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Alma’s definition of faith as “hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21) serves as a pattern for the juxtaposition of faith and truth throughout the scriptures. Faith in the atoning power of Jesus is the truth that will save us.
NOTES AND COMMUNICATIONS

Faith and Truth

John A. Tvedtnes

One of the clearest and most precise definitions of faith is the one given in the Book of Mormon by Alma: “If ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21). Faith and truth are often listed together in the scriptures (e.g., Mosiah 27:14; Helaman 15:7). The Book of Mormon even has the term true faith (Enos 1:14, 20; Alma 44:4; 3 Nephi 6:14).

To gain a full appreciation of this definition, we must understand that the Hebrew words for faith and truth are related, both coming from the root שָׁמַעַת. Hebrew שָׁמַעַת means “belief” or “faith,” while שָׁמַעַת means “truth.” Both are related to יָמִין, “right hand,” and to יָמִין, “established,” the word with which prayers are ended. In Egyptian (which is distantly related to Hebrew) we have Ṣm, “enduring, faithful,” also “right hand,” as the name of the chief God. In this connection, it is interesting that Jesus is called the “Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14; cf. 19:11; 22:6) and also “he that is true” (Revelation 3:7; 1 John 5:20).

Joseph Smith is said to have indicated that the name Ahman was a title of God the Father, while Jesus is called “Son Ahman.”

1 The expression is found in Alma 30:15.
2 The expression is found in Jeremiah 42:5, while in Proverbs 14:25 we read of the “true witness.” In D&C 1:37, we read that the revelations given to Joseph Smith are “true and faithful,” indicating their divine source.
Old Testament prayers end simply with the word *Amen* (= confirmed, true), and hence in the name (title) of Jesus Christ.

Alma spoke of faith in the “true God” (Alma 5:12–13; cf. John 17:3). True faith is hence a belief in God and Jesus, who are true. We are to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24; Alma 43:10). The Lord is also called the “God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16, where the Hebrew reads אֵלֹהֵי אָמֵן; Ether 3:12 [referring to Jesus]).

Nephi wrote, “I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus” (2 Nephi 33:6). This is an authentic parallelism (such as is found in typical biblical poetry), wherein the word “truth” parallels the name “Jesus,” making them synonymous. In support of the idea that “truth” is one of the titles of Jesus, we note that he is called “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In Mosiah 27:36, the knowledge of the truth is equated with the knowledge of Christ. A similar idea is found in Helaman 15:13: “they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd” (cf. 1 Nephi 10:14; 2 Nephi 1:10; 10:2; Mosiah 4:12; Alma 18:34).

The scriptures also speak of the truth which is in Christ (1 Nephi 13:24–25; 14:26; Enos 1:26; 1 Timothy 2:4, JST) and of the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:10). He is said to be “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14; Moses 1:32; 5:7; 6:52; 7:11; D&C 84:102; 93:11; 2 Nephi 2:6; Alma 5:48; 9:26; 13:9). In Helaman 15:7, a knowledge of the truth is equated with faith on the Lord, while to reject truth is, according to Helaman 8:25, to rebel against God.

In D&C 93:24, we have a definition of truth: “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (cf. Jacob 4:13). In the Bible, Jesus is called he “which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; cf. John 1:1; 1 John 2:13–14, 24), thus defining him in the same manner as truth. Indeed, the title rendered in English as Jehovah means “he exists” and is the third person equivalent of the “I am” of Exodus 3:14 (cf. D&C 39:1).

In the Bible, Jesus is also called the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Revelation 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13; cf. also Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12, and see D&C 19:1; 35:1; 38:1; 45:7; 54:1; 61:1; 63:60; 68:35; 75:1; 81:7; 84:120; 95:17; 112:34;
He is "the beginning" (Colossians 1:18) and is "the Word" which was "in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). The title the Word is also an important one (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1). Jesus, speaking to the Father, said, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:13). The same expression is used in the Hebrew text of several biblical passages, where we read that the word is "verified" or "confirmed" (Hebrew אָמֵן, for example, 1 Kings 8:26; 2 Chronicles 1:9; 6:17; Psalms 19:8; 89:29; 111:7). Jesus is also called the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18; Alma 38:9).

The word is truth and is also light, these being titles of Jesus (D&C 84:45). Christ is called the "light of truth" (D&C 88:6; cf. verse 7) and the "true light" (1 John 2:8; John 1:9). He is also the "Spirit of truth" (D&C 93:9, 26; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; 5:6; D&C 50:14, 17, 19, 21, where he is also called the Word), and Spirit and truth are likewise equated in 1 John 5:6.

It is through truth that we are sanctified according to John 17:17, 19 (see also verse 3), allowing Paul to write of the "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In his prayers offered in the presence of the Nephites, Christ used the word believe five times and added that it was through faith that one could be "purified" (3 Nephi 19:20–23, 28–29). When Jesus said "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), he was evidently referring to himself and to the atonement which he alone brought.

Returning to Alma's definition of faith as a hope in that which is true, we can perhaps better understand why the first principle of the Gospel is "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Article of Faith 4). It is faith in the atoning power of Jesus which starts us on our pathway to salvation. Faith in anything less than this truth—Jesus Christ—has no power to save.

When, therefore, we read that Jesus is the "Amen, the faithful and true witness," the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 3:14; 21:5–6), we must understand these titles in

4 While some of the references from John 14 can be applied to the Holy Ghost, they are said in D&C 93:9, 11, 26, to refer to Jesus. Joseph Smith similarly indicated that John 14:16–18, 21, 23, refer to Jesus (HC 3:380–81). Both Jesus and the Holy Ghost operate by means of the "light of Christ," and in at least one passage the Holy Ghost speaks for Jesus in first person (Moses 5:9).
light of Alma's definition of faith, which has primary reference to faith in Christ.