

Alma 34 — The Great and Last Sacrifice — Amulek on the Infinite Atonement, the Mediator, and the Time to Prepare to Meet God

Alma 34: c. 74 BC, still on the hill Onidah among the cast-out poor of the Zoramites, immediately after Alma sits down and Amulek rises to finish the sermon. Where Alma planted the seed and called the witnesses of the Son, Amulek now declares the heart of the matter from his own mouth: the atonement of Christ. He teaches that an atonement must be made or all mankind perishes, that it cannot be the sacrifice of man or beast but must be infinite and eternal, and that it is the Son of God himself who is that great and last sacrifice — the Mediator whose mercy overpowers justice and encircles the repentant in the arms of safety. From the doctrine he turns to the urgent application: cry unto God in every place and at every hour, care for the needy or your prayer is vain, and above all do not procrastinate the day of repentance, for this life is the time to prepare to meet God. It is the companion cornerstone to Alma 32 — faith planted, now the Christ in whom it is planted made plain — and the doctrinal summit of the whole Zoramite mission.

Alma 34 is Amulek's sermon, and it is the doctrinal summit not only of the Zoramite mission but of the whole pre-Christian Book of Mormon on the subject of the atonement. Alma had prepared the ground in chapters 32 and 33 — he planted the seed of faith and called the ancient witnesses of the Son — and then, in a gesture the text records with care, *he sat down upon the ground, and Amulek arose* (v. 1). This is the second witness at work, the companionship pattern established back in Alma 8: Alma opens, Amulek confirms and completes. And what Amulek adds is the thing the whole mission has been building toward. The poor's deepest question, Amulek says, is *whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ* (v. 5) — the exact denial the Zoramites recited from the Rameumptom. Amulek answers it not with argument but with testimony and doctrine: he *knows* Christ shall come, and he explains why an atonement is necessary, what kind of sacrifice it must be, and how its mercy works. Then, having laid the doctrine, he turns the whole weight of it onto the listener with the most urgent altar call in the Book of Mormon.

Hebrew Word Studies

kaphar / olam / rachamim (כָּפַר / עֹלָם / רַחֲמִים) — **to cover, to atone, to ransom, to wipe clean / forever, eternity, the vanishing-point of time / compassion, tender mercy (from rechem, the womb) vv. 8–14, 10, 15.** Three Hebrew words stand under Amulek's atonement doctrine. *Kaphar* — atone — is the verb at the center of Israel's whole sacrificial system; *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, is the *yom ha-kippurim*, the day of coverings. The root sense is to *cover* — the mercy seat that covered the ark was the *kapporet* — and also to *ransom* or *wipe clean*. When Amulek says Christ shall *atone for the sins of the world* (v. 8), the Hebrew underneath is *kaphar*: the sins are covered, ransomed, wiped away by the great and last sacrifice that all the lesser *kaphar*-offerings of the law only foreshadowed. Amulek's insistence that the law's animal offerings are *not* the real atonement (v. 10) is the recognition that they were *kaphar* in figure only, *every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice* (v. 14). *Olam* — the word behind *eternal* and *everlasting* — means the most distant time, the horizon beyond which the eye cannot see, and so by extension perpetuity, forever. To call the sacrifice *eternal (olam)* is to say it reaches to and beyond every horizon of time, applying as fully to the first man as to the last. Paired with *infinite* it forms Amulek's two-word Christology: the offering has no boundary in scope (infinite) and no boundary in time (*olam*, eternal), because the One who offers it is himself the *El Olam*, the Everlasting God (Gen. 21:33). *Rachamim* — the *bowels of mercy* of v. 15 — is the plural of *rechem*, the womb; it is the deepest Hebrew word for compassion, the love a mother feels in her body for the child she carried. When Amulek says the sacrifice brings about *the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice*, he is reaching for the same womb-deep tenderness Alma named at Gideon (Alma 7:12) and Ammon at the close of his hymn (Alma 26:37). The atonement is not a cold transaction balancing a ledger; it is *rachamim*, the visceral, maternal compassion of God made strong enough, through the infinite price, to *overpower* the demands of justice and pull the repentant into the arms of safety.

From the Chapter's Architecture

``cross-references Gen. 21:33 (El Olam, the everlasting God — the eternal nature behind v. 14's infinite and eternal); Ex. 12:5 (the Passover lamb without blemish — the type of the great and last sacrifice, vv. 10, 13–14); Lev. 16 (the Day of Atonement, kippurim, the covering of sin — the system Christ fulfills, vv. 8, 14); Lev. 17:11 (the life of the flesh is in the blood... it is the blood that maketh an atonement — the blood-atonement logic of vv. 11–13); Deut. 15:7–11 (thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor — the charity-to-the-needy of v. 28); Ps. 49:7–8 (none of them can by any means redeem his brother... for the redemption of their soul is precious — the impossibility of finite ransom, vv. 11–12); Ps. 95:7–8 (to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart — the urgency of vv. 31–33); Isa. 1:11–17 (your sacrifices are vain... relieve the oppressed — prayer and offering void without justice to the needy, v. 28); Isa. 53:5–6, 10 (he was wounded for our transgressions... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all... his soul an offering for sin — the infinite sacrifice, vv. 8–14); Isa. 55:6 (seek ye the Lord while he may be found — do not procrastinate, v. 33); Matt. 6:24, 33 (the impossibility of serving God and mammon while neglecting the kingdom — the prayer-and-charity union of vv. 27–28); Matt. 25:31–46 (I was an hungred... naked... sick... inasmuch as ye did it not — the needy turned away of vv. 28–29); Lk. 12:16–21 (the rich fool whose soul is required in the night — the procrastinator of vv. 32–35); Lk. 18:1 (men ought always to pray, and not to faint — the continual prayer of vv. 19–27); Jn. 4:23–24 (worship... in spirit and in truth — verbatim at v. 38); Jn. 9:4 (the night cometh, when no man can work — the night of darkness, v. 33); Rom. 3:24–26 (Christ a propitiation that God might be just, and the justifier — justice satisfied by mercy, vv. 15–16); 2 Cor. 6:2 (now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation — vv. 31–33); 1 Tim. 2:5–6 (one mediator between God and men... who gave himself a ransom for all — the Mediator and ransom of vv. 14–16); Heb. 7:27; 9:11–14, 25–28 (Christ offered once for all, not the blood of beasts — the great and last sacrifice, vv. 10–14); Heb. 10:1–4 (the law's sacrifices can never... take away sins — only types, v. 10); James 2:14–17 (faith without works is dead — the vain prayer of v. 28); 2 Ne. 2:6–10 (the infinite atonement and the ends of the law answered in the Holy Messiah — the doctrine of vv. 9–16); 2 Ne. 9:7 (it must needs be an infinite atonement — Jacob's exact phrase, v. 12); Mosiah 3:15–19 (the law as a type until Christ; the natural man and the atoning blood — vv. 10, 14); Mosiah 4:16–26 (Benjamin on imparting substance to the beggar — the charity of v. 28); Alma 7:11–12 (the bowels filled with mercy, rachamim — v. 15); Alma 12:24 (this life... a probationary state... a time to prepare to meet God — verbatim doctrine of v. 32); Alma 31:23 (the Zoramites who prayed weekly and never spoke of God again — the foil to vv. 19–27); Alma 33:4–11 (the Zenos prayer this chapter's prayer-counsel completes); Alma 42:15–24 (Alma's fuller treatment of justice and mercy reconciled by the atonement — the doctrine of vv. 15–16 unfolded); 3 Ne. 9:19–20 (Christ ends the shedding of blood and the law of sacrifice — the stop to the shedding of blood of v. 13); D&C 18:11–12; 19:16–19 (Christ suffered these things for all... which suffering caused myself... to tremble — the infinite sacrifice in his own voice, v. 14); D&C 19:16–17 (repent now or suffer even as I — the urgency of vv. 31–35). ``