

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 45

Alma 4–5

**From Prosperity and Peace to Pride and Power
The Atonement**

Now we have two extremely important passages; they are worth years actually. We are in Alma 4. In the fifth year of the reign of the judges all that fighting and terrible stuff happened. Now we are in the sixth year, and everything is going pretty well. In the sixth year there were no contentions, for once. Of course there were no contentions; they were suffering too much from the setback in the wars. It says, “But the people were afflicted, yea, greatly afflicted for the loss of their brethren, and also for the loss of their flocks and herds, and also for the loss of their fields of grain.” The place was ruined; their crops were trampled and destroyed. The losses had been so heavy “that every soul had cause to mourn; and they believed that it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness.”

It’s interesting in how many cities after World War II everyone had lost somebody. The mayor of Pforzheim told me that in the last air raid of the British on the town of 80,000, there were 30,000 killed in that one raid. It was really something, but this is a different kind of war here. There were no good guys now. They said, “Every soul had cause to mourn, and they believed it was the judgments of God sent upon them because of their wickedness and their abominations; therefore they were awakened to a remembrance of their duty.” This was the promise given to Lehi.

Verse 4: “And they began to establish the church more fully; yea, and many were baptized in the waters of Sidon.” Weren’t there any other rivers around except the Sidon? It looks as if there were not very many. Notice that it was shallow—it was forded. That’s where all the battles took place, at the ford. They could pass back and forth over it; it was the border also, and it washed down into the sea. It was that kind of country; there were no big rivers around. “Yea, they were baptized by the hand of Alma, who had been consecrated the high priest over the people of the church.” He had his work cut out for him. Now another thing to notice: See how small this civilization was. He baptized not 35,000 but only 3,500 souls. Everybody was wanting to get baptized, but that’s how many he baptized in a year. We are dealing with Hopi dimensions here. It’s not a gigantic [civilization] with millions of people in the manner our friend Arnold Friberg [portrays].

Then just two years pass, and it’s all over. In the eighth year they have gone sour again. Do things happen this fast really? You bet they do. “The people of the church began to wax proud, because of their exceeding riches, and their fine silks.” Now here we come to a cultural note; we should mention silks. I have a lot of words for *silk* on the board. As they will tell you in the encyclopedia, etc., the knowledge of silk was known in China before 1000 B.C.—it was Chinese. But everybody tells you this story: It was brought by Nestorian monks (missionaries) to the West in the year 552. They brought the eggs of the silkworm, which feed on the mulberry bush, concealed in their hollow staves as they came. That’s the story people tell. But way back in the Augustan Age before the time of Christ, Roman

literature is full of silk. They not only talk about *silk*, but *bombax*, a word that means both *silkworm* and the *cloth*. Aristotle and Pliny both describe the silkworm, but they don't make a direct connection with silk. But they called the cloth the very same thing. Don't you think they made connection between the worm and the cloth if they called them both *bombax*? These cultural things are very interesting and really quite complicated.

It's interesting that in the Old Testament, in Proverbs, way back there, the word is *shēsh*. Well, that's the Egyptian word *sšr/šsr* for linen or any fine cloth. You just draw it with a bag and a picture of a piece of cloth. *Shēsh* is the same word the Egyptians were using. It's translated in the King James as *silk*. And we have *meshî* translated as *silk* way back in Ezekiel [16:10, 13]. In Revelation you have it in Greek. It is *sērikos*. That comes from the land of the Seres, which is supposed to have been a tribe in India. The Greek *sindōn* is the word for *linen*. But the Arabic word for a *silkworm* is *dūd*, "a gauze-spinning worm." They use the words *gauze*, *silk*, and *cotton*, so no wonder it tells us in Harper's big Latin dictionary that this word [*silk*] refers in general to any fine fiber. In English it's perfectly legitimate to call any fine fiber *silk*. It goes on here. You have *metaxa* and various modern Greek words for it. The nicest story about it goes way back to Minoan times. The story of Solomon and Bilqis is the story in Tha'labī. When Queen Bilqis, the queen of Sheba, came to visit Solomon, she posed riddles for him. She was the riddling queen, and they exchanged riddles. Solomon was very sharp, and she was very sharp. She won incidentally; she outwitted him. But her number one riddle was this: She had a nice box with her. She said that in the box was a big bead, and the bead had a crooked hole through it. "How can you put a thread through the bead without opening the box." Well, this was a non sequitur or something, but you can see what it was referring to. The secret was that she had a little worm that spun a fine thread, and the worm crawled through [the bead]. The secret she brought in her box was, of course, silk because they had silk in Minoan times.

So the use of this word is very free. The Romans definitely had the knowledge, but it was lost for five hundred years and then came back again. These cultural things come and go. That goes with the horse and lots of other things. But you mustn't get tripped up on things [like this]. Notice it uses *silks* in the plural. What do they mean by *silks*? There is one *silk*. No there isn't. *Silk* is any very fine cloth. I think we got all the fancy words here, so we'll go on.

They had all these fine things like fine-twined linen, and it's a very interesting thing: In the Central American collections we have here and among things in the Mexico Museum, there is superb metal work, but [they were] especially strong on woven stuff. The ancients were awfully good at weaving, and that's what their wealth was. Our BYU people have discovered more woven stuff in Egypt at Sera than was known before—all kinds of weaving. We have a very good man, Kuchar, who is perhaps the nation's foremost man in ancient fabrics. He has identified all sorts. Two weeks ago they discovered the most gorgeous mummy cover [that has been] discovered in the last forty years. The BYU people found it. It is going right now to the Cairo Museum, and they are going to give it a special niche. It's the most beautiful mummy case and mummy with a gold breastplate and heavy gold plate. It isn't solid gold, like King Tut's, but they say it's far more gorgeous than anything found for years. So we're having luck in Egypt. But you notice that here the fine weaving is the great thing. As you know, they call the Indians "primitive," but the one thing they can do is weave. They make magnificent baskets and

woven wear. The Hopis have very fine stuff; we can't do it as well as they do. So they are great at their weaving, etc.

And they had "costly apparel." Notice they never call it "beautiful apparel." It's just costly. Usually it looks quite ugly, I suppose, but it's costly. They overdo it, as you know if you've seen the vase paintings and the murals from Central America, Mexico, etc. They are all horribly overdressed; they look like walking Christmas trees—these grandees being carried around. It went to their heads again, and Alma took this very hard: "Now this was the cause of much affliction to Alma." What's wrong with this elegance? Note the sharp distance between the two lifestyles here; that's what it is. Verse 7: "Yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people." They were not compromising or anything. Alma was much afflicted, and the priests and elders were sorely grieved. They were coming down hard; they didn't agree at all. We have a definite hostility here. The people went right on with it because they didn't like how [Alma and the priests] were doing it. It was two diametrically opposed lifestyles. That's what we're up against. They saw what they called *wickedness* that had begun among the people.

Verse 8: "For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that the people of the church [the church was the main culprit here] began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world [here's your equality], that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure." That's snobbery, contempt, intolerance, and meanness. But what about persecution? Do people actually go that far? Do we really act this way because we get rich? Well, we do, of course. Remember, Hamlet sums it up very neatly:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay.
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act III, scene 1

You have to deal with all these things if you are in official life or anywhere else. "The oppressor's wrong"—a person gets power and he becomes oppressive (D&C 121). "The proud man's contumely." It's not enough just to be proud, but he puts you down. "The pangs of disprized love." You are in love with somebody who doesn't just turn you down—he or she makes you feel cheap. It's terrible! They look down on you. "The law's delay." If you try to settle something in court, they make a monkey of you and give you the run around. This was [written] four hundred years ago, but it hasn't changed. And "the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes." The *unworthy* is the *boss*, the *manager*, etc. You have a patient, competent worker who has to take all this guff from somebody who is really incompetent himself, but he is the boss or the boss's son. This is what we have to face. "... who would fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life ..." etc.

This really happens. You know how people feel about the “rat race.” You know how they write about their jobs. Read *The Wall Street Journal* faithfully, and you’ll find that. Young men who go in at fabulous fees get fed up; I know many of them that do. One made a “killing.” He was quite rich when he told his stake president in Arizona that he was going to take some time off and do some studying—wouldn’t even go to school. The stake president was furious. He said, “Do you mean to say you are going to spin your wheels reading books when you could be making big money?” Emotions run high in this thing. This isn’t just that some people got rich and some didn’t get so rich. Oh no, it goes this way, and this is peculiar to our society as much as anything, although you find the same injustices everywhere. After all, Shakespeare was talking about England.

So what happens? Great contentions. Notice Alma 4:9: “There began to be great contentions among the people of the church; yea, there were envyings, and strife, and malice, and persecutions, and pride.” You have all these things within the ward, etc. Note the nature of these crimes—the meanness and the pettiness of it. There’s nothing that you can make a law against. You can’t go to jail for being envious of someone. You can’t go to jail for strife or competition. We believe in competition; ours is a competitive system. Or for malice—to catch up and get even with somebody. “Don’t get mad, get even.” That’s the slogan. With persecutions you put the pressure on. And there are the takeovers, hostile and otherwise, and the pride. Iacocca is always talking about his pride, “. . . even to exceed the pride of those who did not belong to the church of God.” The church members were worse than the nonmembers, in other words. Can it go that way? It does.

Verse 10: “And thus ended the eighth year of the reign of the judges; and the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church.” This is a thing to notice. Here in this eighth year we come to the fatal turning point; from now on it’s all down hill. It seems rather early in the game for that to be happening, but notice we are going on to the time of Christ now. From now on things start getting serious when the church itself is the center of corruption. So this is what’s going to happen.

The Supreme Court recently repealed some state laws, making it a crime not to be visibly making or spending money. That’s to say vagrancy is a crime. If you just walk around without any visible means of employment, you go to jail—if you are a philosopher who wants to see the world, etc. If you have money to spend, you don’t have to go to jail. But if you don’t, you have to go to jail. (I know, I’ve tried it.) That’s some country. We call that freedom and the like.

It tells us here in verse 11 that the church was corrupting the entire nation: “Alma saw the wickedness of the church, and he saw also that the example of the church began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people. Yea, he saw great inequality among the people [there we are again; he always hits that], some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others [*despicio* means ‘to look down on others’], turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry.” Well, we are excellent at this; we talk about the people freezing on the sidewalks in front of the White House, etc. I just heard a report that 170 people died on the sidewalks in San Francisco last year. Well, we certainly pass them by without noticing them. It sounded like an exaggeration to me, but in San Francisco anything can happen. I could give you some statistics that are rather horrendous, but we are not going into them.

But there were the others; this is the other side. Notice that this is a tract for the times. There are no *-isms* here. We are not talking about socialism, capitalism, fascism, or anything else. It's just human beings dealing with each other. "Others were abasing themselves, succoring those who stood in need of their succor, such as imparting their substance to the poor and the needy, feeding the hungry, and suffering all manner of afflictions, for Christ's sake, who should come according to the spirit of prophecy. Looking forward to that day, thus retaining a remission of their sins; being filled with great joy because of the resurrection of the dead [that's where it pays off], according to the will and power and deliverance of Jesus Christ from the bands of death. . . . Alma, having seen the afflictions of the humble followers of God, and the persecutions which were heaped upon them by the remainder of his people, and seeing all their inequality, began to be very sorrowful."

What did he do about it? Well, he did exactly the same as when the same thing happened in Athens in the time of Solon—a very well-documented affair because the great Solon left his record. We talked about this in the other semester in the time of Lehi. He was a contemporary of Lehi, and I would "bet a dime to a donut" that he knew Lehi because he traveled to the east. He went to Palestine and dealt in olives and olive oil. He exchanged olive oil and pottery and things like that. He was the greatest Greek; we still call wise politicians *Solons*, although it's an ironical use of the word most of the time. And in Rome there was the person who was chosen dictator in crisis. This is a person who is given emergency, plenary powers and becomes a special prosecutor. That's exactly what Solon became and what this man Nephiah became. Alma had all three offices, so "he selected a wise man . . . and gave him power according to the voice of the people, that he might have power to enact laws according to the laws which had been given [all he was doing was enforcing the laws which people were ignoring] and to put them in force according to the wickedness and the crimes of the people." They committed crimes, so Nephiah had these emergency powers. This was to free Alma to put the pressure on where it would count most.

Names like *Nephiah* that end in *-iah* are interesting. At the time of Lehi, there was a new revival movement begun in Israel led by Josiah. These names that ended in *-iah* in Israel at that time are *Jehovah* names. That was the revival of the cult going back to Jehovah. *Iah* is another form of the name. You find that name later. You find it in Aramaic, too. The name *Nephiah* would probably be a mixture. They mixed Semitic and Aramaic elements. It might mean "the Lord is Jehovah." That's just a guess, but it sounds good.

Verse 18: "Now Alma did not grant unto him the office of being high priest over the church, but he retained the office of high priest unto himself; but he delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah. [This is what he wanted to do it for:] And this he did that he himself might go forth among this people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them [it had reached the point that the only thing he could do was], to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness, and all the contentions which were among his people." All he could do was preach, and it went over, as I said, like a lead balloon—as you might expect. Notice that Joseph Smith didn't invent this. You'd think a happy ending would come out, but happy endings don't come here. It's one calamity after another, "seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them."

What good does it do to appoint special officers, make special laws, etc., if people are acting that way? Alma had all the principal offices, as we have seen—head of the church, army, and state. Law courts, judgments, sentences, etc., weren't getting anywhere at all. There was only one way to do it, he said. He could see "no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them," which is what Solon did, incidentally. And he was driven out of the city, of course. He left for ten years. Verse 20: "Alma delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephiah, and confined himself wholly to the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy." Only revelation and prophecy can make the breakthrough. [People] just keep calling each other names and going around in circles. You have to break the circle somewhere, and it can only come by revelation.

Now we come to one of the most remarkable chapters in the Book of Mormon, this long chapter 5 that is over 60 verses long. The same thing is told in Nephi 1–2 and in Alma 42. This is an account of the Law of the Atonement—of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. These are the ordinances performed at the temple in Israel by the law of Moses on the Day of Atonement. And that's what we are told here. Alma went first to the people of Zarahemla. He was launching the movement there, and he did it this way throughout the land. "And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established in the city of Zarahemla, according to his own record, saying:" These are formal words, and he repeated these wherever he went. That means the day of establishment, the day of founding which is Yom Kippur, the New Year, and Rosh ha-Shanah, etc. It has all those names. It is the day of the founding of the world in all ancient societies, when everything gets started. (I've written so many articles on this.) These are the words he spake when he established it. It tells us in verse 3: "I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi [following the same pattern]." This is an inauguration of the church, an initiation of the order. What we have presented here is the old law of Moses in its purity. Here you recognize the Day of Atonement—that's what it is. As we have mentioned before, atonement is literally *at-one-ment*. The word is not found in the new revised version of the Bible; they use *reconciliation* instead.

I'm not going out of the way, but I must tell you that the basis of the law was this. It is translated *reconciliation* now; the only time it appears is in Romans in the New Testament. It means "sit down with somebody again," because the two parts were this. Very briefly, on the Day of Atonement you had the *kappōret*, the tent in which the Holy of Holies was, and only the high priest could enter the tent. On the Day of Atonement when the people had atoned, the high priest came before the door of the tent, which was the *pārōket* or the *veil*. He announced that the people had performed the rites of sacrifice properly with the shedding of blood, etc., and wished to enter the presence of the Lord to be atoned for their sins. The Lord parted the veil and invited the people of Israel to enter. Of course, it was only the high priest who had entered. Only he was allowed to enter. That was the *kappōret*, the covering of the veil. I have a long article on the Day of Atonement which is coming out in the *Ensign* in a series pretty soon, so we won't get sidetracked on that. But they had to observe the law which was the old law. And this is the law he talks about here. We have the rites. He is going to talk about the rites, such as "The Song of Redeeming Love," which is part of them.

We can't emphasize too much this law of consecration. I'm going to tell you what it was. It was the old law. This is point one: There was only one law given to Israel at any

time—only one law given to the human race, and this was it. Point two: It was the minimum requirement. Incidentally you will find all this in the Old Testament in Zachariah 14:18 and following. It's a minimum requirement. Anyone can be expected to keep it, like the Word of Wisdom which can be kept by the "weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints." It was given complete to Moses, but the people would only accept it in part. It has always been that way. As we are told in Exodus 32:19, when he smashed the tablets, they did not get the higher priesthood because they were not worthy of it. They got only the lower priesthood. Moses prophesied at the end of Deuteronomy in his farewell, just before he was about to leave the people. (It's quite a speech here.) He says, you're a stiffnecked people. If you are rebellious while I am still with you, what will you do when I'm gone [paraphrased]. Then he says, I "call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you" (Deuteronomy 31:27–29). And they did in record time. Therefore, he leaves upon them just what we have on the promised land. He says, Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. They go together, and you understand why. If thou wilt not hearken, these curses are for you [paraphrased]. Then he lists the promises and blessings and the curses, which are the blessings in reverse in Deuteronomy 28:15. He says in short, "I have set before you [this day] life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Well, the people accepted the conditions wholeheartedly, just as they did in the time of King Benjamin. They all voted and chose to go into it. In one voice they shouted, "Amen," for they were accepting the curse along with the blessing. It's the same in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

This is the reason they have to be different: They can't just go back and be like ordinary [people]. He really rubs this in, and you will find most of this in the book of Deuteronomy [Brother Nibley paraphrases most of it]. "Ye all stand this day before Jehovah your God that he may establish you this day for a people unto himself." There are to be no mental reservations as to what you are to be sworn to; God is not mocked. Don't say, "This won't bother me; I'll go just my way. I'll take the oath." The Lord will not spare him that does, but "all the curses written in the book shall be upon him." Because you are something different from the world, he says—holy, set apart, chosen, special, peculiar, *am segullāh* (that's the word *sealed*, a *sealed people*), not like any other people on the face of the earth. "God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6). That's why you can't do just like other people. He says this will remain the law until God himself sees fit to change it. That's another point.

Then he told them what to do. This is what you do. First, you must establish the center, the temple, according to my instructions. This is the place which Jehovah, your God, has chosen out of all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling. You shall seek that place out and go there. You shall bring your offerings there—your sacrifices, your heave offerings, your firstlings of your flocks. (Remember, they brought their firstlings at the beginning of Mosiah when Benjamin was going to speak to them.) There you hold your feasts before the Lord joyfully with your families. It follows the rule right throughout the Book of Mormon. And this is what you are supposed to do when you come there: The first thing you do in the new land when the holy place is established is to take all your first fruits in a basket and take them before the altar and recite this speech: "A Syrian was my father ready to perish from hunger." This is Abraham, you see. Abraham was a Hebrew. The word *avar* means a person from the "beyond," a homeless, an outcast, a bum—all

sorts of disrespectful things. That's what Abraham was, a wanderer. Remember, he never had a home or a place to settle. *Lekh Lekhā* was the rule he lived by. "Keep going and don't stop." No one would put up with him very long. Then he says, and he went down into Egypt and there he became a nation. And the Egyptians treated us badly. The Lord brought us forth and brought us to this place and has given us this land. This is the Book of Mormon theme all the way through, too. The King James Version renders *Sirion* as *Amorite*. The Hebrew word is *Amorite*. He is a person from the beyond. And the word *Hebrew* means a displaced person, a tramp, an outcast, a homeless person.

You bring in your basket, etc. A tribute is a free-will offering of thine hand required at the feast of the weeks. The offering is required. You must bring it, but the amount is determined by yourself. So you are testing yourself here as to whether you will be willing. It's a free-will offering, but it is required of you. It's on the basis "of how much the Lord has given you." The Septuagint has it better: "... to the limit of your ability." The Hebrew says, "... according to that which he has given you, even with which your God hath blessed you." It's the law of consecration. From everything with which he has blessed you, you are supposed to bring. But you give according to your own free will; nobody is going to twist your arm. He requires you to take the test, which is whether you will try to short-change him. Three times a year—at the [feasts of] the unleavened bread, the weeks, and the tabernacles—all males come together. Every man shall give as he is able according to the blessings which the Lord has given him. And how much is to be given, it asks. Exactly as much as the Lord has given you. All of that with which the Lord has blessed you and with which he may bless you. So they had the law of consecration.

He says this twice in Deuteronomy: When you have eaten and drunk and are full, and silver and gold has piled up, and you say to yourself, "My ability and hard work have made this fortune for me," don't get the idea that you are telling the truth. Bear in mind that God has given you the capacity to get what you have only for the sake of confirming the covenant which he made with your fathers. If you forget that in any degree, you will be destroyed just like the other nations. Don't get the idea that all this is being done because of your righteousness. "Speak not in thy heart saying, 'For my righteousness, the Lord hath brought me to possess the land, but for the wickedness of the nations, the Lord doth drive them out,' because you are not a righteous people but wicked. You are stiff-necked people."

At this point, special pleading by Moses is all that saves the people from destruction, actually. There is to be no dickering or cheating. Above all, the Lord detests one who tries to bargain with him. "Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord a bullock or sheep with any blemish or fault whatever, or any evil favor." It's your shearing time. You can't use it or sell it anyway, so you might as well make a sacrifice of it. He says, don't try to do that. Don't try to cheat the Lord. It's the type of tithe you bring. (Brigham Young said some very humorous things about a person who brings a horse or cow that is diseased and falling apart.) That is an abomination unto the Lord thy God to try to dicker with him.

Now this is the Yom Kippur; this is the Lord's release. At the end of every seven years, every creditor must cancel all debts, never to be paid again. It's quite a system! With all men either debtors or creditors, this is not a convenient arrangement, but it is the only way. Only God can draw the line and say, "Here, this business of exploiting each other must stop." The Lord guarantees to make up any losses to those who keep the law, for the Lord will greatly bless you if you do this. But only if you carefully hearken and observe

and do these commandments. The important thing is the spirit in which you do it; this is a very important part of the law.

“If there be a poor man of your brethren anywhere within your knowledge, thou shalt not harden thy heart nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother, but thou shalt open thy hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficiency of need of whatever he is in want. And since it is a loan, beware there is not a thought in thy wicked heart saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand. If I give it to him now, he will not have to repay it, and I’ll never get it back,’ and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother and thou givest him not, and he cry unto the Lord and it be a sin unto thee. [This is not to be regarded as a business operation.] Thou shalt surely give him, and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest.”

You don’t say, “I hate to do this, but it’s the law—fiscally unsound.” If you give in the spirit God requires, he says, you will not be without your reward because for this thing “the Lord God shall bless thee in all thy works.”

Now comes the famous verse quoted by the Lord, “The poor you have always with you.” This is taken as proof that we will never get rid of the poor so why bother about them—there’s nothing you can do about it anyway. It was Judas who said, why don’t we sell this ointment and get a lot of money and then we can give it to help the poor? Knowing that Judas was a hypocrite and really didn’t mean it that way, the Lord said: Look, if you want to help the poor, you can do that anytime. The poor are always with you, but I’m only with you today and then I’ll be gone. If you want to help the poor, you’ll have plenty of opportunity to help the poor. That’s what he was talking about, but we twist that around and say, “Well, you can’t help the poor—no use trying because they are always there.” We love to play games, don’t we? There’s nothing like an economist going around and around the bush.

“After six years of service any and all servants must go absolutely free no matter what is paid for them and thou shalt not let him go empty. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, out of thy winepress, out of whatsoever the Lord God has blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. [Why?] And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in Egypt, and Jehovah, thy God, redeemed thee.” God saved you and gave you eternal life, and in return the least you can do is remember that you were a bondsman in Egypt.

“Therefore, I command you this day that when you do this thing, it shall not seem hard unto thee when thou sendest him away free. [This is an interesting thing; it’s the spirit in which it is done.] Thou shalt not deliver unto his master a servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. [Human rights supersede property rights there, you see.] Not only shall the refugee dwell with thee in the place which he shall choose, but while he is with you you shall not *tonēnū* [that means ‘mutter under your breath’] about him. None of that.

He is loading it on here: Moreover, everyone is under sacred obligation to get involved. You can’t cut corners here and pretend that you were busy at something else. These are famous; this is the Law of Israel. “If you see a stray ox or sheep and recognize it, you must absolutely return it to your brother.” You keep nothing you find for yourself, but hold it until the owner shows up. If you see someone’s ox or ass fall down, you cannot pretend not to notice or make yourself scarce. Remember in the story of the Good Samaritan how

the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road so they could pretend not to notice the man over there. It's the same way we do it here, and we get some nice Book of Mormon stuff on the humanity of it.

If someone falls from the roof of your house because you have failed to put up a railing around it, you may not plead contributory negligence—that he should have been more careful. Moreover, you cannot take a millstone or anything else upon which a man's livelihood depends for pledge. You can't take anything from him if he needs it. And talk about private property, this is private property that is property. He says, "You may not go to the house of a creditor to take something as a security, but you must stand at a distance and let him bring it out to you." His house is sacred whether he owes you money or not. What's private is private. If the security is something he needs, you must return it to him by sundown so he can use it. You shall not appeal to the iron law of wages. He doesn't call it that, but that's what it [means]—paying a worker as little as you can because he is desperate for work. This applies to strangers as well as Israelites. (Of course, that's the basic law of our economy today.) "You must pay a worker before sundown because he is poor and setteth his heart upon it." Everyone has a right to his daily bread (see Deuteronomy 24:15).

The whole law is validated only when carried out in the spirit. "And now Israel what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God and walk in his ways; to love him and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul? Behold, everything in heaven and earth belongs to him; all mortals are his children; all living things are his creatures. He does right by the orphan and the widow, and he loves the stranger and wants him provided with food and clothing." So how much more kind, just, humane, and edifying is the strict law of Moses than the laws by which we live today in which you have an army of lawyers just to get the smallest claim for an insurance company, for example? (Not that I've had any such experience or anything like that!)

So that's what we find here [in Alma 5]. We are going to get the law of Moses here, and we are also going to get the rituals and ordinances carried out in the Day of Atonement, which he refers to here. He tells us he is establishing it, and he tells us how his father, Alma Sr., began the whole thing by baptizing in the Waters of Mormon. It began with the baptizing in his community; then he organized the community. Verse 5: "And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness [there must be a stirring below before there can be a stirring above; this gives us some vivid images here and eloquent passages], 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 [notice he is giving them the same introduction that Moses gave the people—my father Abraham was brought out of Egypt to a land of promise]; and they were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also." Now, he has used the word *establish* three or four times in a row here.

It is just like reading from Deuteronomy when he says in verse 6: "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? [We are going to rehearse that all over again.] . . . Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance that he delivered their souls from hell? [That's a much better thing than delivering them from Egypt.] 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."

Yom Kippur means *embrace*. It means *enfolding* or *hugging* a person. And I should have told you that when the priest goes to the door to be received by the Lord, they embrace each other. There are interesting old Jewish pictures of the Lord's hand coming through the door of the tent and Moses taking the hand. He [Alma] is going to talk a lot about embracing here and the arms open to embrace. We have a few minutes so let's refer to this article on the Law of Atonement. How do you become one? Well, the ultimate becoming one is a fusion in an embrace. That's how you signify it, whether it's the marriage vow that "they two shall become one flesh," or something like that. This embrace is a very important thing, and it figures here.

We are told in Genesis, right at the beginning of Moses, that all the newborn are taken into the family. They must be united, and that's what atonement is. *Kippūr* means *atonement*, and it also means *embrace*, the literal act of *hugging*. "All the newborn are taken into the family, which is united in an eternal covenant by the token of shedding blood." That's a personal shedding of blood, the circumcision. They become the seed of Abraham. This is a real atonement, you see. The Greek equivalent is *lytrōsis*, meaning a *ransoming*. Then there is all this business of being bought free. The Hebrew and Aramaic word for *atonement* is *kāpar*, and it's an extremely rich Semitic word. It's not just in Semitic languages, but in our own language, too. Our words *have*, *seize*, and *grab* are from the Latin word *capto*. *Kāpar* is the starting place. It has the same basic meaning in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, meaning "to arch over the hand," hence, "to wipe over, to cleanse, to expiate, to forgive, to renounce." But also first, "to put the arm around" and also "to wipe off."

Now this is where the Book of Mormon really strikes twelve o'clock; it's a remarkable thing here: The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts or drawing a thing close. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafata*, meaning a common ritual embrace, written with the ideogram of embracing, or the Egyptian *ḥpt*, written with the ideogram of embracing arms. This is the way you write *ḥptor kafara* in Egyptian—a pair of arms like that embracing and taking you into a hug. "It's cognate with the Latin *capto*, and from it comes the Coptic *kaftan*. A *kaftan* is a cape that completely covers your head and everything else, a monk's robe. Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation.¹

This is the Book of Mormon situation: It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik by crying out, "*Ana dakhîluka*—I am thy suppliant." The lord had to take you into his tent, and then he would place his robe over your shoulder, the *kāf* (which is the word for *shoulder*, too) and declare you under his protection. He would have to protect you then. In the Book of Mormon (way back in 1 Nephi) we see this world as a dark and dreary waste, a desert. We see Nephi fleeing from an evil thing that is pursuing him. He is in great danger and prays to the Lord to give him an open road and a low way to block his pursuers and make them stumble. He comes to the tent of the Lord and enters as a suppliant. In reply the Master, as was the ancient custom, puts the hem of his robe protectively over the kneeling man's shoulder (his

¹ Cf. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Meaning of the Atonement," in *Approaching Zion*, CWHN 9 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 554–614; see also Hugh W. Nibley, "The Atonement of Jesus Christ," *Ensign* 20 (July 1990): 12–23; (August 1990): 30–34; (September 1990): 22–26; and (October 1990): 26–31.

katafa). This puts him under the Lord's protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug, as the Arab chiefs always do. The Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him. They are *at one* (see 2 Nephi 4 and Alma 5).

But you notice you have him enter. The two parts of the Yom Kippur are the *yeshûvâh* and the *teshûvâh*. *Teshûvâh* is to return home; it's when you return and are let in. *Yeshûvâh* is when you sit down. *Yâshab* means to sit down beside your Lord. In one you return home, and in the other you enter the tent and sit down beside your Lord. That's what you do. These are very nicely set forth in a couple of places in the Book of Mormon, in Alma 5 and in 2 Nephi. This is what happens. This is the imagery of the Atonement. This is what 2 Nephi 1:15 tells us: "But behold, the Lord hath redeemed by soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally with the arms of his love."

And 2 Nephi 4:33 says: "O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! [see the chief puts his robe around his servant, and this is at the time when he is running away from his enemies]. O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!" That's exactly what he does. When the lord puts his protecting robe around your shoulder, that protects you from your enemies.

"Behold, he sendeth an invitation to all men, for the arms of his mercy are extended toward them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you" (Alma 5:33). This is the *hepet*, the ritual embrace that consummates the final escape from death in the Egyptian funerary texts—and the release, where Horus is received into the arms of his father Osiris, which takes place at the veil in the last scene of the Book of the Dead, where he passes through.

In Israel when the sacrifices and sin offerings were completed on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went to the door of the *kappōret*. That's the name of the tent covering that covered over the Ark. Before they had a temple, they had a big tent there, and the door of it was the *kappōret*. There's your *cover* again. See, there's *kāpar* and our word *cover*. The *et*(*eth*) is just the feminine ending. It's our own word for *cover*; all these things go together. It's not because we borrowed it from the Hebrew. We have words like that—like *cave* and any kind of covering. This is what [they did]: The high priest went to the door of the *kappōret* to receive assurance from the Lord within that he had accepted the offerings and the repentance of the people and forgiven them of their sins. I will meet you at the door of the congregation and speak to you there, the Lord says to Moses (Exodus 29:42).

We get this situation in the first chapter of Luke when Zacharias, a direct descendant of Aaron (as was also his wife), entered behind the veil into the Holy of Holies (*naon tou kuriou*, the *skēnē* or tent of the Old Testament) while people waited on the outside. He didn't meet the Lord but his personal representative, a messenger of the Lord standing beside the altar (Luke 1:11), who identified himself as Gabriel, who standeth in the presence of God, sent down to converse with thee and to tell thee the good news. The news was about the great at-one-ment, the great Atonement, about to take place in the restoration of the gospel, in which the children would "turn to the Lord their God" while the hearts of the fathers would be "turned again to the children, the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." That's what *at-one-ment* is—to bring them together again. That's why it is properly called *re-conciliation*, meaning "to sit down with the person again."

It is all a preparation for the great bringing together again through the office of baptism after they had been separated by the Fall. Back to Exodus again: “And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and . . . Aaron and his sons, . . . I will dwell among the children of Israel and be their God” (Exodus 29:44–45). They will all be one happy family forever. It is understandable that the *kappōret* is also translated in the King James Bible as “the mercy seat,” where a man is reconciled at one with God on the Day of Atonement.

Paul talks about it in his letter to the Hebrews. They would understand this, you see. “And after the second veil, the tabernacle [succoth, booth, tent; it’s interesting that the Hebrew word *succoth* is exactly the same word the Egyptians use], which is called the Holiest of all [contained] the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat” (Hebrews 9:3, 5).

I should bring a big picture of the famous Dura Synagogue. At Dura Europus was discovered the oldest synagogue known. We have pictures of how this [ceremony] was done there, and it’s very interesting. “The scene as designed shows the curtains drawn back at either side to disclose the objects behind them.” The custom has persisted in the Torah shrine. In a stock presentation found in early Jewish synagogues, as well as on very early Christian murals (there’s a picture of it printed in a book of mine called *An Egyptian Endowment*. “The hand of God is represented but could not be called that explicitly [that would be blasphemy], and instead of the heavenly utterance, the *bat-kōl* is given.”² A *bat-kōl* means a *whisper* or a *voice from a distance*. From the hand radiate beams of light—the five beams; they have a great deal to say about the five beams of light that come from the hand. “To show the hand and light thus emerging from central darkness is as near as one could come in conservative Judaism to depicting God himself.” In early Christian representations the hand of God reaching through the veil is grasped by the initiate or human spirit who is being caught up into the presence of the Lord. Philo of Alexandria, who for all his philosophizing had a thorough knowledge of Jewish customs, compares all the hangings of the tabernacle with the main veil. “But in a sense the curtains are also veils, not only because they cover the roof and the walls but because they are woven of the same kinds of material.” They represent the cosmos.

As I said before, the yearly rite of atonement included the *teshuvah*, a return to God, repentance. The prophets repeatedly invite Israel to return to God who is waiting with open arms to receive them if they will only repent (Jeremiah 3:14; Leviticus 16:30). They not only return and are welcomed in but they also sit down. That is the *yeshiva*, which means “a sitting, a rest, a settling, a dwelling with, a session, a council, a court.” All meanings are combined in the *yeshivāh shel ma’lāh*, the heaven where the angels and the souls of the righteous are believed to dwell, a place of divine justice to which all will be summoned. The root *yāshab* has the basic meaning of sitting or settling down to live in a place. You have a place because you have returned home.

All this we find in the Book of Mormon. Along with the embrace already mentioned, we have the formula “have place” in exactly the same sense—“a place on my right hand” (Alma 5:25; Enos 1:17). We are quoting Enos, Alma, Moses, etc. “There is a place prepared for you.” Thus Nephi promises Zoram: “Therefore, if thou wilt go down into the wilderness to my father thou shalt have place with us” (1 Nephi 4:34). Of course, when

² Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1953–68), 1:251.

you enter a tent everyone must say “*ahlan wa-sahlan wa-marhaban*.” *Ahl* means a *tent* or a *family*; it’s the same word. You are a member of the family. *Sahl* means “all in good faith,” and *marhaban* means “we will make a place for you.” It’s the compulsory greeting and the normal one.

This is the metaphor that Alma uses combining the *teshûvâh* and the *yeshûvâh* in the proper order: “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?” (Alma 5:24). Well, that’s another one. Need we recall that it’s on the Day of Atonement that the priest entered the tent, that the people’s garments were all made white by the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb.

We don’t have any more time now, but this fifth chapter [is very important]. I’ve heard people actually say that the Book of Mormon can’t contain the fullness of the gospel because it doesn’t have anything about the temple in it. Well, don’t fool yourself. It has all the ordinances in it, in their old form. This is an interesting thing because with the destruction of Jerusalem in the time of Lehi these rites disappeared and were never renewed again. The second temple didn’t have this, so the Nephite people preserved it. They preserved the rites in their old form, not in the later form. That’s what we have in the Book of Mormon.