

## **General Comments on Alma 5**

### **Historical Context**

Chapter 4 indicates the church in Zarahemla is having problems with pride and contention (cf. 4:6-12). If we go back to 1:29-33, we can find the origin of the division. Back in chapter 1, the church was using their wealth to help those in need. In chapter 4, that is no longer the case. Pride has crept in and undermined the church's selfless charity.

From details in the text, it is clear a significant number in the leadership of the church have become sinful (5:22-23), materialistic (4:6), and rejected Messianism (5:43-52). Referring to the leadership of the church, 4:7 says "this was the cause of much affliction to Alma, and to many of the people...yea, many of them were sorely grieved". Note it says "many" and not "all" or "most". It is not clear if this is a majority or minority of the church leadership that has gone bad (cp. 14:1 where "many" is clearly not a majority), but it is clearly significant enough to cause serious internal problems, and force Alma to reorganize the church in 6:1. The rejection of Messianism is noted in Alma's testimony in 5:43-52 and then noted again in 7:17-18, where Alma notes the brethren at Gideon believe in the Messiah and are "not in the state of dilemma like your brethren". Also note in 5:37 Alma rails against "ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray".

The bad example of these people results in nonmembers generally being offended at them (v. 4:10). In the ninth year, the Law of Consecration was no longer generally observed among them because pride led to selfishness and callousness (cf. 4:11-13). Thus, in the space of about two years the church had gone from doing very well, to quite bad.

Alma gives up his position as chief judge (cf. 4:16-17) and takes up the ministry full-time to correct the present course of the church (cf. 4:18-20).

### **Theology**

What is occurring at present is different from what occurred in Mosiah 26. There, the younger generation did not witness king Benjamin's speech, which was the major converting event for that society, so they were less inclined to be religious. The result is there is a great deal of external persecution on church members by nonmembers.

Here, the present prosperity of the church becomes its own worst enemy as the people deliberately forget about the past. Pride and contention is within the church and outsiders are put off by their behavior.

In Mosiah 27:13 the Lord says, "nothing shall overthrow [my church], save it is the transgression of my people". And that is what is happening in the events of the present chapter. This is a matter of internal apostasy as opposed to external persecution. The result is Alma is forced to purge the church of those who refuse to repent.

The irony is in Mosiah 27:13 the angel tells Alma the younger that his external persecutions will not upend the church, only the unrighteousness of the church will do that. Now, Alma the younger is facing exactly that. As a youth he fought the church and was stopped by an angel, now as an adult he has to fight the wicked inside the church to keep it from being destroyed.

### **Rhetorical Style and Composition**

Given these circumstances, Alma's speech in the present chapter is overwhelmingly negative, aimed at addressing the pride of the people within the church, principally the leadership. His words are direct and his speech unrelenting. The message was summarily followed by the excommunication of the unrepentant (cf. 6:3) and the acceptance of the repentant non-members (cf. 6:2), presumably those who had formerly been persecuted by those who had just been excommunicated.

Alma's dismay over the condition of the church in Zarahemla is stated plainly in his subsequent comments to the church in the land of Gideon (cf. 7:3-7).

In verses 3-13, Alma recounts their immediate history, pointing out the sinners, their literal fathers, repented and were forgiven, implying they ought to as well. Note Alma emphasizes recent history over ancient Israelite history. Their recent history they cannot deny.

Verses 14-19 and 20-25 are paired in a question and answer fashion with v. 14-19 being the accusatory questions and v. 20-25 being the condemnatory answer. The two blocks of text are intended to be complimentary, as follows:

- A (v. 14) - Have ye received his image in your countenance?
- B (v. 15) - stand before God to be judged
- C (v. 16) - Can you imagine...ye hear voice of

the Lord saying...works of righteousness upon the earth?

C (v. 17) - do ye imagine...ye can lie...works of righteousness upon the earth?

B (v. 18) - brought before the tribunal

A (v. 19) - can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenance?

A (v. 20) - yielded yourselves to be subjects to the devil

B (v. 21) - no man saved except...garments must be purified...cleansed from all stain

C (v. 22) - your garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness

C (v. 23) - ye are murderers...guilty of all manner of wickedness

B (v. 24) - [sit with] Abraham, Isaac, and with Jacob...whose garments are cleansed...spotless, pure and white?

A (v. 25) - they are the children of the kingdom of the devil

Alma's argument is the apostates are not of the Lord, they are of the devil, and their works are not righteousness but are filth.

Verses 26-42 form the next block. Alma says now is the time to repent of the list of specific sins in v. 26-32. He then says the Lord will accept them if they repent in v. 33-36.

Otherwise, they will be kicked out in v. 37-42. The context is both immediate and eternal. Alma emphasizes the time to repent is right now, because he is about purge the church of the unrepentant. Yes, obviously, there is an eternal context to the discussion, but the immediate matter is the threat of excommunication.

Alma then launches into a powerful testimony of Christ in v. 43-52. This section of text is also an authority statement, as is v. 3 and v. 61-62. These verses suggest Alma is asserting his authority as high priest because the leaders of the church have gone bad, so he must discipline them, and he is in a position to do so, being the high priest. The fundamental issue is their acceptance of the Lord as Messiah, and the need for them to act according to that belief and the Lord's teachings.

Alma closes with a comparison of wolves and sheep, saying the wolves have got to go, in v. 53-60. This sets the stage for what must have been mass excommunication in 6:3.

## Comments on Alma 5

1 NOW it came to pass that Alma began to deliver the word of God unto the people, first in the land of Zarahemla, and from thence throughout all the land. 2 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:

v1-2 After abridging the history (ch. 4), Mormon makes a quick editorial comment to introduce the words of Alma given to the church at Zarahemla. The rest of the chapter is apparently a verbatim quotation of Alma's words from his own account without editing or comment by Mormon.

v1 "throughout all the land", we are informed in Mosiah 27:6 the people have moved well beyond Zarahemla into surrounding lands.

3 I, Alma, having been consecrated by my father, Alma, to be a high priest over the church of God, he having power and authority from God to do these things,

    behold, I say unto you that he began to establish a church in the land which was in the borders of Nephi; yea, the land which was called the land of Mormon; yea, and he did baptize his brethren in the waters of Mormon. 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. 5 And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; 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; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also.

    6 And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, you that belong to this church, have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers? Yea, and have you sufficiently retained in remembrance his mercy and long-suffering towards them? And moreover, have ye sufficiently retained in remembrance that he has delivered their souls from hell? 7 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. 8 And now I ask of you, my brethren, were they destroyed? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, they were not. 9 And again I ask, were the bands of death broken, and the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed, and their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love. And I say unto you that they are saved.

    10 And now I ask of you on what conditions are they saved? Yea, what grounds had they to hope for salvation? What is the cause of their being loosed from the bands of death, yea, and also the chains of hell? 11 Behold, I can tell you--did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? And was he not a holy prophet? Did he not speak the words of God, and my father Alma believe them? 12 And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart. Behold I say unto you that this is all true. 13 And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their

hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

v3-13 Alma is applying the principle which he was confronted with by the angel in Mosiah 27:16. The events Alma relates occurred some 40 years earlier and account for the establishment of the church as they know it among them (cf. Mosiah 24-25).

The series of statements and rhetorical questions by Alma are largely accusatory, as he knows the people have forgotten about the roots and core beliefs of their church. The underlying accusation is the contemporary church is sliding far away from his father Alma's original church as it was set up in Mosiah 23:6-19 and then later again in Mosiah 25:19-24. As there are almost certainly some of the original church members still alive and they are the children of those original church members (cf. v. 13) they know their history well. The present departure is a deliberate one.

The text presents themes of both physical (v. 4-5) and spiritual salvation (v. 6-12), with considerable emphasis on the spiritual.

This matter of remembering the captivity of your fathers is one emphasized in Deuteronomy. There, the Israelites are told to remember their bondage in Egypt and the covenants with their fathers 14 times, and they are told to not forget eight times (cp. Deut. 8, Deut. 32:7).

Another theme unique to Deuteronomy is the idea of leaving the Lord for other gods whom Israel does not know, other gods that have not proven themselves to Israel (cf. Deut. 11:28, Deut. 13). This concept goes hand in hand with them ignoring their own history with the Lord.

The Lord knows it is easy for people to go into denial and He is addressing that fact, telling them it is unacceptable. He has proven Himself to them repeatedly in the past, why does He have to keep proving Himself to every generation? Even worse, why does He have to prove Himself to the same generation?

v3 An authority statement. Alma later expands upon this in v. 43-52. Verses 61-61 are similarly an authority statement. Alma has to exert his authority in a church gone astray.

v10-13 This thesis is the core of the rest of the chapter. The members of the original church knew they had spiritual salvation (v. 10) because they believed the preaching of the prophet Abinadi (v. 11). This brought about a great change in their

hearts and desires (v. 12). They humbled themselves before God, change was permanent. They endured to the end, and so they were saved (v. 13).

Alma's point is the present church has not had a permanent change of heart as the original church did, they are not enduring to the end as their fathers did. Hence his questions in v. 14, 19, 26, regarding the condition of their hearts, and his accusations of them in v. 37-42 of being stray sheep. By way of contrast he spends the rest of the chapter telling the current church they are not like their fathers in this respect.

v13 "your fathers...they were faithful to the end; therefore they are saved", Alma is obviously implying this batch of children is not enduring as their fathers did so their salvation is in jeopardy.

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts? 15 Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body? 16 I say unto you, 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? 17 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? 18 Or otherwise, 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, yea, a remembrance that ye have set at defiance the commandments of God? 19 I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?

v14-42 This section forms Alma's argument against the present church. He uses a series of four arguments, two sets of two. The first two deal with an eternal setting (v. 14-19, 20-25), the second two deal with a temporal setting (v. 26-36, 37-42). Additionally, the four arguments are arranged by subject in an A-B-A-B fashion with respect to accusation and judgement.

The eternal arguments deal with rejection at God's tribunal for their sin (v. 14-19), and then the individual's realization their sins make them subjects of the devil (v. 20-25).

The temporal arguments plainly list the common sins among the present church and commands them to repent (v. 26-36), or they will be like straying sheep who will be separated from the Lord's flock and given to the devil (v. 37-42).

v14-19 These verses use imagery of the Final Judgement with the unrepentant sinner placed before God's tribunal. Alma asks them if they think they can lie to God about their conduct and nature. Alma is addressing people within the church who consider themselves religious so they are aspiring to a heavenly reward, yet they are in denial over their own sinful nature and unworthiness of the heavenly reward they are anticipating. They can live in denial now, but their hypocrisy will be manifest at Judgement.

v14 "have ye been spiritually born of God? ... Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?", the concept of being spiritually born again is not a NT novelty, cf. Deut. 10:16, Deut. 30:6, Isa. 1:11-18, Jer. 4:4, Jer. 24:7, Ezek. 18:31, Ezek. 36:26. Compare 1 Peter 1:22-23 where having a purified soul and heart is equated with being born again.

"Have ye received his image in your countenances?", this question is repeated in v. 19 as "can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenance?", for the significance of one's face or countenance bearing God's mark or image, cp. Exod. 33:11, 2 Chron. 7:14, Ps. 27:8, Hosea 5:15.

Also, if we assume Alma had access to the Psalms as we know them, which isn't necessarily the case, he might be alluding to Ps. 10 (esp. cp. Ps. 10:4). If he is, then this is particularly biting insinuation as he is saying they don't have God's image in their countenance because they are prideful in their countenance like the man described in Ps. 10. Even if he didn't have access to this particular Psalm, it still clearly illustrates the Semitic concept of having your face either inclined towards or away from the Lord.

v15 "Do you look forward with an eye of faith", Alma is asking them what their perspective is. Do they have a long-range eternal perspective, or has their perspective become temporal and material? When people slouch into apostasy their goals and views become short term. Spiritual and eternal things become unreal and intangible as they lose sight of them in favor of things they can hold in their hand. Once they start doing this it becomes more difficult to let go of what is in your hand, and the Law of Consecration is no longer applied.

v17 "do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord", the matter of lying and being a liar is again addressed in v.

25. When a person is in denial over their sinful state they are lying to themselves. In order to rationalize their position they have to make God a liar, One who would say one thing and then do another as He has said that no unclean thing can dwell with Him. The person in denial cannot admit they are lying to themselves, so they have to project the contradiction onto God. They may never explicitly say it, but Alma points out their position implicitly requires it.

20 I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil? 21 I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for 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, who should come to redeem his people from their sins. 22 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 stained with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you? 23 Behold will they not testify that ye are murderers, yea, and also that ye are guilty of all manner of wickedness? 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, and also all the holy prophets, whose garments are cleansed and are spotless, pure and white? 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; but they shall be cast out for they are the children of the kingdom of the devil.

v20-25 Alma continues the Judgement theme, but now turns the subject inward to how the individual will feel inside themselves at the point of being confronted with their sins. He asks them "how will any of you feel..?" (v. 22). If they have not cleansed themselves of sin via the Atonement, which they have been taught about by the Law (v. 21, 24), then all of their sins will be upon themselves (v. 22) as a testimony against them (v. 23). How will they feel? How would you feel if you were caught in this situation?

The intent is to make it clear Judgement will not be a matter of arguing your case with God until you win. It is a case of everyone laying aside their subjectivity and egocentrism and admitting to the objective truth and reality of the situation. If a person has sinned, they will no longer be able to deny it. The denial, lies, and self-deception will end and they will confess they are steeped in sin, and therefore unfit to dwell with God as were their righteous fathers. Thus, they are subject to the devil, having been led astray by him (v. 20, 25).

v21 Having to clean your garments of any impurity comes from



Lev. 13:58, which refers to physical uncleanness. But, obviously, the symbolism of the physical parallels the spiritual, cp. Isa. 1:16-18, Jer. 2:22.

v22-23 Alma pairs "blood...filthiness" with "murderers...wickedness" in the accusations against the leaders of the church. It is likely the accusation is spiritual as opposed to literal physical murder, as if it were literal physical murder then Alma would turn the matter over the judges for legal prosecution. But, this is an internal church matter, so Alma is dealing with it.

The underlying accusation is the priests, elders and teachers of the church are liable for the false doctrines and failures to keep their congregations out of sin. Their failure to do so means the blood of their people is on them. This is based on Deut. 21:1-9, Ps. 26. Isa. 4:3-5, see also Isa. 64:5-6, Jer. 2:22, Jer. 32:1, Ezek. 3:18, Ezek. 22:23-31, Ezek. 33:1-11.

v24 Alma is probably referring to the history of Gen. 35:1-3 in his reference to patriarchs with clean clothes. Alma is also probably intending to draw on the context of Duet. 32, the song of Moses wherein he says the Lord is a God of truth and Israel is a rebellious child covered with defective spots because he does not remember his elders (cf. Deut. 32:4-7).

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? 27 Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? That your garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ, who will come to redeem his people from their sins? 28 Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. Behold ye must prepare quickly; for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand, and such an one hath not eternal life. 29 Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare quickly, for the hour is close at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless. 30 And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

31 Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved! 32 Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it! 33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you. 34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; 35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire-- 36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of

righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn.

v26-36 Alma presents a series of sins the church is guilty of.

Note his statements are bracketed with singing (v. 26) changed to wailing and mourning (v. 36) if they do not abandon these sins he catalogs herein. Their original song of joy and redemption is changed to a bitter lament of wailing as they have abandoned righteousness.

He asks them if they have kept a godly walk so as to maintain a remission of their sins (v. 27, cp. 7:22). Obviously, they have not done this or he would not be questioning them on it. Maintaining a godly walk is a subject treated at length by king Benjamin, so chances are this is a doctrine that is well known among the church, cf. Mosiah 4:26.

He then accuses them of pride (v. 28), envy (v. 29), persecution (v. 30-31), and iniquity (v. 32-33). Note in each of these four accusations he immediately follows each one with a warning that if they do not stop they will not be prepared for the imminent Judgement.

Alma calls them to repentance, to become righteous and do good works so they may be blessed of God (v. 34) and not cut down in their wickedness (v. 35-36).

37 O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice! 38 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 if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd. 39 And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold; and now, who can deny this? Behold, I say unto you, whosoever denieth this is a liar and a child of the devil. 40 For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil. 41 Therefore, if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him. 42 And whosoever doeth this must receive his wages of him; therefore, for his wages he receiveth death, as to things pertaining unto righteousness, being dead unto all good works.

v37-42 Alma states those in the church who profess religion but wallow in sin are like sheep who refuse to listen to the shepherd, so they wander off and are lost (v. 37).

Alma presents a sharp dichotomy by stating there are only two shepherds, Christ (v. 38) or the devil (v. 39). One can

discern which shepherd a man is following by his works, whoever does evil has the devil as his shepherd and whoever does good has Christ as his shepherd (v. 40-41). Anyone who does evil becomes a child of the devil and their reward is spiritual death (v. 42).

The core issue is talk versus walk, a matter of hypocrisy. There are people who profess religion, sound religious, and may study religion, but if they do not practice it then it is all in vain. When they do evil, they are children of the devil, regardless of what they say.

And that is Alma's problem. A lot of people in the church profess to be religious, but they are not living according to religious principles. Instead, they are "puffed up in the vain things of the world" (v. 37, cp. v. 53).

Alma's sharp dichotomy of v. 38-42 is intended to make it clear religious talk without a religious walk makes you a child of the devil, and anyone who says any different is a child of the devil (v. 39).

v37 "ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness", Alma is specifically addressing the leaders inside the church who have gone astray. This is not aimed at the general church population, but the priests and elders, those who were supposed to be leaders.

43 And now, my brethren, I would that ye should hear me, for I speak in the energy of my soul; for behold, I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God. 44 For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.

45 And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? 46 Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me. 47 And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God. 48 I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name. 49 And now I say unto you that this is the order after which I am called, yea, to preach unto my beloved brethren, yea,

and every one that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free; yea, I say unto you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation; yea, to cry unto them that they must repent and be born again.

50 Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men. 51 And also the Spirit saith unto me, yea, crieth unto me with a mighty voice, saying: Go forth and say unto this people--Repent, for except ye repent ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of heaven. 52 And again I say unto you, the Spirit saith: Behold, the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, yea, a fire which cannot be consumed, even an unquenchable fire. Behold, and remember, the Holy One hath spoken it.

v43-52 Alma explains why they should listen to what he is saying concerning faith on Christ and repentance. First, it is the teaching of their fathers (v. 43-44). Second, it is his own testimony, which is a result of his experience from acting in his priestly calling (v. 45-49). And finally, it is what the Spirit of God says (v. 50-52).

Alma's intent is to present three compelling witnesses in arguing his case, and he arranges them in a continuum of past (v. 43-44), present (v. 45-49), and future (v. 50-52).

v44-49 Alma is called to testify (v. 44) of things revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (v. 46). These are not things he has come up with himself (v. 45).

The text of these verses form a tight synthetical parallelism centering on the middle of v. 46, so v. 43-46d is complimented by v. 46e-49.

This description of the order of the Priesthood could be applied to any dispensation. The Hebrew word "kahunnah" is translated to "priesthood" and is derived from the term "kahan" which translates to "priest". A more literal translation of "kahan" would be "mediator". The priest is to act as a mediator between God and Israel.

The Greek word "hierateuma" is translated to "priesthood", but a more literal translation would be "sacred effect". The Greek term "hierourgeo" is translated to "priest", but a more literal translation would be "sacred act". Thus, the priesthood is to have a sanctifying effect and the priests are to perform sacred acts. Their role is to bring about the sanctification of Israel.

This is precisely what Alma is saying his calling is. He

is called to preach the words of the Holy Spirit to the people (v. 46-47). He is to testify of Christ (v. 48), and call the people to repentance (v. 50-52). He is to act as a mediator between the Nephites and the Lord, to sanctify them by getting them to repent.

53 And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches? 54 Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance-- 55 Yea, and will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them? 56 And finally, all ye that will persist in your wickedness, I say unto you that these are they who shall be hewn down and cast into the fire except they speedily repent.

57 And now I say unto you, all you that are desirous to follow the voice of the good shepherd, come ye out from the wicked, and be ye separate, and touch not their unclean things; and behold, their names shall be blotted out, that the names of the wicked shall not be numbered among the names of the righteous, that the word of God may be fulfilled, which saith: The names of the wicked shall not be mingled with the names of my people; 58 For the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life, and unto them will I grant an inheritance at my right hand. And now, my brethren, what have ye to say against this? I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled. 59 For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him. 60 And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.

v53-60 The final call to repentance (v. 53-56) and summoning of the righteous out from among the wicked (v. 57-60).

Those who persist in pride, materialism (v. 53), persecution (v. 54), and selfishness (v. 55) will be cast off to a spiritual death unless they repent (v. 56).

Those who are humble followers of Christ, and those who are willing to repent are told to separate themselves from the wicked. The wicked will have their names blotted out of the rolls of the church (v. 57) while the righteous will have their names entered into the Lord's Book of Life (v. 58).

The Lord will do this because He will not permit his faithful followers to be harmed. He would rather destroy those that seek to harm his people, than see his faithful followers

harmed by them (v. 59-60).

v57 "come ye out from the wicked...", i.e., the faithful in the church are to separate themselves from the wicked and hypocritical within the church. The practical application of this becomes clear in the next chapter as the unrepentant are excommunicated (cf. 6:3). The faithful believers should obviously avoid people who would persuade them against the church or lead them into sin.

"The names of the wicked...an inheritance at my right hand", this is presented as a quotation of the Lord, but we don't have any text that matches it. It is possible it is text from the conversation Alma senior had with the Lord in Mosiah 26 which wasn't included in Mormon's abridgement of that conversation.

**61 And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you. 62 I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life.**

v61-62 Alma concludes his remarks with an authority statement which compliments his opening statement in v. 3. Being the high priest he speaks by way of commandment, and he commands the members of the church to repent. Those who aren't members of the church are invited to join by baptism that they may enjoy spiritual blessings.

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