

PDF version of the lesson notes.

## I. Big Picture

- My lesson notes. One week only. Just substituting.
- Alma 5 is a sermon given by Alma II. The sermon headnote reads as follows:

The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.

- *What do you think of this sermon? Why do you like this sermon?*
- *What are the main points or themes of the sermon? What is Alma trying to get across to the people of Zarahemla?*
- *How would you describe the tone of the sermon? How does it compare to other sermons in the Book of Mormon*
- *How is the sermon structured? How does the structure lead the reader to the main points or themes of the sermon? How does the structure affect the tone?*
- The most obvious part of the structure is the heavy use of questions. Alma asks 45 questions in the sermon. *Why do you think Alma uses questions as his primary rhetorical tool in this sermon? Does the structure tell us something about Alma or his audience? How do the questions affect you as a reader? How do you react to his heavy use of questions as opposed to other sermons by Alma and other Book of Mormon prophets?*
- The structure really makes the sermon seem hard hitting and rapid fire. It feels like Alma is using a machine gun as opposed to a sniper rifle to make his point. *He wants to hit everyone? I would, for example, classify, Jacob's sermon in Jacob 2–3 as much more sniper like. Jacob is very concerned about the damage a stray bullet may cause. Do you think this is a fair characterization of the sermon? Why or why not?*
- Also, I must admit that the sermon reminded me of times as a child when I would try to get away with not doing a good job on my chores. After having done a poor job I would report to my mother that I had completed the task at hand. My mother would frequently (or at least in my remembrance it seems frequent) point out through a series of questions just how poor my effort had been. *Is this a fair characterization of the sermon? Is Alma scolding them like a mother might scold a chore shirking child?*

- *Does the length of the sermon and the heavy use of questions make it hard to see how things are connected together or the main thematic parts of the sermon?*
- I do find it easy to loose track of the thematic parts. I think it is helpful to keep a broad outline of the main parts or themes of the sermon in mind.

- **Sermon Outline[1]:**

1. Remember the deliverances of your Fathers: 1–13.
2. Imagine the judgment day: 14–25.
3. Repent and prepare: 26–32
4. Hearken to the call of the good shepherd: 33–42.
5. Alma's testimony: 43–49.
6. The words of the Spirit: 50–52
7. To those who persist in Wickedness: 53–56.
8. To those who desire to follow the good shepherd: 57–62

- *Do you see a progression or pattern in the sermon outline?*
- *Is it surprising that Alma's testimony is really in the heart of the sermon (or maybe about 2/3 of the way through) as opposed to the very end?*
- I guess to some degree I see, "the hearken to the call of the good shepherd" section as the climax or heart of the sermon. Alma's testimony immediately follows after that section. Alma then uses his testimony as a spring board to launch into his final call to action which is once again to hearken to the call of the good shepherd.
- *Do you think this might have application today in terms of how an when we should bear our testimony in talks? Could this be more effective than saving our testimony until then end? Why or why not?*

## II. Bondage and Deliverance

### A. Types

- Read Alma 5:3–5

(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.

- Alma emphasizes his authority and also his relationship with Alma I. *Why would he do that? Shouldn't his authority and position be well known in the capital city?*
- Alma right from the start mentions "captivity and deliverance" by briefly retelling Alma I's captivity and deliverance (along with his people's captivity and deliverance) from both King Noah and the Lamanites.
  - ◆ *Why does Alma begin his sermon by reminding the people of the bondage of Alma I and his people?*
  - ◆ *Does this hint at the importance of these events in terms of the identity of the church?*
  - ◆ *Is this story a Book of Mormon equivalent of the Willie and Martin handcart company or Huan's mill in terms of typifying or marking a shared identity among Nephite church members?*
- Alma often starts or begins his sermons with a type or example of bondage and deliverance. This isn't true of every sermon; Alma 7 does not begin with a bondage/deliverance type but many sermons by Alma do begin this way. See, for example, Alma 9, Alma 33, Alma 36, and Alma 38.
  - ◆ *Why is this such an important theme to Alma?*
  - ◆ *Why does he so frequently use a deliverance example or type at the beginning of his sermons?*
  - ◆ *Why does Alma bring up examples like King Noah or the Israelites in Egypt?*
  - ◆ *Do you think that bondage/deliverance narratives have or should have an important place in our spiritual discussions and narratives?*

### ***B. Triplet***

- I think verse 6 is a complete paragraph so let's read that next. Read 5:6:

(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?

- Alma delivers a triplet of questions each with essentially the same first half. *Why the repetition? How does it effect you as the reader? How does the triplet progress conceptually?*
- *How is the physical captivity and deliverance of their fathers related to the souls of their fathers' being delivered from hell? Does Alma see them as equivalent or the physical deliverance as evidence of the spiritual deliverance?*

- I think the next three paragraphs are helpful in this regard. Read Alma 5:7-9:

(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.

- *What do these verses imply about Alma in terms of Alma's understanding of the relation between the physical and spiritual deliverance of his father and his father's people?*
- *In verse 9, what does Alma mean when he uses the word destroyed? What kind of destruction is he talking about? Does a distinction between physical and spiritual destruction make sense here? Why or why not?*
- What does Alma mean when he say the "bands of death were broken" and that the "chains of hell were loosed?" Are these two things equivalent or different?
- *Is it important that Alma's example operates at this point on the aggregate or collective level? Is it important that he is talking about both the physical and spiritual deliverance of the collective group? Isn't it strange to talk about the deliverance of the group when it is caused by their souls expanding and singing the song of redeeming love? Those strike me as very individual and personal changes?*
- *Why does Alma refer to the fathers as being "saved" already? Does Alma see being saved as equivalent to the mighty change of heart described in the preceding verses? Are there*

*other possibilities?*

### **C. Conditions of Salvation**

- Let's read the next couple of paragraphs (Alma 5:10–13):

(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.

- Does verse 10 capture the main point of the whole sermon?
- *Do these verses help us understand what Alma means by the word saved and why he refers to their fathers as being saved?*
- In verse 10 Alma uses the word "cause." He seems to be referring to the "cause of salvation." How does Alma describe the first cause of the salvation of his father? Was the "cause" something that Alma did or something that happened to him?[2]
- Alma talks extensively about salvation and how someone is saved but he doesn't mentioned any ordinances[3]. *Why?*

### **III. Imagine the Judgment Day**

- Let's move on to the "Imagine the judgment day" section. Read Alma 5:14–15:

(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?

- *Are all the questions in the triplet (verse 14) equivalent? Why or why not?*
- *How are the questions in verse 15 related to the triplet in verse 14?*
- Verse 15 seems to represent a real shift in the way that Alma talks about salvation. I think the difference is particularly striking in verse 21:

(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.

- *Earlier Alma equated salvation with having our hearts changed, humbling ourselves, trusting God, and remaining faithful. How are those two descriptions of salvation related?"[4] Why the change? How does the shift affect you, the reader?*

## **Endnotes**

1. Hardy, Grant (Editor), 2003, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, University of Illinois Press, 260–266.
2. Faulconer, Jim, 2004, *Sunday School Lesson 22*, Times and Seasons.
3. Faulconer, Jim, 2004, *Sunday School Lesson 22*, Times and Seasons.
4. Faulconer, Jim, 2004, *Sunday School Lesson 22*, Times and Seasons.