronounced *kfr*. So we have *cover*, but that is just the beginning of this very interesting word. It's the same in Aramaic; it's “to cover over your sins.” This is the way Jastrow's big two-volume lexicon explains it: It means “to arch over; to bend over; to cover; to pass over with the hand, especially the palm of the hand.” The word for *palm of the hand* in all Semitic languages is *kāp*. It means “to cover, hence to grasp by the hand; to wipe over, hence to cleanse, to expiate, to forgive, to renounce, to deny, to be found, to encircle.” All these in this one word. Well, this is nothing in Arabic. If you don't have fifty totally different meanings for a word, you think your language is impoverished. But here *embrace* is the idea; therefore, you cover a person. And this is a very interesting thing because here the Book of Mormon casts what I would say is a rather dazzling light on the subject. *Kāfaf* and

kāfar mean the same in Aramaic. I'll put the word *kafaf* up here. This is the Egyptian, *hpt*. This is the situation vividly set forth in the Book of Mormon.

I remember old Professor Popper. Imagine, in the years when I took Hebrew and Arabic at Berkeley, I was the only student taking those languages. Today, there are twenty teachers of both there. That's how things have changed since then. I was Popper's only student. A rabbi, he would grow quite eloquent on this particular subject of the *kafata* in Arabic. This was in the Arabic class. We've got it all down here, so let's turn to it. The Arabic is *kafata*, and the Egyptian word is *hpt*. They all go together. Notice that the ideogram is two arms embracing somebody, *hpt*. And, of course, you get the Coptic word from that, from which we get our word *caftan*. That is a long monk's robe with a hood that covers you completely; it goes completely over your head. That's *kafata*, and it's the same word as the Latin *capto*, which means "to embrace, to capture, to hug around." It's quite universal—our word *cover* and the rest. And the Jews go into various interpretations. As I said, it means all these things. The basic meaning is "to arch over; to bend over; to cover; therefore, to cover your sins, to wipe them out, to forget them; to pass over with the palm of the hand, hence to wipe over; to cleanse; to expiate; therefore, to forgive, to renounce, to deny, to be found." Then the basic meaning goes to *encircle* again, such as encircling a city, a town, a person, or anything else.

We'll go ahead to chapter 4 of 2 Nephi in which we have a vivid desert episode. Talk about one of those dazzling little vignettes, it's here. Nephi describes himself as running away from his enemies. He has been oppressed terribly. His big brothers have never stopped dogging him; they have been after him all the time. He has been given a rough time by everybody. The family sort of resents his being the leader anyway, being the youngest until his two brothers were born there [in the wilderness]. In verse 32 he says, "May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley [now in a thing like the *Sirat Bani Hilāl*, a person escaping from his enemy always wanted to take the low, quick, straight path as far as he can get away from him—the easiest path to take and the surest to escape, not having to run up and down any hills or anything like that], that I may be strict in the plain road!" That means "sticking right to the path." That's the *derekh*, you see. At the end of the first Psalm: "The way of the wicked shall be lost in the sand." It goes that way. That my way may not be that way, "that I may be strict in the plain road [that I may stick to the proper path]! O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!" This is an Arabic idyll. When a person is running away, he runs to the tent of any great sheikh he can find. He goes in and kneels down before the sheikh and says, "I am thy suppliant." The sheikh is then obligated to put his caftan over his *kātēf* which is the same word as *shoulder*—to put the hem of his garment over his shoulder and say, "*Ahlan wa-sahlan wa-marhaban*. This is your tent, this is your family." The Hebrew word *ōhel* for *tent* is the same as the Arabic word *ahl* for *family*. He says, "We'll make a place for you." Then the lord or the chief is under obligation to defend you against the enemies that are chasing you. You are now under his protection, and he will protect you. This is part of the medieval code.

This is what we have here. "O lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!" He's running away and he wants the plain road so he can get away from his enemies and wants to be encircled with the robe of righteousness. "O Lord, wilt thou

make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way.” A stumbling block is the Greek word *skandalon*; it’s anything you trip up on when you are running, what you bump your toe on. The Hebrew word is *eben mikshôl* [or *šûr mikshôl*] which means “the rock of stumbling, a stone of offense. Sometimes it’s called “a stumbling block” and sometimes “a rock of offense.” It’s anything that will trip you up when you are trying to go somewhere. You are making a nice thing of it, and all of sudden you fall flat on your face. That’s dangerous, you see. So he says, don’t let that happen to me. “But that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy [make his way hard].” I showed that picture from the time of Lehi of an Arab riding his camel, and it said he was escaping from his enemies. He was running for dear life. That’s what we have here. Notice how the image is: Make the way straight for me so I can get through. Then when I go to you, will you put the robe of your righteousness around me and I will be in your protection. My enemy, meanwhile, is blocked in the sand. He is wandering around and doesn’t know where he is going. He’s lost, he’s been blocked. But don’t put any stumbling block in my way so that I can escape. So we have these interesting situations here.

Now we will turn to Alma 5:33. This idea of being embraced is very strong in the Book of Mormon as an expression for the Atonement. Since that’s what the Sunday School lesson was yesterday, I happened to stumble on this. “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.” This is the embrace; he is willing to take you. Notice, “Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink [come into my camp] of the bread and the waters of life freely.” He will take you in when you are running away and he says his invitation and his arms are extended. And in 2 Nephi 1:15 we have it where he says, “But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.” That’s what got us started here. It’s the embrace he is in. We have this ideogram. And the opposite of that you will find in Alma 5:7. We notice that the opposite is the very same thing: “Behold, he changed their hearts. . . . 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 [that’s the other encircling; Satan can encircle you too], and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them.” You get this same negative idea right here in verse 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?”

In the one you are bound tight to one person; in the other you are bound tight to another. And there is nothing ever mentioned about anything in between the two, which is a very interesting thing. The opposite of oneness is in Alma 5:25. This is the alternative to being embraced, to being taken into the family. “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 [remember, Nephi said to Zoram, ‘You come down to our father’s tent in the desert and you can have place with us;’ *marhaban* means ‘have a place with us,’ and here he uses that term again] in the kingdom of heaven; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.” The opposite is to be cast out or not included—thrown out of the house. Then notice verse 57 in the same chapter. (These are just at random.) “Come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things. The names of the wicked shall not be

mingled with the names of my people.” The idea is being cast out and cut off completely, and that’s what we are talking about here. We have a section on this in the Egyptian writing on embracing at the veil, for example. Remember, the *pārōkeṭ* is also the front veil of the tabernacle which the Lord parted to grant the people atonement after they had performed all the ordinances necessary on the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month. That was when he greeted them and claimed that he was one with them. So there is the emphasis on *at-one*. It’s this *oneness* that makes all the difference in the world, that you can’t get anywhere else. It’s good that this word survived and came right through in English, never questioned, as against the alternatives which are used today.

Here is a picture from the twenty-fifth dynasty. This would be the last king of the Taharkan Dynasty. They are the ones who gave us the *Shabako Stone*, so Shabako was the second king of the line. But it tells here what is going on. The king is being embraced by his father after obtaining all things. This shows embracing on both sides. Here, an embrace on one side and an embrace on the other side. This one is the heavy weight that was worn in the back of the *selkit* emblem. Now *selkit* is always represented as the *embrace*. Notice the ideogram here is the embracing. The two arms are embracing, and they are embracing the *djed* symbol, which represents the marrow in the bones. This is called “health and strength.” He says here, “I give thee all life and power.” This is a picture of the symbol for life—actually the umbilical cord, the navel. The other is *was*, which is always rendered as “power in the priesthood, authority to speak for priesthood, etc.” Also, this is the embrace. These are the symbols of embracing. The two fans protected the king when he went forth, according to Moet. They embraced him on either side. The kings always had those two fans called the *shuit* or the *khaibit*. This is the counterweight which hangs on the breast to impart breath and life. Here we have the process going on from a famous picture in the temple at Karnak where he is washed here and then clothed. He is anointed and then he is introduced into the presence of the king. Then the king is going to embrace him. The final step is this embrace. So there’s this idea of being one. You can’t be closer to a person than when you embrace.

A recently discovered, almost complete document is the *Apocryphon of John*, a very old Coptic fragment. In that is the story of John and Jesus when they were little kids. They are just little children and they meet for the first time in the house of Elizabeth. They rush to each other and embrace and they fuse into one person. Now this is a story that is picked up and used a lot later, but it shows the oneness of what the embrace is. It is an atonement of one-ment. To be taken back completely is something quite different than just to be forgiven, to be excused, to be bought off—all of those other things. This idea is to be taken back into the presence, and that’s why the Jews call it the *zākar*, the remembrance of the *teshûvāh*. “Returning to the place you remember” is what it is. As I said, the earliest Christian hymn, that marvelous Syriac hymn called *The Pearl*, talks about the person leaving his Heavenly Father and Mother, coming down and sinning in the world, and the struggle he has to get back and be greeted by the family again when he returns.

Notice these parallels. What have the Egyptians got to do with it? One of the most interesting explanations was given a hundred years ago by President Joseph F. Smith. He was ages ahead of scholarship, which is just catching up with him now. In 1888 President Joseph F. Smith said, “Undoubtedly the knowledge of this law and of other rites and ceremonies [talking about the Atonement] was carried by the posterity of Adam into all lands and continued with them, more or less pure, to the flood, and through Noah, who was a ‘preacher of righteousness,’ to those who succeeded him, spreading out into all

nations and countries.” The description of this process is given in the beginning of the book of Moses. It describes very clearly how this spread. All nations corrupted it everywhere, but they received it anyway. “What wonder, then, that we should find relics of Christianity, so to speak, among the heathens [it’s not surprising at all] and nations who know not Christ, and whose histories date back beyond the days of Moses, and even beyond the flood, independent of and apart from the records of the Bible.”¹ Of course, we can pick up fragments that look like the gospel all over, among the Indians, among the Maoris, and wherever you go. This has been a great thing in the spreading of the gospel. I could tell you a lot of stories about that.

There were parallels way back in 1856 when they discovered at Nippur the Babylonian story of the flood, and it looked just like the Genesis story of the flood. So everybody said, “Ah ha, this is the original story,” because the document was far older than any Hebrew documents we had. But it was only sixth century. It was only from the time of Assurbanipal, the last one. Since then a very interesting thing has happened. They said, “There must be an older flood story than that.” Actually, the Old Testament was a much older version. That was discovered when World War I broke out. The University of Pennsylvania had a big fund; they were going back to look for the old tablets at Nippur. They were going to find the Sumerian version of the flood, but they couldn’t go because of the war. So alas, they had to stay home and look through the stuff they already had. The first thing they found was the Nippur Tablets that they were going to spend a couple of million bucks looking for. They were already there all the time. They never bother to see what they have; they want to go out and dig up other stuff. They like these jobs, etc. But anyway, which is the older version? Well, you’ll find it everywhere and in various stages of decay and interpretation.

They [scholars] say that this proves that “‘Christianity’ sprang from the heathen [because the heathen documents are older—well, they aren’t older now], it being found that they have many rites similar to those recorded in the Bible, etc. [That is only a vain and foolish attempt to show off superior scholarship] for if the heathen have doctrines and ceremonies resembling . . . those . . . in the Scriptures, it only proves . . . that these are the traditions that the fathers handed down, and that they will cleave to the children to the latest generation though they wander into darkness and perversion, until but a slight resemblance to their origin, which was divine, can be seen.” This is our argument in “The Genesis of the Written Word.”²

The argument is definitely on President Smith’s side, for as he observes, “The Bible account, being the most rational and indeed [the] only historical one, . . . we cannot but come to the conclusion that this is *not* the work of chance.” We are talking about atonement, and only the scriptures will explain why this is necessary. And the ancients don’t have atonement. See, there is no Egyptian word for *sin*. The whole idea is quite different there. And what do you do if you don’t have the Atonement? What is your view of life? The Greeks, etc. I sin, but all people do that. You can’t help that; everybody does that. Life is hard, so we all sin. What happens as a result of that? There is no atonement, no forgiveness, no hereafter. So the only alternative is the tragic view of life, and all the ancients have this terribly tragic view of life. You either have the Atonement, “come back home and be one,” or you are going to have this infinitely tragic view of life—we’re going nowhere. It’s absolutely basic in the Greek tragedies, for example. They do have redemption, forgiveness, and all those other things—but not the hereafter, the Atonement, the life eternal, etc. None of them have that. In the old Norse sagas, it is even more poignant. It’s terrible and tears you apart.

Well now, this is interesting too; we might as well mention it here. Here's an article by Isidore Levi. "The farther back we go in Israelite tradition, the more consistent and sensible the ordinances of the atonement become." The Jews are just as confused on it as anybody else. Notice, in all those definitions I gave, which word covers it? The only word that covers it is *atonement*, our English word, and there is no equivalent of that anywhere else. Nobody has that *at-one-ment* idea. They have the return; they have the *teshûvah*; they have *kpr*, "covering up;" they have forgiveness and all those. They are all partial. Quoting Rabbi Levi, "There was a teaching that the sacrifice of Isaac was the great atoning sacrifice of Israel [and this is commonly held]. The offering of Isaac was an atonement for Israel. Isaac offered himself as a free-will offering." That's what the *akedah* is; *akedah* means *the binding*. He offered himself to be bound. He wasn't forced to be, so he gave a free-will offering, as the Savior did. "The offering of Isaac is called the *akedah*, which means *the binding*, because Isaac submitted of his own free will to be bound and offered. It is even maintained that he was actually put to death on the occasion—that he was slain and burned on the altar." Remember, he brought the wood; he bore it on his own back. He was burned and reduced to ashes, and then on the spot the Lord resurrected him. It has to be the Resurrection; the Atonement has to be followed by the Resurrection. Otherwise, why are you atoned if you are just going to cease to exist from that moment on? That's why the ancients are left out in the cold. "It is even maintained that he was actually put to death on the occasion and then restored."

Now I'm quoting from the *Talmud*: "And Isaac received his spirit again while the angels joined in a chorus of praise. 'Praise be to the Eternal, thou who has given life to the dead.'" So a resurrection was celebrated by the death of Isaac. But, of course, Isaac wasn't put to death. There was a substitute for him—the ram in the thicket. He didn't complete the sacrifice at all. It too was only a similitude. "Though most of the Jewish teachers reject the resurrection on the spot idea," writes R. A. Rosenberg, "still, even for them, Isaac was the perfect sacrifice—the atonement offering that brings forgiveness of sin through the ages." It's an eternal sin offering, and the Jews say it must have been Isaac. "The trouble is, as everybody including the Jews themselves points out, that Isaac was not sacrificed, but a ram was offered in his stead—still looking forward to the great sacrifice to come. And the sacrifice of the ram was continued in the temple long after Abraham as a similitude to the great and last sacrifice until it actually took place." But it was carried on after [the sacrifice of the Savior].

Let me read the conclusion to what Wolf has to say about this. "Atonement as an expression of the mystery of God remains the reality at the core [it's the mystery of God]. Interpretations of the *how* and *why* of the process multiply as images and metaphors expand into theories and become, in turn, ancillary or dominant, only to dissolve and give way to other theories and changing cultural configurations which reappear later in new shapes and new relationships." It's constantly being processed in trying to grasp this idea of the Atonement, and it's going on all the time, he says. Well, there's no better handbook for grasping it than the Book of Mormon.

Now Lehi goes on with more imagery that is very interesting in 2 Nephi 1:16: "And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord . . . for I have feared, lest . . . ye be cut off and destroyed forever." See, there's the alternative. You are either embraced in his arms or you are cut off and encircled by the chains of death—the other thing that encircles you. Verse 19: "But behold, his will be done; for his ways are righteousness forever. [In spite of his despair, he says], "Inasmuch as ye shall keep

my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.” That’s the cutting off. What can be closer to his presence than to be in his embrace and one with him. There’s that marvelous passage—the most beautiful in the Book of Mormon, I think. “The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there” (2 Nephi 9:41). He will receive you personally, take your hand, and give you the signs and tokens himself when you come, as he did to the Nephites. Every one of them he received individually, even the children. One by one, he blessed them and received them. He called each person by name and identified himself to each one. This is what we do here in the rite of the Atonement in Israel. It’s very clear as a matter of fact. Exodus is where it is set forth in the Old Testament, and then in all the books of Moses you have the rite of the Atonement. It’s very important.

Verse 23: “Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness.” The oldest manuscript of this comes from Spain. The *Lorica* means “the armor of righteousness.” It’s a famous poem, and philologically it’s a very strange thing. Norbert Wiener’s father, who was a professor of philology at Harvard for many years, wrote a book about this, *The Lorica*. It’s such a strange mixture of language and everything else. It describes the “armor of righteousness” as a whole thing. It seems to have been very ancient, both among the Hebrews and the Jews. He is talking about it here, and it is a natural defense, the *Lorica*—the armor of righteousness. “Shake off the chains with which ye are bound [there it is again] . . . and arise from the dust. Rebel no more against your brother. . . . Were it not for him, we must have perished with hunger in the wilderness.” He saved us; he brought us through. But [in verse 25] he is still afraid; he doesn’t think he is making much progress. “And I exceedingly fear and tremble because of you [he is not optimistic]. . . . He hath not sought for power nor authority over you, . . . and that which ye call anger was the truth, . . . but it was the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it. . . . And if ye will hearken unto him I leave unto you a blessing, yea, even my first blessing. But if ye will not hearken unto him I take away my first blessing.” This exhortation is to the whole family; he is going to give their separate blessings later. Notice, Zoram is a “fifth wheel;” he is another member. He has married the oldest daughter of Ishmael. Lehi says that Zoram is going to be a true friend to Nephi forever, like the Plataeans and the Athenians. Verse 31: “Thy seed shall be blessed with his seed, that they dwell in prosperity long upon the face of this land.”

Now he starts speaking to Jacob, his firstborn in the wilderness. Notice verse 2: “Thou knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine afflictions for thy gain.” What does that mean? It means you will get credit for enduring. There is nothing you will go through that you won’t be thankful for and glad of later on. He will consecrate your afflictions for your gain. In verse 4 we see that the Book of Mormon is the handbook of the Atonement. This whole chapter is on the Atonement, and we are going to get a rather clear explanation of things. He starts out here, “For the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free. And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil.” This is the first basis, of course. The conscience is absolutely basic because you are not going to have any Atonement unless you have guilt feelings.

The final idea: Why do so few people know anything about the Atonement? We leave it up in the air—we don’t know what we are talking about. Why do so few know anything about the gospel, for that matter? But the point is, here is this thing which is the central point of the teachings of Jesus Christ—his atoning blood. The term is used over and over

[in the Book of Mormon]; it's dominant. It's a central theme, and yet, as we saw here, there is no agreement about it [in the world]. People are trying to figure out what it is. There is one very good explanation of that—something has been taken away. As I told you about Johanan Ben Zakkai, they didn't want the temple. They didn't want any of this. Remember, the main purpose of the temple was the carrying out of the sacrifices of the Atonement. That's what you find described in the books of Moses. The rabbis, who were teachers and not priests, were glad to get rid of it. Ben Zakkai took his school and went over in Jamnia and founded the first rabbinical school. They didn't want any of this, so these things were removed. As the Book of Mormon tells us, many precious things were removed. That's why people stumble. It's very obvious that the Atonement stands right there, and yet it's a vacuum. There's something missing. The explanation is very clearly given by Nephi at the first that many precious things have been removed; therefore, many stumble because of that. The Gentiles stumble, etc. It's obvious that has happened, but the Book of Mormon replaces that. It replaces those parts that have been removed, and that's why we need it—among other things. Precious things have been removed from the Bible.

1. Joseph F. Smith, in *JD* 15:325–26.
2. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Genesis of the Written Word," in *Temple and Cosmos*, *CWHN* 12 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 450–90.