

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Semester 2, Lecture 46
Alma 5
Rededication and Restitution
The Atonement

Now, we're on the fifth chapter of Alma. These papers are really something. If it hadn't been for the computer, I would be far ahead. I would have finished it [a book] years ago. With everything else I've ever done, I've not only used no computer, but I've never had a secretary. Every single word I have typed myself on every book, and it's gone swimmingly. Now I have a secretary and a computer, and it takes four years to do what I could have done in one very easily alone. That's the progress of science.

Now here's the situation we have in Alma 5. Both Alma and his father had been having a constant struggle, as you know, to keep the Nephites in the path of duty. They were always drifting away, as Israel does. Could they [the two Almas] be to blame? Were they too severe? You notice both of them are overstrict. In the first place, Alma Senior [may have] made his own son rebellious, and the same thing with Mosiah. Perhaps they were being too strict because the kids went off and went overboard.

Remember when he ran away from King Noah and went out and founded the church on the teachings of Abinadi (and you know what kind of a fire-eater Abinadi was), it was very strict. It was the strict, austere brotherhood of Qumran, or it was nothing. He always insisted that that's the way the church would be. And he no sooner got the church started in cooperation with Mosiah than what happened? People started drifting away in large numbers, as a matter of fact. First it was in the outskirts of different settlements with which he wasn't too often in contact. He didn't even know what was going on. What kind of a leader is this? And people, as I say, were becoming disaffected in large numbers and it got worse and worse. They started walking out in droves. Then Nehor put himself at the head of this movement. He took advantage of it for a more easygoing, a more relaxed, a more permissive church. That's what he wanted. It became popular and remained the more popular church. But must the church be that strict? It probably must.

Then we see next that Amlici capitalized on that. He wanted to go to the other extreme and with a disaffected group formed a party to make him king. It wasn't quite strong enough, but it was a very serious threat; you see that. Alma was able to check it and overcome him in a hand-to-hand combat, but did it go back to normal? No, they didn't go back to normal. That's what we get here. In this chapter he decides on a general reformation; this is a long chapter. He goes out to the outskirts in the next two chapters after that. He goes to the people of Gideon, and then he goes to the people of Melek and Ammonihah and tries to do the same thing. He is refounding the order of things to establish it exactly in the pattern as was done in the first. It's the law of Moses he's following very strictly, as we read later on. It was strictly the law of Moses.

So he celebrated the covenant, just exactly as Benjamin did in a great renewal at the coronation rite—renewing the covenant, renewing the state, the society, and the creation

of the world. This is one of the best-known phenomena of ancient history now. It wasn't a few years ago, but I've been yelling about it for years. As is well known, this is a stock theme. It's a rehearsing of the creation, the refounding, the rebirth of the human race. It's the *natalia*, it is the refounding of the kingdom, it's universal. Everybody is reborn and receives a new name on a particular day, which is the new year—it's gauged by the sun. And it [this ceremony] is very conspicuous in the documents, and only within the last three or four years, the anthropologists have latched onto it. Finally when they catch up to it, it has become very obvious. You can see that. And this is a very basic theme.

I notice the three principal anthropologists writing about this now. They've all got into the act, and they're talking about primitive societies. This is universal. Van Gennep's theory is that society has to regenerate itself by rites of passage. You know what a rite of passage is—the rite of passage into the other world. Then you have to get passage to come back. That's what they're talking about now. There are two worlds. You go to the one, and then you come back refreshed and renewed to your old world and begin a new cycle of life. This is what they're saying today. Well, it's been obvious for a hundred years, but they didn't notice it. They've been following Frazier instead, which is a very different pattern.

Well, Van Gennep's theory is regeneration by rites of passage. He says it sometimes takes the form of rites of death and rebirth. And Victor Turner says the rites all apply to the society and don't affect the individual at all. The society first separates itself from its former life. That is what you do when you drive out a scapegoat, etc. You purge yourself of what you were before. They separate themselves from their former life. Then there's what he calls the transition; and then there's the reincorporation when you come back to ordinary life and you're good for a new period.

Finally the third one, Edmund Leach, says, "Each festival shifts from the ordinary community to the sacred order and back again." It's sacralization, separation from the secular of this world. There's transition, and then there is what he calls "marginal time." It's all in terms of time. You go into another time. You go into marginal time, and that's your transition. Then you come back again to desacralization, the aggregation as a new beginning of secular time. Well, they like to use all this gobbledygook, etc. It has been staring us in the face for a hundred years, and finally they have made it a great discovery. They like to theorize, etc. It's funny because they're dealing supposedly with the most simple, primitive people, to which they feel vastly superior—but who were vastly superior to them. The recent work of Levi-Strauss, the famous anthropologist, shows this. It was fifteen years ago now that he wrote his revolutionary work on primitive man. Well, they weren't primitive at all. He says they knew an awful lot more than the anthropologists who come to study them. And it's true; they did. The anthropologists didn't know that.

For four years I shared an office with Morris Opler, who was the president of the American Archaeological Association. Every Thursday Hoyer (they were Indian men) would come out from UCLA, and we would listen to records and talk about this sort of thing. Anyway, Aristotle's point of view is that the observer is always superior to the observed. If I'm looking at a bug or a leaf or something like that, I'm superior. If I study you as an anthropologist, then I am the superior mind. I'm viewing an inferior object because I have you in my power. You are whatever I say you are. It is enormous vanity—that Chicago School and Ruth Benedict and those people. We won't go into that. That was before your time, fortunately.

What makes the theories different from *The Golden Bough* of Frazer, as I said before, is the fundamental idea of two worlds. That's what they all recognize—that you go to the other world and then you come back to this one. [They recognize] two worlds. The Hopis have the four worlds, but it's just the other world and this world. There is a Jewish girl, who is a very good anthropologist, Nadia abu Zahara. She's made a study of basic rain rituals from Morocco to Afghanistan, especially in North Africa with which she is familiar. All the way from Morocco to Afghanistan, you find rain is the main subject because it is desert country. Their rites are very elaborate, but absolutely identical with the Hopis. That's true. They go through the very same sort of thing. But it has to do with this fundamental idea of two worlds, and it's nowhere better expressed than in the Koran. The Arabs have a marvelous idea about this. There is the *alam al-shāhida* and the *alam al-ghayb*. They are both very rich roots, and they both mean the same thing. The word *shāhida* means "to be present." A *shahīd* is a witness; *shahāda* is "evidence, a testimony, to behold, to witness personally." But the basic meaning of *shāhida* is to be present on the scene and see what's going on. So the *alam al-shāhida* is the world to which you can bear testimony by your own personal experience. You can only bear testimony to so much, no more, no less. What you've experienced is real [to you], and naturally you assume that's the only world. But then there is the *alam al-ghayb*. We find all words in Arabic that begin with a *gh* have to do with a covering. If you say, *ughmî alayhi*, meaning "he passed out or fainted," literally it means "there was a covering over him." The *alam al-ghayb* is the world which is behind the veil. The basic word *ghayb* is to be absent, not to be there. See, this means to be present and know what's going on. This is to be both absent and not know. It means *confusion, vagueness, and dimness*; it means "the other world, the other side, something beyond our ken." They call it "the infinite world, the vast world, the world that's unknown to us."

The Egyptians put it very nicely: Their word for everything is *nt-t iwt.t*—all that which is and all that which is not. All that which is all that I know about; but if I'm going to include everything, it has to include a lot of things I don't know. It's just possible there's something I don't know that exists. And of course the *iwt.t*, the part you don't know about, is vastly greater than the other. Now the world that God knows about, and the world that you know about are two totally different things. You know that. So we're living in the *alam al-shāhida*, and reality would be the *alam al-ghayb*.

The purpose of these festivals is [to give you a look at the other world]. They all have these festivals, and this is true in Islam, too. That's what our temple does, you see. You get a peek behind the veil; you go into the other world. You try to make yourself intimate. You ease yourself into a vaster life and nearer to reality. That's all that physics is trying to do today. It's getting so far out now. You've heard of Peter Higgs and his *boson*. Everybody is looking for it; they're spending hundreds of millions of dollars in Europe and here. Stanford is competing with Cal Tech on it, they tell me, trying to discover the Higgs *boson*. It's namely this: After all the particles are considered and everything else, there is one vast enclosing essence or particle (or whatever it is—it's one field) that accounts for everything. Its force produces all the particles. Peter Higgs in Edinburgh suggested it; he didn't discover it. They're looking for it, and they're spending hundreds of millions of dollars to discover that ultimate particle, an ultimate field of force—the ultimate one that will be the real one and will explain all the others. And they say, "Well in a few years we'll know everything." They've said that before.

It's exactly what we have here. [Arabs] go to Mecca, and we go to the temple. At BYU we have to teach religion to everybody.

President Harris established the Four-Point program for bringing Near Eastern students over here, so we got a flood of Moslem students here at BYU in the forties and fifties. And they had to take religion, so they took Book of Mormon. I taught the only Book of Mormon class [for them]. In one class I had nine students from Mecca. They had been brought here by a *ṭawwāf*. A *ṭawwāf* is a person who accompanies you. He's your *paralempTOR*. When you go through the temples, or when you go through the rites, you have somebody standing at your elbow telling you to give the right answers and what to do so you won't make any mistakes. He was the *ṭawwāf* from Mecca and knew all that, and he was so excited about the gospel. He brought all these friends from Mecca, of all things. The thing that surprised me more than anything else was that none of them had ever seen a camel. Now anybody from Egypt or from Palestine has seen camels all over the place, but these people from Mecca had never seen camels. Isn't that amazing? Well, that's another story.

No, we're talking about the same thing here. We're all in the same boat, and it's a very interesting thing. The Koran expresses it well in this here. So this is what you have in Alma 4, 5, 6, and 7 here. They have to do with the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Professor Popper used to explain that. The *kippūr* means "the covering of your sins, the day of covering." But Yom Kippur is a rededication, the Day of Atonement, at-one-ment, becoming one with God again. We've been separated from God, we've been cast out, we have sinned (the Fall in the Garden). We must get back again into the presence of God, and that is *at-one-ment*, which you write *atonement*. It surprises people to know that *atonement* is not a Latin or Greek word. It is a genuine Old English word, and it means just what it says, *at-one-ment*. It's been replaced now in the Bible by *reconciliation*, as mentioned before, which means "come back to a person and sit down with him again."

And so we have these rededications everywhere. For example, ten days before Yom Kippur, every night (if you're pious enough) you have to go to the synagogue and pray the *selîhôt* prayer at midnight, which is a prayer of repentance. You repent for the ten days preceding it. It's a great time of repentance and change so you can go back and be reunited with God at Yom Kippur.

The oldest Egyptian document that we have is the *Shabako Stone*. The twenty-fifth dynasty was founded either by Shabako or Kashta, but Shabako is responsible for the stone. He renovated the Temple of Menes which was built to celebrate the founding of the first dynasty of Egypt, which represented the founding of the world and the creation. It was the creation story, the drama of Adam and Eve in the Garden, the outcasting, the processes, the ordinances by which you return to the presence of God, and finally the veil. Well, this is in the *Shabako Stone*. We often refer to it in classes because it's come in for a lot of recent study. Shabako was an Ethiopian who founded the twenty-fifth dynasty, and he wanted to set off his dynasty in style. There were thirty-one dynasties, and every one of them had to be a refounding of the world. This is necessary to show the universality of these things, so forgive me. When they were renovating the temple, it was like when they were renovating the Nauvoo House. They found the Oliver Cowdery text of the Book of Mormon in the cornerstone. And this was found in the cornerstone of the Temple of Menes going way back 5,000 years ago. What would be better than to use this for the

temple drama, the creation story? This is what they wanted, so at the top he [Shabako] says he caused it to be copied, etc. But everything now was going to be done exactly as it was then, but better than it was before. So they went through and rehearsed all this stuff.

In Rome they had the *Restitutio Orbis*, the restitution of the universe, of the world. The *orbis* is the earth or the city, but the *orbis* represents the world, just as the temple does at Jerusalem. And in 274 A.D. when things were badly run down, the emperor Aurelian wanted to turn everything around with his great conquests in the Near East, etc. So he celebrated the *Restitutio Orbis*, everything being made new and fresh, though that's supposed to happen every new year anyway at the festival of Janus.

And the Greeks called it the *eniautos*. "Here we are again; we've come full circle." Of course, our ancestors called this celebration the *Yule*. In Israel the Yom Kippur is the *Yule*, which is just the word *wheel*—it goes round and round. In Arabic the word is *ḥāla*. Leo Wiener, Norbert Wiener's father, has written extensively on this, and the Grimms also. In Arabic *ḥāla* means "the wheel turned a complete turning." We're back where we started. We say the wheel is the Yule, and they roll wheels down the hill and do all sorts of things with the Yule. The Yule is where you complete the circle and you come back again. That's what it means. So you get this completion of the circle, etc. That's what we're going to have here [in Alma], a refounding—every Day of Atonement is supposed to be this.

Notice how it starts out. He emphasizes that it is the first. Verse 2: "And these are the words which he spake to the people in the church which was established." It is a formal rite he's talking about. These are the words with which he established it. In the next verse he says "he began to establish the church in the land" beginning with an ordinance, baptism, it says here. Before you enter the temple you're washed.

Alma 5:4: "And behold, I say unto you, they were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah, by the mercy and power of God [and he gives them a history of their bondage], . . . brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also." He was introducing everything anew here, and he was reestablishing—there must be a stirring below. Do you remember the captivity of your fathers? This is so very interesting because the first Dead Sea Scroll discovered was the *Serekh Scroll*, the *Manual of Discipline*, their Doctrine and Covenants, which told exactly why they were out there and what they were doing. It begins right like this: On the first day all the candidates for the ordinance will meet together in a meeting. The first thing they were told was how their fathers were led out of Egypt and their sufferings and all they went through and how they'd been delivered. It's exactly this speech that he gives us here in the *Serekh Scroll*. So I'll write in the margin "1QS" here, the *Serekh Scroll*.

Verse 6: "Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? . . . [and how] he has delivered their souls from hell? Behold, he changed their hearts [see, we're going into a new life here; it's going to be a rebirth]. . . . They were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word." I said before that goes back to the mysteries, but the mysteries are very secondary here. This is always the festival of light; it's always held at sunrise. It's the rising of the sun in the new year; you date it by that. When the sun comes up, you're in a new age, a new cycle has begun, and the sun has come again.

Verse 7: “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.” Instead they’re going to be encircled, as we said, by the *kappōret*, by the arms of God when he welcomes them into the tent after he has parted the veil. The priest says they have passed the test, they have purified themselves, they have repented, etc. Then he says, “Let Israel enter my presence,” and they come into the tent. The *kappōret* is the veil that he parts in the tent.

Verse 9: “And again I ask, were the bands of death broken and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? [Notice, he keeps talking about this encircling—to be *encircled* by the bands of death, *encircled* by the chains of hell.] . . . Their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love.” Now here we have the song of redeeming love, which is a very interesting thing. Remember, these rites were last performed in Lehi’s generation. After that, Jerusalem was destroyed. Well, it was rebuilt again, but they [the Jews] never restored these rites again. This is where you have to go (to the Book of Mormon) for the old rites the way they were performed. And this is the way we find them in the law of Moses, too. So he says here the soul did sing, and he’s going to mention the song of redeeming love a little later here. It’s an interesting thing.

Verse 10: “And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved?” Are you ready to enter? This parallels Benjamin’s speech which was given at the new year. The people had all come to the temple. They were camping, as they should, with their tents facing the temple. We don’t get this from the Bible; we get this from Nathan the Babylonian who was present at a coronation of the prince of the captivity many years after the destruction of Jerusalem. But he described exactly how it used to be carried out, and of course that’s what we find in Mosiah. Now here’s another repetition. He’s refounding. Alma was desperate, and he was going to establish everything all over again. The Jews are used to this business of getting a new start. “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 and also the chains of hell?” There he goes again. We’re in the darkness. It’s this: First you have to believe in the words, and he asks them, “Did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi?” The whole movement began when Alma started to believe the words of Abinadi. Verse 12: “And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. [And thirdly:] . . . he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts.” His heart was changed, and then he changed others. He’s giving a lot of credit to his father here.

Now we said it was the birth day, and with the Romans it was a universal day. It was the same thing in Egypt, for example. Everybody who was born on the same day as the Pharaoh had a birthday identified with him. He could go live in the palace with him or anything like that. And in Egypt everybody dated his own birthday not from the day he was born, but from the day the Pharaoh assumed the throne. That was the beginning of years. In the Western world we call it the *Natalis*, the great birthday. Everybody is born. That’s the *Saturnalia* when everybody celebrates, etc.

Here it is: “Have ye spiritually been born of God? [See, this is your birthday, you have now been spiritually born.] Have ye received his image in your countenances?” Now you’ll notice that this chapter and the next, but especially this one, is extremely rich in the most powerful imagery of the atonement rites. They’re full of vivid imagery. He mixes

them very freely, and the people understand what he means. This is very characteristic. So he starts out with this image here, and see what happens now. Verse 15: “Do you look forward with an eye of faith [see, there’s an image] . . . to stand before God to be judged . . . [another image].” But it’s more than an image; it’s a reality in the future, because now he starts talking about imagination. Notice verse 16: “I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord . . .?” In verse 17 he says “Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day . . .?” In verse 18: “Or otherwise, can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God?”

Notice each verse begins with the word *imagine*. Can you imagine this? Progressively, you imagine. Well, is it legitimate to imagine? Are you cheating if you imagine too much? Is all that we have of the gospel just imagination? Are we just making it up? We think it’s very real to us. These are the stations. You can imagine you hear the voice of the Lord. Before you can carry out any operation, you must visualize it. You must imagine it, no matter what it’s going to be. So there’s nothing wrong with imagining things—you have to. Where does history exist? One hundred percent in imagination. Did I read to you out of Stephen Hawking’s book on that? I should have brought that along. I’ll bring it next time. It’s a very good one. He says there’s nothing in science. It’s just pure imagination, nothing else. He says you’ll never be able to prove any of this; it’s just the structure of your own mind. He feels it very strongly. In his condition, one would, I suppose.

Verse 16: “Can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?” That would be wonderful. “Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?” He’ll believe you? No, you can’t do that. The first alternative is to be righteous, the second is to try to bluff it and say you were righteous. Then third, “. . . can ye imagine yourselves brought before the tribunal of God with your souls filled with guilt and remorse, having a remembrance of all your guilt, yea, a perfect remembrance of all your wickedness?” Very vivid. You can imagine that. You can imagine it right now, he says. You do have a remembrance of your guilt, as far as that goes, and it will come back more quickly, of course, in the presence of God.

Verse 19: “I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? . . . Can you look up, having the image of God [notice he started out, ‘have you received the image in your countenance?’] engraven upon your countenance?” It’s the same thing you began with. In other words, this is a real at-one-ment, when you’re united with God and, like the Father and Son, are exactly alike, a perfect correspondence. It’s not *unio mystica* or anything like that, but becoming exactly alike. Of course, a problem arises if everybody looks exactly alike. We don’t really have a model of perfection. Is it blond? Is it brunette? When you have a beauty contest, what are the rules you have to follow? The girl that wins has something that the others don’t have. It’s not measurements. I mean you can measure with a caliper until the cows come home and you’re not going to establish beauty that way, are you? If we all look alike, if there is a standard, I mean. I’d like to be much taller than I am, for example. That would be nice. But I don’t need to be. It doesn’t break my heart or anything like that. Around here everybody’s tall, so it’s nothing to be proud of anymore. When I walk down the street in Athens, I feel great because I’m as tall as anybody. But then I cross the border into Yugoslavia, and I’m a runt. I feel terrible, so I’d better get back to Athens.

Well, that's the way it is. Well, what is it then? We all wear the same basic white. What could be simpler? It wasn't the clothing. Moroni was dressed in nothing but a white [robe], and that was it. Joseph says very clearly you could see that was all; he didn't need any more. He didn't need a protective garment; he was not in this wicked world. He was not in this dangerous place. But what's the difference? Well, you notice as people excel in certain things, they get to be more alike and more different. You take the greatest scientists or the greatest composers or the greatest painters. Composers are usually the best to deal with. With Bach that is about as far as you could go. That's perfection. Then Beethoven comes along—the man who liberated music supposedly—and he's great, too. He shares Bach's grandeur and greatness, but is totally different. Bach would have never written like that, and he never would have written like Bach. Then along comes Brahms. He's not a bit like the other two, but he has that same stature, that same greatness goes with it, that element of sublimity. We have a very interesting book on Brahms—how very religious he was and how deeply he prayed before he ever composed anything like that. And Bach the same thing. Those men were all deeply religious. The point is the more alike they become in stature, the more different they become in nature. So the great ones never founded a school. There's not a school of Bach or a school of Beethoven, but there are plenty of minor composers you can think of that have founded schools. Diabelli would be a good example. As they say, as you become more enlightened, you become more yourself and absolutely more unique. It's an amazing thing. The Father and the Son look so much alike you can't tell the difference between them. We don't know about their [differences]. We know in our case. And, of course, there's no room for jealousy, because why should the Father be jealous of the Son, or the Son jealous of the Father? I mean greatness recognizes and glories in greatness. You love to see someone that can do better than you can. That's the way it should be done. That's a thrilling thing, instead of the petty envy, etc. In science there's jealous rivalry. There are half a dozen Nobel Prize winners with a difference of ten or fifteen minutes between who gets the Nobel Prize—the one who phoned his findings in first—and who's forgotten forever. This has happened on more than one occasion.

But we go on; [Alma] is talking about this. As I said, this is very rich imagery. You can imagine these things, and then he says [verse 21]: "There can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers." Now there is a strange paradox: Washed in the blood of the lamb. Have your garments been washed white in his blood? Well, how can blood wash garments white is the point? If you have ever attended a kosher slaughter, you know that the priest has to wear his priestly robes, the rabbi, though he does not have authority. No Cohen or Levite can establish his priesthood today; they don't have the genealogy. But still he puts on the robes, and when he cuts the throat of the beast he becomes completely spattered with blood. There's no way of avoiding it because it has to be hung upside down. All the blood has to run out. When he makes that first cut, there's a terrific spurt of blood, and he gets spattered.

After they have performed this rite and slain the pascal lamb, then Aaron and his sons appear before the people with their garments splattered with blood, which shows that the atonement has been made. The blood has been shed, after the similitude. That means that the people's own blood has been washed white. This is explained here, how blood can wash you clean. He's going to tell us. Notice that your garments are stained with filth; they're bloody. That's the blood that's washed out. Notice the difference here: "... cleansed from all stain, through the blood of [the lamb]." And the next verse says, "And now I ask of you, my brethren, how will any of you feel, if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having

your garments [not cleansed] stained with blood and all manner of filthiness?” So we have two kinds of stained garments; the one is the blood and filthiness that stains your own garment. He says the blood will testify against you. We are guilty of what we assent to. We may not have shed very much blood, but we are all guilty of what we assent to. We all pay the same half shekel. It’s a very interesting that everybody must pay a sin tax, a tax for sin, on the Day of Atonement. But the interesting point is you don’t know how to value sin. Who is more guilty than the other? There’s no way of knowing that, how guilty a person really is. So everybody must pay, whether it’s a woman, child, rich, poor; it makes no difference. Everyone must pay exactly the same amount, because only God knows who the real sinners are. So everybody pays the half shekel. Everybody has sinned some, so everyone must pay a half shekel, not more and not less. That puts us on an equal footing. But as far as giving an appraisal value to sins, we can’t do that, like the Jesuits did in their doctrine of probablism. We won’t go into that now. But he says here, “washed white through the blood of the lamb,” and this is it.

This reminds you of the two serpents. Remember, in the wilderness the people were bitten by serpents and were dying. They were stinging serpents. So Moses raised a bronze serpent on a staff, and all who looked upon the serpent lived. Well, the serpent healed [the bite of] the serpent. Have you noticed on the staff of a physician, on the caduceus, the medical staff has two serpents intertwined. The Greeks tell us that Hermes was the founder of the medical profession. That was of Egypt, the Egyptian Hermes Thoth. The two serpents are both copulating serpents because they beget, but they are also opposing each other. The one kills, the other heals. The two must be intertwined because it must be the *coincidentia oppositorum* that brings things to a balance. So you have the two serpents. [As for] the serpents in the wilderness—as they were killed by the serpents, so they were healed by the serpents. We’re told the same thing about the *hyssop*, and here’s the same thing. As they got the bloody filth on their garments, so by the blood on the priest’s garments [they were atoned]. Notice it says the blood on our garments testifies. We’re told in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that when the priest and his sons come out, having performed the sacrifice, their garments are spattered with this blood. That blood testifies that the sacrifice has been made, and the other garments are washed clean. The other blood is off then. So there’s no contradiction in having garments washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. It testifies that they have been cleansed. Of course, we say this is all symbolic, but these symbols were very real to these people. Alma 5:21: It’s the Lamb’s blood on the garment of the high priest that makes your garment white. So that’s what he’s talking about here. Notice this rich symbolism. It will testify against you. We can’t apportion guilt, because we’re all guilty. We must all be purified. All our lives we have to repent.

Notice again he says in verse 23: “Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers [remember, carnal, sensual, and devilish], yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness? [Well, we are]. Now we come to the *teshûvâh* and the *yeshîvâh*. Here is the *yeshîvâh*. See, you have to have your garments cleansed before you can come into the tent and sit down. That’s what the priest testifies, that they’ve done the rites. Then he says you can come in. But you have to be cleansed, and notice that’s what he talks about here [in verse 24]: “Behold, my brethren, do ye suppose that such an one can have a place to sit down in the kingdom of God, with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob . . . whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white?” You have to cleanse your garments before you can come into the tent and sit down. As I say, it’s called the *yeshîvâh*, a very important part of the Yom Kippur, the sitting down by the side of God.

That's why it's translated now in the new Revised Version [of the Bible] as *reconciliation*. In the Latin, *reconcilios* was spelled originally with *s*. *Re* means *again*, *con* means *with*, *sedere* means *to sit down again with*. *Reconcilio* means "sitting down as in a council, conciliate and giving counsel." Then you can come in the tent and sit down with them. Nephi used that expression. He went into the tent of the Lord when he was fleeing from his enemies and asked for the Lord to protect him and put his garment over his shoulder. That's what happened there.

Then he goes on here in verse 25: "I say unto you, Nay: except ye make our Creator a liar from the beginning, or suppose that he is a liar from the beginning, ye cannot suppose that such can have place in the kingdom of heaven." That's the other expression. You will sit down, which is *ahlan wa-sahlan*, and you will have place; *marhaban* is the wide place. No, the opposite of atonement is to be cast out, to be rejected, "but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil." You are cast out into that other kingdom here. Remember, this "have place" [idea]. When Nephi grabbed Zoram and held him tight, he said down to him, come down to my father's tent and you can have place with us. You can be members of the family, and you're in [paraphrased]. But if you're rejected, this is what happens. You're cast out into the outer darkness, into the desert night, because you're children of the kingdom of the devil.

Verse 26: "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" Now this *song of redeeming love* is something interesting because this is found elsewhere. Archaeologists have found it. [Paraphrasing a Jewish archaeologist:] The oldest known synagogue is the ruin of Dura Europos, discovered in 1932. It was preserved perfectly by the sand since A.D. 256 when it was destroyed and covered up. The focal point of the assembly hall was the niche which was originally behind the veil. (The Torah Scroll which was behind the veil). That is the synagogue equivalent of the Holy of Holies. Immediately above the niche was painted a great tree rising nearly to the ceiling, a vine tree without grapes. There is a table and a cup (of course this is the vine in the Book of Mormon). According to the Jewish scholars, "the tree led to the great throne above," under the high ceiling. On the panel immediately above the niche on one side of the tree is depicted the great sacrifice, the sacrifice of Isaac, the *ʿāqēddāh*—because Isaac permitted himself to be sacrificed. *ʿĀqēddāh* means the binding; he allowed himself to be bound, therefore that was an atoning sacrifice for the Day of Atonement. "On the other side we see Jacob blessing his twelve sons. Some lions had been painted over to accommodate the picture, but there are animals in it. Another panel shows [Jacob] blessing Ephraim and Manasseh in the presence of [Joseph].¹ So we're getting all these Book of Mormon motifs.

Along with the Old Testament figures, we see felines and masks of Dionysius and fertility symbols of Demeter (what are Dionysius and Demeter doing there? They have to be there.) In the midst of the tree are mingled various birds and animals. Above them there sits Orpheus, very conspicuously playing his harp. His music brings all things into love and harmony—that's the business of Orpheus. A Jewish scholar suggests he may represent David here "who saved Israel through his music." Music is certainly the theme. Every figure in the elaborate display is facing the viewer full face, and they seem to have their mouths open as if they are all singing together. The Orphic motifs are found in other

¹ Taken from Brother Nibley's article, "The Meaning of the Atonement," in *Approaching Zion*, CWHN 9 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 554–614.

synagogues as well, but how does this pagan theme of Orpheus relate to the Day of Atonement? The connection is found in the Hebrew word for the *kappōreṭ*, or mercy seat for the Day of Atonement. In Greek, both the Old Testament Septuagint and the New [Testament], the *kappōreṭ* is called the *hilasterion*, the place of the *hilaria*. In both Greek and Latin it's called the *hilasterion*. That is the tent that the priest goes up to where the veil is parted. It's called in the New Testament in all the Greek translations, of all things, by this word *hilasterion*. That's the place where the *hilaria* is held. Our word *hilarious* comes from that. *Hilasterion* is a word used by Paul for *atonement* in his address to the Romans, since the Romans would understand it.

The Roman writer Macrobius in the *Saturnalia* (the *Saturnalia* is the equivalent of the Day of Atonement and of Yom Kippur for the Romans, and it's very old; it goes back to archaic times) tells us that [the *hilaria* was held] at the spring equinox to celebrate the revival of life with a new vegetation year—all life is renewed. The *Dea Mater*, the great mother goddess, and *Attis* preside, he says, the very figures we find at Dura Europos. You find Demeter and her son, Attis Dionysus, at Dura Europos [and] in the other synagogues. Why do they put these pagan figures in there? Because it's the *hilasterion*. [Macrobius] says [the *Dea Mater* and *Attis* are] the very figures we find at Dura Europos as Dionysius and Demeter, the latter drawn by her lions. Another Roman tells us that on that occasion Orpheus was regarded as the king of the *primum regnum*, the primal god and creator, first king ruler, begetter of the human family. The *hilaria* was the occasion on which all the world joined in the great creation hymn, as they burst into a spontaneous song of praise recalling the first creation.

See, that's where our word *poem* comes from. That means *creation*. The Greek *poiema* means the *creation hymn*. Walter Otto has written a book on this subject called *Die Musen*. At the beginning and founding of the world, each of the muses represented one department of knowledge, and matter, etc. They all sang together the great creation hymn, which we read about in Job “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” That's the creation hymn, and you find it everywhere. It's very important. So the *hilaria* was the occasion when all the world joined the great creation hymn, when they burst into a spontaneous song of praise recalling the first creation. That song of creation has left its mark throughout the literature of the ancient world everywhere.

Now about the mingling of pagan with Jewish symbols in the early art. Notice how rich [the symbols are in the Book of Mormon]. Alma doesn't draw back at the most sumptuous symbolism here—he just throws it all over the place. It's to be accepted at face value, too—what's literal and what isn't. The mingling of pagan with [Jewish and] Christian symbols in the early art of the synagogue and church, which was very common, was long discounted as “purely decorative.” The Jews just put this in for decorative purposes, [they claimed]. Why would they bring these pagan symbols right into the synagogue just to decorate it? This explanation was soon discredited by the evidence. As Goodenough sees it, “Dura presented its Old Testament scenes clustered about a great vine over the Torah shrine, a vine in which Orpheus played his lyre to the animals, while numerous other pagan symbols appear in various parts of the room. The two, the pagan symbols and the Old Testament illustrations, could not be separated.”² And they can't be separated in Alma, either.

² Erwin Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York, Pantheon, 1953), 1:31.

Well, now here is some stuff I just added here [in the same article]. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, if not the oldest, is one of the earliest Christian writings to appear after the days of the apostles. It mingles early Jewish and Christian formulas (Judeo-Christianity) with strong predominance of the Jewish. Here the bishop leads the congregation in the litany, praising the “Creator and Savior, rich in love, long suffering; who leads the chorus of mercy; always mindful of the salvation of thy creatures. . . . The rolling sea . . . sustaining countless forms of life . . . instructs all thy creatures to shout: ‘How exalted are thy works, O Lord!’ All things hast thou created in wisdom, . . . the holy Seraphin along with the Cherubim; . . . with unwearied voices cry, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.’”

It’s the old Hebrew *trishagion* (Isaiah quotes this hymn, too, in Isaiah 6:3) as all Israel in the Church unite their voices “and the powers below heaven sing,” as the stars join in “this Hymn of the cosmos to God’s bounty and love.” It’s the hymn of redeeming love. See, this is the time of the at-one-ment, when the two worlds come together, we were talking about. They fuse now in this glorious music, and all the lights and other effects. Well, he says, “Israel, thy earthly church, . . . gathered together in one [it’s the assembly] by the powers under heaven by day and night with a full heart and willing spirit sings the hymn.” The four elements join in. “The creatures praise Him who gave them the breath of life, and the trees Him who caused them to spring up. Whatsoever things exist by thy word testify to the might of thy power. Hence, it behooves every man to feel in his heart to send up a song to thee through Christ for the sake of all; for thou art kind in thy benefactions and generous in thy compassions.”³

We have Alma asking here in Alma 5:26: “If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” And here we’re told in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, “it behooves every man to feel in his heart to send up a song to thee [to feel to sing the song of redeeming love] through Christ for the sake of all; for thou art kind in thy benefactions and generous in thy compassions.” And that’s the way Alma describes it. “My brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?”

And John tells us [about it] in Revelation [14:3]; he’s the closest, you see, “And they sung as it were a new song before the throne . . . and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.” You have to be qualified. And so he goes on, and we have the song of redeeming love. Then [Alma] says again in the next verse that it is necessary to be humble for this and to have your garments cleansed and made white. Verse 28: “Behold, are you stripped of pride?” This is very important, you see. This is the metaphor. Notice that the white garments signify humility, because they don’t put on any display or anything like that, and purity because they’re white. “Are you stripped of pride?” means you put your pride off; that’s another metaphor. Pride is [displayed in] costly apparel, as we read a little later on. In verses 54 and 55 of this chapter it tells us that’s what pride is. We’re stripped of pride here with that garment.

Verse 29: “Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy [this idea of taking off your old finery]? Again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make

³ *Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 35.

a mock of his brother?” This is equality. Mock no one. We say, “No one is perfect.” We like to say that. That’s an easy thing; it lets everybody off the hook. But remember, that means that everybody has something seriously lacking. We’re all seriously faulted, you see, when you say no one is perfect. And we’re all short of it in every case. In fact, that is the theme of that marvelous writing, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. It’s been years since they used that in priesthood, but it’s the best manual in the world. That’s the theme Joseph is always hitting at—how far we are from perfection, and he’s as far as anybody else. He says we’ve got to get that through our thick heads, that we’re all seriously defective. That’s why we have the gospel, that’s why it has to be so strict. That’s what Alma was talking about. If a person is pompous and pretentious, tries to be a ballet dancer or something like that when he can’t, he deserves mockery. He mocks himself; you don’t have to mock him. He’ll take care of that. He’ll make a fool of himself. You don’t have to go into that. And so nobody can make a mock of his brother; don’t do that whatever you do.

Verse 33: “Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men . . .” [here we are, the arms extending; here’s the embracing. Remember, that’s what Yom Kippur means, to cover with the arms first of all. That’s the basic meaning—*kafara*, *capto*, and all those words that go with *cover*], for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you [that’s what it is, remember, the ten days of repentance]. Yea, he saith: Come unto me, and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life [here’s another image], yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and waters of life freely [it’s not enough to have the tree of life; it’s the bread and waters of life, using Lehi’s allegory here]. Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire.” Now he’s using the vineyard image again. Notice that the vineyard is the most conspicuous thing; it’s both the good and the bad. It’s whatever Israel brings forth as the vineyard. In Jacob 5 is the long story of the vineyard.

And then again, “Whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit [there’s another image] . . . the same have cause to wail and mourn. . . . Ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep.” There’s another image; now it’s sheep he’s talking about. What is their claim? They claim that they have been righteous, but it won’t work at all. They have “gone astray as sheep.” That’s why he’s bringing them together again. So according to that in the next verse, he brings another image. Christ is the good shepherd. “Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; . . . and now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye [using another one]?” The devil has his fold, too. It’s yours.

There’s no alternative ever mentioned between these two. When Alma speaks, or anybody else in the Book of Mormon, it’s the one or the other. That’s what we have here. It’s the *‘alam al-shāhida*, the world which you see and know, your world, or the *‘alam al-ghayb*, the world which is the real world, the world which God knows and sees. We only see a little bit of it. When we adapt ourselves to this world, naturally it’s the only world, and we’re making ourselves very small.

I thought we would at least finish this chapter today, and we still have through verse 62. But you see, this is powerful stuff. This isn’t just something that some kid sat down and wrote off as nothing at all. It’s all in here. He’s got it all worked in, just as if he were weaving an elaborate tapestry, and it comes out a beautiful picture. You can’t do that, you

know, if you're just bluffing. I love Mrs. Brodie's comment that he just did this as a practical joke on his family so he could laugh at them. She said, "Now I have the damn fool fixed, and I'll really laugh at him."

Question: I'm still not sure I understand why the pagan symbols were in that early synagogue.

Answer: Oh, well, I have a section here that I might have read it on how that happened. This was the Hellenistic period, and it's perfectly legitimate. Remember these are only images, just as he [Alma] uses them. He's not talking about real sheep. He's not talking about real wine. He's not talking about these various things he talks about, gone astray, etc. They're not sheep. Well, if you can use one image, you can use another. They were purely symbolic, and the Jews are great for that stuff. They have the freedom of Oriental imagery, you know. They do it all over the place.