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## Alma 41 — Wickedness Never Was Happiness — Alma on the Restoration of the Soul

*Alma 41: c. 73 BC, the third movement of Alma's charge to Corianton, in Zarahemla. Having taught the resurrection of the body (Alma 40), Alma now answers a second confusion in his son's mind: Corianton had supposed — perhaps wresting the prophets — that the doctrine of restoration meant a sinner would be 'restored' from sin to happiness, as though the resurrection automatically reversed a wicked life into a blessed one. Alma corrects him with one of the sharpest and most-quoted lines in the Book of Mormon: 'wickedness never was happiness.' Restoration, Alma teaches, does not turn evil into good; it returns each soul to exactly what it became — good to good, evil to evil, mercy to the merciful, justice to the unjust. It is the doctrine of moral consistency, of the harvest matching the seed, and it sets up the climactic chapter to follow (42) on how justice and mercy can both be satisfied.*

Alma 41 is the third answer in the four-chapter charge to Corianton, and it turns the great word of the previous chapter — *restore* — from the body to the soul. In Alma 40 Alma taught that the resurrection *restores* the body completely: every limb and joint to its proper and perfect frame, not a hair lost. Now he takes up a second confusion in Corianton's mind. The boy had apparently supposed that *restoration* worked a kind of moral reversal — that the same resurrection which fixes a broken body might also fix a broken life, restoring a sinner *from sin to happiness* as though the grave wiped the moral slate and handed everyone joy. Alma will have none of it. Restoration, he insists, is not reversal; it is return. It gives each soul back exactly what that soul made of itself. The good are restored to good, the evil to evil, the merciful to mercy, the just to justice. The chapter is the Book of Mormon's clearest statement of moral consistency — the law that we reap what we sow, that character carries through death unchanged, that the resurrection reveals and confirms what we have become rather than overturning it.

### Hebrew Word Studies

*shuv* / 'eshher (שׁוּב / אֲשֶׁר) — **to turn, to return, to bring back, to restore / happiness, blessedness, the good state of one who is rightly related to God vv. 2–5, 13–15 / vv. 10–11.** The chapter turns on two Hebrew ideas. The first is *shuv*, to turn or return — the verb behind *restore* and *restoration*. *Shuv* is one of the great words of the Hebrew Bible: it is the word for repentance (turning back to God), for return from exile, and for the act of giving a thing back to its owner (Ex. 22:26; Lev. 25:28 — property *returns* to its original holder in the Jubilee). That last sense is the key to Alma 41. Restoration is *shuv* in the legal sense: a returning of each thing to its rightful place and owner. *That which ye do send out shall return (shuv) unto you again* (v. 15) is the Jubilee logic applied to the moral life — what you put out comes back to you, restored to its source. The error Alma corrects is the assumption that *shuv* could mean turning a thing into its opposite; but *shuv* never means that. To return a thing is to bring it back *as it is*, not to transform it. The second word is 'eshher / 'osher, happiness or blessedness — the state named in the Psalter's opening word, 'ashrei, "blessed/happy is the man" who delights in the law (Ps. 1:1). In Hebrew thought happiness is not a mood but a condition: the flourishing of a life rightly ordered toward God. This is why Alma can say *wickedness never was happiness* (v. 10) as a flat statement of fact rather than a moral wish — 'eshher is by definition the state of the righteous, the man planted by the rivers of water (Ps. 1:3). A wicked soul is not *unhappy* by arbitrary penalty; it simply is not in the 'eshher-condition, because 'eshher is what right relation to God *is*. The carnal state is *contrary to the nature of happiness* (v. 11) in the most literal sense: it is the absence of the very alignment that the word 'eshher names.

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## From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Lev. 25:25–28 (the Jubilee return of property to its owner — the legal shuv behind v. 15); Deut. 30:15–20 (life and good, death and evil set before Israel — therefore choose life; the agency of vv. 5–7); Ps. 1:1–6 (blessed / 'ashrei is the man whose delight is the law... the wicked are not so — the nature of happiness, vv. 10–11); Ps. 7:14–16 (the wicked man's mischief shall return upon his own head — v. 15); Prov. 1:31; 11:18–19; 26:27 (eating the fruit of one's own way; the deceitful work and the sure reward — vv. 3–5, 15); Job 4:8 (they that sow wickedness reap the same — v. 12); Isa. 3:10–11 (it shall be well with the righteous... woe unto the wicked... the reward of his hands shall be given him — vv. 3–4); Hos. 8:7 (they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind — v. 15); Matt. 7:16–20 (by their fruits ye shall know them — the works that reveal the soul, v. 3); Matt. 16:27 (reward every man according to his works — vv. 3–5); Gal. 6:7–8 (whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap — the Pauline statement of v. 15); Eph. 2:12 (without God in the world — verbatim with v. 11); Acts 8:23 (the gall of bitterness, and... the bond of iniquity — verbatim with v. 11); Rev. 22:11–12 (he that is unjust, let him be unjust still... my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be — the restoration of each to his own, vv. 5, 13); 2 Ne. 2:11–13, 27 (Lehi: opposition in all things, and men free to choose liberty or captivity — the agency Alma assumes); 2 Ne. 9:16 (the righteous... shall be righteous still... the filthy shall be filthy still — the persistence of character through judgment, vv. 5, 13); Mosiah 3:24–25 (the wicked consigned to a state of misery by their own works — v. 4); Alma 40:25–26 (the restoration of the body that hands the word forward to this chapter); Alma 42:22–25 (justice and mercy — the open door at v. 13 walked through); Hel. 14:30–31 (Samuel: ye are free... ye are permitted to act for yourselves — the self-judgment of v. 7); D&C 130:18–21 (intelligence and the law upon which blessings are predicated — every blessing restored according to obedience to its law, vv. 3, 15); D&C 88:32–35 (those who enjoy that which they are willing to receive, unwilling to abide a law unable to abide the glory — the nature-of-happiness doctrine of v. 11). ```