

Alma 31 — The Rameumptom — Worship Turned Inside Out, and the Prayer of a Sorrowing Heart

Alma 31: c. 74 BC, the commencement of the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, immediately after the death of Korihor. Word reaches Alma that the Zoramites — Nephite dissenters who have gathered in a land called Antionum, dangerously close to the Lamanite wilderness — are perverting the ways of the Lord and bowing to dumb idols. Alma takes a hand-picked company of his most seasoned laborers and goes to recover them by the power of the word. What he finds appalls him: a society that worships once a week from a high stand called the Rameumptom, each man reciting the identical scripted prayer thanking God that they have been elected to salvation and that there shall be no Christ. The chapter sets the counterfeit worship of the Zoramites against the true prayer of Alma — a long cry of sorrow, intercession, and pleading for strength and success — and ends with the company filled with the Holy Spirit, sent out two by two into the great mediation sermons of Alma 32–34. It is the portrait of worship turned inside out, and the cure beginning in a grieving man's prayer.

Alma 31 opens with a grieving heart and closes with a praying one, and the whole chapter lives in the distance between two kinds of prayer. Korihor is dead at the end of chapter 30 — trodden down among a people called the Zoramites — and that detail is the hinge into this chapter, because now Alma turns to the Zoramites themselves. They are not pagans who never knew the truth; they are *dissenters from the Nephites* (v. 8), people who once had the word of God and have fallen away from it. This is worse than ignorance. They knew, and they left. And Alma, who has just watched the word silence Korihor, decides to try *the virtue of the word of God* on a whole apostate society — to attempt with preaching what the sword could never do (v. 5). The chapter is the setup to the great mediation trilogy that follows; everything in Alma 32–34 is the answer to the disease diagnosed here. But Alma 31 is not merely a prologue. It is a complete and devastating study of false worship, and a model of what true prayer sounds like when the heart is breaking.

Hebrew Word Studies

***bachar* / *qadosh* / *Rameumptom* (בָּחַר / קָדוֹשׁ / —) — to choose, to elect, to select for covenant / holy, set apart, consecrated / "the holy stand" (a Book of Mormon term, self-glossed in v. 21) vv. 16–18, 21.** The Zoramite prayer corrupts two of the deepest words in Israel's covenant vocabulary. The first is *bachar* — to choose. It is the great covenant verb: *the Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you (bachar), because ye were more in number... but because the Lord loved you* (Deut. 7:7–8). Election in the Hebrew Bible is always a choosing *unto* something — unto service, unto covenant, unto being a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6) — and always grounded in God's love, never in the merit of the chosen. The Zoramites take *bachar* and invert every part of it. Their election is *from* their brethren rather than *for* the world; it is grounded in their own holiness rather than God's love (*for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee*, v. 17); and it issues not in service but in contempt for everyone not elected, who are *cast by thy wrath down to hell* (v. 17). They have kept the word *chosen* and discarded everything that made being chosen a mercy. The second word is *qadosh* — holy, set apart. To be *qadosh* is to be consecrated to God's purposes, and Israel was called *a holy nation* (Ex. 19:6) — but holiness in the covenant is derivative, a reflection of *I am holy* (Lev. 11:44), never a possession the people own. The Zoramites cry *Holy, holy God* and then immediately claim the holiness for themselves — *thou hast elected us to be thy holy children... we are a chosen and a holy people* (vv. 16, 18). They have taken the seraphim's adoration of God's holiness and redirected it into a celebration of their own. As for *Rameumptom* — the text gives no Hebrew because it is a Zoramite coinage, but Mormon translates it for us: *the holy stand* (v. 21). The naming itself is part of the perversion. They have a special word for their special platform, a proprietary holiness with its own vocabulary — the impulse to brand and patent the sacred, to make holiness a thing you ascend a labeled structure to perform, rather than a life lived before God. The contrast is total: *bachar* and *qadosh*, the words of God's electing love and Israel's consecration, hollowed out and stood on top of a tower.

From the Chapter's Architecture

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